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## Elbows off table, please: Kids get etiquette lessons

**By Jamie Stengle**  
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Brittany Scruggs, left, and Tiffany Scott, right, learn proper placement during a dinner setting as they attend Joy Weaver's etiquette class in Frisco, Texas.

FRISCO, Texas – Sitting at an elegantly dressed dining table in a country club, 17-year-old Katie Allen can't decide what to do with the long green bean poised on her fork.

The answer comes from the head of the table.

"The faux pas would be to eat it like that," etiquette expert Joy Weaver said.

So Katie and six others – mostly fellow teens – learn that the proper thing to do is to cut the green bean into smaller portions, eating one bite at a time.

Their etiquette primer covered everything from learning that bread should be eaten by tearing off bites, instead of chomping it like an apple, to the proper distance one should be from the table – a hand's width.

Etiquette experts say that beginning in the rebellious 1960s and through the individual-focused 1980s, etiquette fell by the wayside. Now that trend is reversing, with parents willing to pay more than \$100 a session to educate children on the finer points of table manners.

Cindy Post Senning, Emily Post's great-granddaughter and co-director of the Emily Post Institute in Vermont, said it seems like in the past 10 years there has been an upswing in interest.

"So many times we're locked in our offices with our computers. We forget how important knowing these things are," said Sharon Carrish-Bulkley, an associate professor of communication at Mansfield University in Mansfield, Pa., who teaches etiquette.

Etiquette experts say classes give parents a chance to prove they're not the only people who expect good manners.

And many parents either don't know etiquette themselves or, if they do, don't have time to teach their children.

“There’s a huge demand in the education,” said Dorothea Johnson, founder and director of The Protocol School of Washington.

“Parents are signing their children up rapidly all over the country, of all ages frankly, especially the teenagers.”

Weaver, who teaches in large corporate settings as well as intimate gatherings in her Texas home, said younger students often are forced to attend by their parents. But they usually leave being grateful they came, she said.

About 25 percent of her business includes helping children and young adults.

“I wanted them to be more comfortable in social situations and not hear it from mom,” said Cheryl Scruggs, who organized the session Katie attended for her 16-year-old twin daughters and their friends.

“When they got home, they said, ‘Oh my gosh, that was one of the most fun things we’ve ever done’,” Scruggs said. “It’s really helped them even feel more confident.”

Brittany Scruggs said she used her new knowledge just a week after the session while dining at a friend’s house.

“I learned so much about table manners and a lot of little random stuff,” she said.

Although Weaver’s prices vary depending on the amount of time and number of people, a two-hour session with up to two people costs \$500 and she charges \$175 per person for a two-hour session with three to nine people.

Carrish-Bulkley began making etiquette part of her communications classes about 10 years ago.

Her students learn everything from the meaning of “black tie” and how to give a toast to what to do with an array of utensils.

“I tell them that when you go on to your job, it’s good to be book smart, but if you don’t have good manners, then your company or your organization is not going to be as motivated to let you wine and dine their customers,” Carrish-Bulkley said.

“The biggest thing that I’ve seen is that they have the confidence that they know what to do, what to say,” she said. “They don’t feel awkward as much anymore.”

Senning said teens often realize good etiquette can help with their friendships, too.

“Kids are very self-conscious, they don’t want to make mistakes,” she said. “They don’t like to do things wrong.”

She said one example that hits home is explaining the difference between asking a friend for the last french fries or just grabbing them off his or her plate.

Teens easily realize they would rather be asked. “It’s not geeky to say please to your friend,” Senning said.