# **Parenthesis: Teach your child proper etiquette in public places**

**Source: Akhila Das Blah, Storyteller & Content Writer**

Recently, while staying at a resort in Goa, I was lounging by the poolside, listening to the sound of waves crashing behind me, enjoying the peaceful serenity. As I drifted in and out of this idyllic sun induced slumber, I was harshly jolted out of my stupor by an extremely loud family. The children quickly took over the pool, shouting raucously, effectively disrupting the quiet ambience. The children who could not swim, were not wearing flotation devices and weren’t listening to the pool attendant as he tried to ensure their safety. Mildly irritated, I happened to glance around and noticed that all the other guests weren’t happy with the change in the environment either. The parents, on the other hand, did not seem to notice or care about the inconvenience being caused to their fellow guests.

While I understand that children should be allowed to be children, it is important that we as parents teach them how to be polite and considerate in public spaces. The fact is that a pool at a resort is a shared pool and as a result, we need to be mindful of how we behave in a public space. Each of the guests there had paid the same amount of money to enjoy the facilities that the resort had to offer and were entitled to a similar experience. It wasn’t right that everyone’s experience was being ruined by one inconsiderate family. So, what can we do as parents to teach our children proper etiquette in public spaces?

## **Teach etiquette early**

As with all things parenting, start young. It’s much harder to teach a teenager manners as compared to teaching a two-year-old. Begin by teaching them to say ‘please’ and ‘thank you’. Simple words but often neglected. If we constantly reinforce these simple courtesies and children learn them from an early age, it becomes hardwired into them. Encourage them to be polite in all their social interactions. Everybody is deserving of a ‘please’ and ‘thank you’, whether they are older, younger, household help, a stranger who holds the door open, a shop vendor, anybody who you ask to do something for you and anybody who does something for you.

## **Let them wait for their turn**

In a social group, children sometimes can demand your attention incessantly while you’re having a conversation with somebody else. And while it may be deemed cute as a two-year-old, a nine-year-old is considered rude for barging into a conversation. Children constantly interrupt conversations only because they are never taught differently. Children need to be taught to wait their turn, to be patient. When two people are having a conversation, teach them to interrupt with an ‘excuse me.’ Encourage them to wait for a lull in the conversation before they begin. This is helpful once they start talking to people outside their immediate friends and family. I have seen teenagers rudely interrupt sales people or waiters as they are dealing with another guest while demanding something for themselves.

## **Indoor voice vs outdoor voice**

Teach them the difference between indoor voices and outdoor voices. When in a restaurant, movie theatre, a play or any venue that requires a certain decibel level, encourage them to keep their voices low. They must speak so that only the person seated next to them can hear them, not the entire restaurant. Teach them the difference between speaking and shouting. It may seem obvious but most children don’t realise how loud they can be. Make a fun game out of it and encourage them to try different voice levels for different situations.

## **Introduce the concept of personal space**

When standing in line or in a crowded space like an elevator, teach them the meaning of personal space. When we were children in school, during PE classes we were taught to keep a ‘one arm’ distance from each other. It seems like a good rule of thumb to follow. In a crowded public space, everybody is entitled to some personal space. Teach them to not fall over or crowd the person in front of theea

## **Be conscious of surroundings**

Teach them to be cognisant of the environment and its accompanying behavioural expectations. In a park, one is allowed to be loud, run around and kick a ball. But, in a library, one is expected to be quiet and speak in hushed voices. Teach them to be conscious of who else they are sharing the space with.

If there are certain rules that have been put in place for the safety of your child and other children, ensure that they follow the rules. When safety is concerned, there can be no exceptions to the rule. Any action that endangers themselves, others or public property is not acceptable and non-negotiable.

## **Follow safety rules**

As a parent, your role is also to place them in age-appropriate situations. A fine-dining restaurant is not the place for a two-year-old. They need space to move and explore. So, pick a child-friendly environment with a more casual vibe to take your toddler. Avoid taking young children to movie theatres. They are not developmentally ready to sit through entire movies in silence. And you are ruining the movie watching experience for yourself and the other viewers.

Teaching your child public etiquette is important but not easy. It can only be learnt if children are taught from an early age, constantly reinforced and most importantly, modelled by their parents and other authority figures in their life. One of the golden rules of parenting is practicing what you preach. So, modelling appropriate behaviour is crucial if you want your child to change his ways.