

Manners

Is your child displaying bad manners in public?



Is your child:

- Lacking appropriate manners for social situations and community outings?
- Seeming immature for his age?
- Crying and melting down in a moment, yelling because the library doesn't have the book he wants?
- Standing mutely when you try to introduce her to the new neighbors?
- Chewing with his mouth open?
- Picking his nose in public?
- Running screaming down the aisles at your worship service?

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

Some children do not seem to mature as quickly as other children in terms of social niceties and manners. Some children seem to need more direction and supervision when meeting new people or going out in public. You may have no concerns academically, but you may wonder, without your support, if your child might ever be

invited to a play date or birthday party. Perhaps her manners are just terrible and no matter what you promise for good behavior, she will have an extreme reaction in the grocery store, yell in the library and run around at the neighborhood pool.

Some children simply seem to have poor manners. This struggle can be excruciating for parents, as parents are often the ones blamed, judged and spoken about in whispers at the playground. Indeed, social ridicule in the neighborhood can be a huge motivator for parents to get their children to behave. Unfortunately, children don't tend to be so motivated by what the neighbor thinks. You may find yourself snapping and reacting in a negative way to your child's lack of appropriate manners and coping skills, which will only make the battle between you and your child all the worse.

Many possible reasons can explain why some children have more difficulty with manners than do other children. Immaturity, impulsivity, hyperactivity, emotion regulation challenges and a lack of awareness of social norms and expectations are a few reasons your child may struggle in this domain. Understanding these clinical concerns may help to step back, reel in your own emotions and make a plan to help your child.

CLINICAL DESCRIPTION

Adaptive Skills are functional skills including *daily living skills, self-care, community living, functional academics, domestic skills, functional communication, socialization, coping skills* and *motor development*. **Coping skills** include manners, emotion regulation, and the ability to follow social rules for different settings, such as quiet voices in the library.

Manners are measured in comparison to other children the same age as your child. Children are not born knowing to say 'please' and 'thank you.' We find that some children have easy-going temperaments, follow rules and quickly recognize what is and is not appropriate behavior. Other children are louder, more active, more boisterous and are very challenging to parent. These children throw caution to the wind and may not try to understand the rules and expectations for them.

One reason a child may demonstrate poor manners is *Impulsivity* [1, 2]. An impulsive child is not thinking before acting. Words and actions come right out without passing through the brain to screen for appropriateness. Children are driven by emotions, impulses and gut reactions.

Emotion Regulation challenges often go hand in hand with impulsivity. Children who are impulsive are unlikely to regulate their emotions because that step of thinking and considering words and actions just does not happen. We often say children need to "Stop and Think." This approach is a way of training children to use that step of reviewing words and actions before just going for it. This strategy is hard to teach, but with support and practice children can make these improvements.

Challenges with *hyperactivity* [1, 2, 3] can exacerbate the challenges already created by impulsivity and emotion dysregulation. When you add constant movement to the lack of impulse control and ability to manage feelings, rude things happen. A child may yell or invade personal space without noticing at all. Hyperactivity can certainly lead to some behaviors that may be considered rude or inappropriate. Often, children with ADHD struggle with these skills.

Other considerations for poor manners include *Unawareness of social norms or other's expectations* and *Immaturity*. If a child is developing more slowly than other children his or her age or if a child appears to be much older than he or she actually is, often challenges are evident with adaptive skills and manners. The expectation for mature behavior is there, yet some children have not matured to that point.

Parents of super tall 3-year-olds describe that other parents at the playground mistake their child for a 5-year-old and are unhappy with the pushing and shoving that is happening in the sand box or in line for the slide. When children are not as mature as others, they are less aware of the expectations and are less capable of acting with patience and thoughtfulness. Another point to consider is that some children really struggle to understand social norms because they have difficulty with perspective taking or understanding what those around us are thinking or feeling.

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders [4, 5] often struggle significantly with understanding social norms. This struggle is why even very bright children with autism begin to look a bit different from peers as social expectations and adaptive expectations, like manners and coping skills, become more advanced.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR CHILD HAS BAD MANNERS

If your child has poor manners, challenges with emotion regulation, and is unable to follow social rules, it may be helpful to provide some structure. Work with your child to determine “manners” and rules for various settings, and let him or her choose rewards for exhibiting this good behavior. The consequence should be a natural reinforcer. If you scream and run in a restaurant as an adult, you are asked to leave. Thus, it makes sense that if your child is making grand social mistakes, the outing should end.

In order to continue to do fun things, certain manners within a child’s control should be expected. As a parent, don’t set your child up for failure. If you know he or she cannot do the library on a day with no nap, don’t do it. If your child will be calmer after walking to school to burn some energy, plan to walk when you can instead of making that 4-minute drive to school. A social skills group may be a great idea so that your child can practice good manners and social skills and perhaps earn praise and rewards for demonstrating these skills. Set children up for success, and praise their successes. This approach will help with self-esteem and confidence. Children who feel successful tend to do better across the board.

SIMILAR SYMPTOMS

If your child is struggling with a similar problem, not directly addressed in this section, see the list below for links to information about other related symptom areas.

- **Social Skills (Socializing)**: trouble with socially interacting with others impacts adaptive skills within the socialization domain. Vygotsky's *social learning theory* posits that social interaction underlies typical learning and development. Children learn from engaging with one another. Children who watch other children and mirror their behavior are more aware of coping skills appropriate for different situations
- **Communication (Communicating)**: trouble with communication impacts a child's ability to express his or her wants and needs, to develop conversation skills, and to engage reciprocally with peers. If a child struggles to communicate, frustration can increase, and coping skills may decrease
- **Intelligence**: trouble with thinking and reasoning can cause various delays that would encompass areas like communication, daily living skills, socialization and motor development. In order to have an intellectual disability, a child must have both cognitive and adaptive deficits. A child with cognitive delays may also struggle in coping skills, manners, and understanding what is appropriate in social interactions
- **Motor Challenges (Moving & Sensing)**: trouble with motor skills can be a component of adaptive skills like manners. Children with motor impairments may be messy eaters and may struggle to carry out routines that other children do more easily
- **Inattention (Focusing)**: trouble paying attention can cause poor manners. Perhaps this child was not paying attention to the routines as they were being taught, like how to sit at the table during mealtime, how to modulate tone of voice, and how to act in various settings [1, 2, 3]

POTENTIAL DISABILITIES

*Children who have significant problems in this area may have any of the following potential disabilities. *Note, this information does not serve as a diagnosis in any way. See the 'Where to Go for Help' section for professionals who can diagnose or provide a referral.*

- **Intellectual Disability**: children with intellectual disabilities have various delays across cognitive and adaptive domains and may have bad manners
- **AD/HD**: children who have challenges with attention, impulsivity and hyperactivity may display "immature" behavior and lower skills in some areas, such as following directions, emotional control, and coping skills [1,2,3]

- [Autism Spectrum Disorder](#): children who have deficits in social communication and restricted interests or behaviors can have poor adaptive skills or deficits in social skills, including social interaction, play skills and coping skills [4,5]
- [Language Disorder](#): children who have language challenges may struggle with functional communication and thus may have trouble expressing themselves and coping with their frustrations
- [Attachment Disorder](#): children who struggle with attachment to primary caregivers have often come from inconsistent or unpredictable settings, perhaps with less than ideal prenatal care. Children may struggle with coping skills.
- [Anxiety or Depression](#): children who have excessive worry or sadness may withdraw from peers, communicate less and let their daily living skills decline

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

If your child is struggling with this symptom to the point that it is getting in the way of his learning, relationships, or happiness, the following professionals could help; they may offer diagnosis, treatment, or both.

- [CLEAR Child Psychology](#): to *consult 'live'* with a psychologist or to obtain a *customized profile* of concerns for your child
- [ABA Therapist](#): to treat behavior; can help to improve behavior, increase adaptive skills and improve communication. In-home treatment plans make addressing self-care and domestic skills easier. This therapy is often covered by insurance for Autism Spectrum Disorders but can be helpful for other diagnoses as well
- [Psychologist or Neuropsychologist](#): to conduct a full assessment to examine symptoms in a mental health and/or behavioral context
- [Psychotherapist or Play Therapist](#): to treat emotional symptoms as needed; to work on social skills via a social skills group or CBT interventions
- [OT or Speech Pathologist](#): to treat motor or language deficits. In combination with ABA, this approach may be most effective for children with Intellectual Disability or Autism

These professionals may recommend the following tests for this symptom:

- [WISC-V](#): test of intellectual abilities, which can help us understand your child's cognitive strengths and weaknesses (Psychological or School Psychological evaluation)
- [Vineland-3](#): test of adaptive skills for ages birth to 21 years that includes communication, socialization and daily living skills. The parent and teacher forms are interview style with a clinician or rating scale style. Other adaptive measures include the ABAS and the SIB-R, which is the best measure to use for an adult.

- [TOL-2, CTMT, WCST, TOVA](#): tests of executive function that may help to determine the skills and resources your child has, such as the ability to plan, organize, and attend (Neuropsychological evaluation)
- [ADOS-2](#): test of concerns in social communication domains
- [Roberts, BASC-3, Clinical Interview, RCMAS, CDI-2, Human Figure Drawing](#): emotional tests through drawing tasks, open-ended questions, interviews, rating scales, and sometimes storytelling could provide useful information into the emotional experience. The BASC-3 also has adaptive domains to assess your child's flexibility, social skills, leadership, and functional communication. (Neuropsychological or Psychological evaluation)

LEARN MORE

[1] Cook, Julia (2012). *Personal space camp*.

Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Personal-Space-Camp-Julia-Cook/dp/1931636877/>

[2] Esham, Barbara (2015). *Mrs. Gorski, I think I have the wiggle fidgets. (New edition) (Adventures of everyday geniuses.)*

Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Gorski-Fidgets-Adventures-Everyday-Geniuses/dp/1603368175/>

[3] Smith, Bryan & Griffen, Lisa M. (2016). *What were you thinking? Learning to control your impulses (Executive function)*.

Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/What-Were-You-Thinking-Learning/dp/1934490962/>

[4] Berns, Roberta M. (2010). *Child, family, school, community: Socialization and support*.

Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Child-Family-School-Community-Socialization/dp/1305088972/>

[5] Kroncke, Anna P., & Willard, Marcy & Huckabee, Helena (2016). *Assessment of autism spectrum disorder: Critical issues in clinical forensic and school settings*. Springer, San Francisco.

Springer: <http://www.springer.com/us/book/9783319255026>

Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Assessment-Autism-Spectrum-Disorder-Psychological/dp/3319255029/>

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How-to-teach-a-child-good-manners

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