

**Q & A: How do I encourage politeness in my children?  
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**Question: “I have two boys ages 12 and 7. My challenge is that my 12 year old has to be coaxed to say thank you for anything that is given to him. I missed it somewhere in raising him, but is there any help now in getting him to be more polite? How do I handle this?”**

**Answer:**

It’s not just you who missed the boat, but your son as well! Learning to be polite is often a work in progress—it takes consistent mention on the parent’s part, as well as a listening ear from the child. Since he’s already 12 years old, it may seem a bit odd to have to remind him, but that’s what you need to do. And, remind him in a few ways: by modeling polite behavior yourself (consistently, and perhaps overdoing it, saying please and thank you whenever you get the chance, whether he’s in ear-shot or not!), as well as gentle reminders that he needs to say thank you. You may want to develop a code word that reminds him to give thanks, such as “bunny rabbit” or “pickle face”—something that’s funny so he won’t take offense and will begin to utter the polite words in response. If the situation begs more subtlety, then you can give your ear a gentle tug as a cue to give thanks, or softly clear your throat—he’ll catch on quickly. However, the issue may not be one of forgetfulness on his part—he may just not care to be polite, or he may be acting rudely to get your goat! If this is the case, then you need to sit him down, and explain how *you* know that *he* knows perfectly well when to say please or thank you, and you’re not going to coddle him anymore. Tell him that his privileges will depend upon his civility and politeness. Suggest a demerit system in that every time that he omits an obvious thank you, then you will give him a demerit. If it’s more than once per day (which is certainly fair for a twelve-year-old!), then he will lose use of electronics, or have to go to bed early, or lose his daily allowance for spending money. Or, he can lose it all! It’s his choice whether to comply with your request for politeness or not, and he will pay the consequences on a daily basis. Pretty soon the kid will be thanking you for just about everything if there’s something in it for him!