



Dr. Karen Explains...

By Karen Ruskin, PsyD

The Power of Saying "Thank You" and "You are Welcome"

Sometimes it is the simple things that we all know and are taught at a young age that we forget in our day-to-day interactions with those we love. It is the simple things that when implemented hold the power to help a parent-child dynamic. It is the simple things that play a role in developing a child that is respectful and feels good about himself. It is also the simple life tools that when not implemented can have a negative effect on relationships between self and others.

No matter the age of a child, hearing his parent say "thank you" and "you are welcome" are very important parts of his daily interactions. Saying "thank you" and "you are welcome" show respect for another person. These phrases express that you appreciate what someone else has done for you, and show that you value that person. Furthermore, when someone says "thank you" to you, and you reply "you are welcome," this interaction shows that you appreciate the time the other person took to let you know he appreciates what you did for him; it makes that person feel that you must be special to him, an important and valued person. You feel respected, as does he.

Saying "thank you" and "you are welcome" to your child, with consistency, play a part in the self worth development of a child and in helping develop a child that is respectful to self and others. No matter what someone may be doing, stopping for a moment just to

show that you care about the other person by expressing appreciation for what he has done has a powerful effect.

As a young girl, if I happened to sneeze when my mother was in another room doing something important for my father, she would call out from the other room, "Bleeeeeeeeeesssss youuuuuu." I would say, "Thank you" and she would say, "You are welcome." We would joke at times and say, "Thank you for saying thank you for saying you are welcome for saying thank you for _____ [fill in the blank here to fit your example, be it saying bless you, or passing the salt at the dinner table, or help to make the bed]." The back and forth may at times be lighthearted, but the real result is that the child feels special, respected and valued as a person, as does the parent.

It is up to parents to teach the thank-you-you-are-welcome dance. This may seem so simple to do, and yet in so many families life is so busy rushing here and there that verbalizing appreciation with the words "thank you" and "you are welcome" is often saved for the "not so everyday" life events (e.g., receiving gifts). Rather, it is the day-to-day mini interactions that require expressing one's appreciation, and in turn expressing you feel good to be acknowledged.

Whether your eleven-month-old takes your shoe out of the rack and hands it to you, your two-year-old picks up his sock instead of leaving it in the middle of the

floor, your five-year-old helps you pull the garbage pail to the curb on garbage day, your ten-year-old hands you the pepper at the dinner table before you even ask because he knows you like pepper on your mashed potatoes, or your sixteen-year-old throws out his own candy wrapper instead of leaving it on a countertop, start implementing "thank you" and "you are welcome" as part of your family's lifestyle and observe the system-wide positive effect it has on the dynamic. When your children hear you say "thank you" to your spouse for making dinner or changing a light bulb, or stopping for milk on the way home from work, no matter what the "little stuff" is, it all matters. Children learn from direct interactions with you and from observable interactions between you and others.

It is the day-to-day expected behaviors that often get lost without the recognition of a "thank you" or "you are welcome." Choose not to lose these valuable moments in your interaction with your children. If you incorporate a "thank you—you are welcome" manner into your family, it can help make a difference in your child's development of self and your family dynamic.

Karen Ruskin, PsyD, LMFT, specializes in solution-focused counseling as a marriage and family therapist. Her new book, The 9 Key Techniques for Raising Respectful Children Who Makes Responsible Choices, is now available. She is a regular mental health contributor on FOX 25 News Boston. She lives and works in Sharon, MA.