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More Parents Outsourcing Etiquette

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SAN FRANCISCO, May 12, 2005

 **FREE VIDEO**

 **Parents Outsourcing Etiquette**



Kids learn the fine points of tasteful dining. (Photo: CBS)

 **QUOTE**

"Maybe we need to look at the etiquette classes as a symptom of what we're not doing and considering what we should be doing."



Etiquette instructor Syndi Seid (Photo: CBS)

(CBS) In an age when dining out often means dining out of a paper bag, it seems quaint that someone, somewhere is still teaching the finer points of etiquette.

But, as **CBS News Correspondent John Blackstone** reports, Syndi Seid's classes in San Francisco are part of a recent flourishing of etiquette schools across the country, teaching lessons that were once taught by parents.

So why aren't these rules already instilled at home?

"Because they're not around, I guess," says Seid.

For busy families, like the Plonskers, where both parents, Patricia and Jeff, work long hours, sending Joey, 17, and Pearl, 12, to etiquette school seemed a fast track to domestic order.



"I don't want to spend my time nitpicking them, but of course I won't let them throw rolls across the table," says Patricia Plonsker.

Or "shout with their mouth full or interrupt," says husband Jeff Plonsker.

At dinnertime, even Fred the family dog, is expected to mind his manners.

"The only way for him to be with us is to know the rules," says Patricia Plonsker.

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But who teaches the rules may be as important as the rules themselves. And some experts in family relationships say parents today may be outsourcing too many lessons.

"We're losing the teaching aspect of parenting," says Jerrold Shapiro, a family counselor who often helps families to spend more time together.

"Maybe we need to look at the etiquette classes as a symptom of what we're not doing and considering what we should be doing," says Shapiro.

Certainly the graciousness and decorum at etiquette school is far different than the mealtimes students describe at home.

"It's like, the TV's raging, and then my mom's trying to talk to someone on her phone, and then the cats are eating my dinner and taking my spot," says etiquette student Montana Mirandilla about a typical mealtime experience at her home.

"There is no family eating," says Philip Chuzhbinin, another student of etiquette. "We're always in separate rooms watching TV."

Some trace this decline in civility back to the 1960s and 70s, an era of rebellion and freedom. It was the formative years for many of today's parents.

"Parents aren't as savvy themselves about some of these skills, growing up in the hippy dippy era, you know," says Seid.

Which raises the question: Is it the kids or the parents who should be studying etiquette?