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TABLE MANNERS THAT MATTER

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Good table manners are a matter of common sense and should reflect the most logical choices. One of the most important things to remember is to be natural, without drawing attention to yourself. It is best to give the appearance of being confident, yet comfortable.

POSTURE

When eating, sit close enough to the table so each bite is brought to the mouth without having to lean forward. Sit straight at the table without sitting stiffly.

ELBOWS

Elbows should not be placed on the table, but kept close to the side so they don't interfere with those sitting next to you. When a hand is not in use, place it in your lap, or if it is more comfortable, rest your forearm on the edge of the table.

TABLE SETTINGS

An attractive table setting makes the food look and taste better and provides a positive experience for each guest. The table setting gives the host/ hostess an opportunity to express creativity, while the guests see the effort that has been made in their behalf.

PLACE SETTINGS

Each place setting should consist of the main plate in the center, with the forks placed on the left and knives on the right. Spoons are placed to the right of the knives, and the water glass is placed at the tip of the knife. A second beverage glass would be placed to the right of the water glass. The bread and butter plate belongs at the tip of the forks, and the salad plate usually goes to the left of the forks and a little above. When no bread and butter plate is used, the salad may go at the tip of the forks. The napkin is placed directly to the left of the forks and dinner plate, but if the table is crowded, it may be placed under the forks, directly on the plate or in the center of the place setting.

NAPKINS

When seated at the table, if you are the guest, wait until the host/hostess has taken up his or her napkin before placing it on their laps, or when the host/hostess asks the guests to proceed. When the host/hostess picks up his/her fork, you may pick up yours and begin to eat. The napkin remains in your lap until after the meal and should then be placed loosely gathered on the table next to the plate. If you need to leave the table during the meal, the napkin should be placed on the chair and then back in the lap after you return to the table.

Utensils

Knowing which utensil to use will increase self-confidence and foster a more relaxed atmosphere. Silverware is placed in order of its use. Always remember to begin with the silverware on the outside of the place setting and work from the outside in. If in doubt, watch the hostess or someone else at the table who is confident in using the utensils. Cut up food as it is eaten, not all at once. When finished eating, place the used fork and knife on the plate, sharp side of knife facing in, fork next to knife.

Beverages

Wait to sip beverages until your mouth is empty and has been wiped with a napkin. The only exception to this is when your mouth has been burned with hot food, you may take a drink with food in your mouth. Do not gulp or guzzle beverages.

Conversation

When talking at the table, there should never be any food in your mouth. Remember the saying, "Don't talk with your mouth full!" Chew with your mouth closed, without talking. Guests should not draw attention to themselves by making unnecessary noise either with their mouth or with their silverware.

Seasonings and Condiments

Guests should always taste the food before asking for salt and pepper, so as not to offend the cook. When you use the condiments on the table, place a portion of each condiment desired on the plate beside the food, not directly on the food itself, i.e., cranberry sauce is placed on the dinner plate, not on the meat. If there are no condiments on the table, it is not polite to ask for them.

Formal Service

Guests are almost always served from their left, and plates are cleared from their left. Drinks are served from their right and cleared from their right.

Informal Service

When a serving dish is passed around the table instead of being individually plated, it should be passed counterclockwise, to the right. You should take a reasonable portion and never take more than can be finished.

Reaching

Guests may reach for food that is close to them, as long as they do not have to stretch for it and do not reach across another guest. If the food is across the table, ask politely for it to be passed.

Finger Food

Some foods may be eaten with fingers. If you are not sure if it is acceptable, follow the example of the host/hostess or use the neater and easier way to eat the food. When finger foods are served, take the food from the serving dish and place it on the plate before eating it.

Removing Food from Mouth

If a piece of food must be removed from the mouth, do it the same way that it was put in and place it on the plate. A pit or small bone should be removed with fingers. The most important thing to remember when removing food is to do it with as little show as possible.

Natural table manners take practice, and the best place to practice is at home. If manners at the table are insisted upon at home, they will more likely become second nature. Once good table manners become automatic you will feel more relaxed and comfortable, and the conversation and food will be enjoyed much more.

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