



ARE GOOD MANNERS A THING OF THE PAST?

Grandmothers questioned in a survey on the manners of their grandchildren declare that “things aint what they used to be.”

One hundred grandmothers were asked how good manners had changed since they were children, what they expected of their own children when they were growing up and how their grandchildren behave today.

Although the grannies were united in the belief that ‘good manners cost nothing’ they reluctantly came to the conclusion that all the old little courtesies are gradually being erased. Often grandchildren have to be prompted to say ‘thank you’ and some are not taught simple good manners by their parents, in the belief they should be ‘free to express themselves’.

Manners at meal times revealed the greatest inter-generational disparity. Whereas 92 percent of grandparents and 87 percent of their children sat down at the table with all the family to eat at least once a day, nowadays this applies to just 54 percent of children.

Traditional family mealtimes have been on a slippery slope for many years and this survey reveals an apparent corresponding decline in table manners. One grandmother said: “My grandchildren have bad table manners as they haven’t been taught them by their parents.” Only 49 percent of children today have to ask to ‘get down from the table’ compared with 89 percent of their grandparents and 80 percent of their parents. Keeping your elbows off the table is almost totally redundant, with just 19 percent of grandchildren still expected to stick to the old protocol. However some parents are still keen to keep family mealtimes alive, with even the smallest children joining them at the table in their highchairs whether it is their mealtime or not.

Although some traits in etiquette may no longer be encouraged today, good old fashioned ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ seems to have weathered the storm. Nevertheless, there has been a big downturn in writing

thank you letters, from 86 percent of grandparents to just 35 percent of grandchildren putting pen to paper today. Only 37 percent of children say 'excuse me' before interrupting someone speaking, a disappointment to the 82 percent of grandmothers questioned who were taught this common courtesy when they were young.

Behaviour at school, according to the survey, has been on a steady decline since today's grandparents sat at their desks. In the 'good old days', nearly all pupils (93 percent) stood up when a teacher came into the classroom, slipping to 51 percent over the next generation down to just 19 percent today.

There was one question that all the grannies surveyed unanimously agreed on (100 percent) - the importance of looking at a person when you are speaking to them. 88 percent said that their children also engaged in this way with the person they were speaking to, but only 48 percent of 21st century grandchildren make eye-to-eye contact.

Some of the 'grandrespondents' agreed that the best way to teach a child good manners is by example and that the deterioration in good manners was more likely a reflection on how society has changed over the years, rather than a direct indication that children are not taught how to be polite any more. Grannynet founder Verity Gill said: "This survey has revealed some interesting reactions. What we've found is that there has been a real shift in what polite manners mean to children in modern times today compared with what was expected of their mothers and grandmothers. Maybe a question of 'modern' polite not being the same as polite from 'the old days'."

A final word from one wise grandmother: "If there weren't rules there would be nothing for kids to break, no risk to take, no scars to show for mistakes. Rules let you fly."

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

Grannynet was founded in 2006 by Verity Gill when her life was turned upside down by the arrival of her baby daughter. As she looked for help and guidance from her own mother, she realised what an important part a grandmother plays in the life of their grandchild.

Starting with a forum for grandparents to exchange stories and compare notes on their grandchildren, Grannynet quickly developed to provide advice and articles to help them support their children and

grandchildren in all sorts of ways. Today, Grannynet provides a friendly and informative support network for grandparents all over the UK with their membership total recently hitting 4,000 grannies.

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