

# Students learn to go beyond please and thank you

By EVE MARX

There's not a parent alive who hasn't agonized over their children's company manners. While it's one thing to teach your kids to sit at the family dinner table and not speak with their mouths full; it's quite another to get them to look a stranger in the eye and stick out their right hand.

That's where Melissa Leonard, certified business etiquette and international protocol consultant comes in. For three days in December at West Patent Elementary School, the expert motivated a large group of young people to brush up on their manners.

Ms. Leonard, who has worked with many Fortune 500 companies

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MELISSA LEONARD,  
ETIQUETTE TEACHER

and has been featured on Martha Stewart's Sirius Radio show as well as in the publications American Baby, The New York Times and Redbook, said, "Manners make all the difference and the importance of early training cannot be overemphasized." Pointing out that our



EVE MARX PHOTO

Where do you shake your hands from? The elbow. Christopher and Camryn DiFiore under the tutelage of Melissa Leonard, certified etiquette consultant.

children are future politicians, businessmen and women, entrepreneurs and other key figures in society, she conjectured that "their success in life is directly related to what we instill in them now. It may be something as simple as knowing how to shake hands, introduce themselves to adults, to show gratitude and respect for others or even which fork and glass to use." These are necessary tools required to succeed in life.

The after-school program drew about 20 children, equally mixed among girls and boys. Ms. Leonard's goal for the three after-noon sessions was to impart to the youngsters contemporary etiquette solutions to cover a range of social

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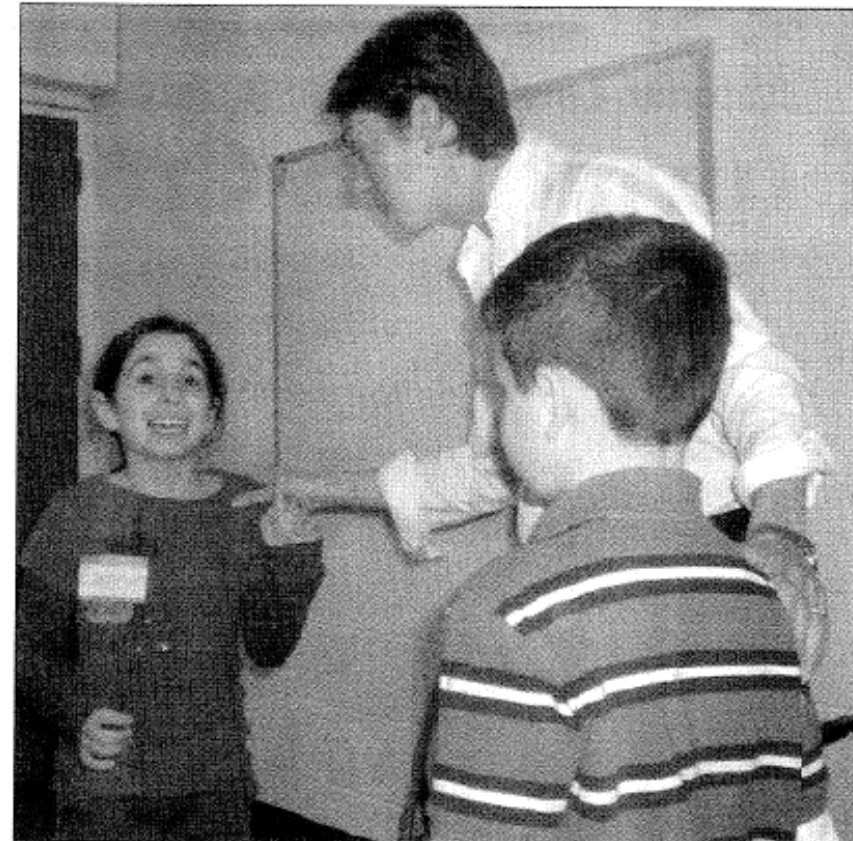
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situations. The children were taught how to introduce themselves, the proper way to address others, host and guest responsibilities and dining etiquette. Using a lively engaging and interactive approach, Ms. Leonard, polite, alert and vivacious, began by asking the students to explain why they were there in the first place and how they thought they could soon utilize their new skills.

The first major area covered on the initial day of class was the basic of shaking hands. Broken down, handshaking is a bit more complicated than it seems. Firmness of grip, number of times the arm is to be pumped up and down (no more than three shakes, she said), even where the arm is shaken from ("Not the shoulder, not the wrist, but the elbow," she explained) were parsed out and discussed, as well as a neat game one can play to improve eye contact. "Ask yourself what color are the other person's eyes," Ms. Leonard suggested. "That means you have to look at their eyes to do that." Also discussed were the uses of "Excuse me," how to say please and thank you and when it's appropriate to wear a hat.

"It's OK to forget someone's name," Ms. Leonard instructed the children. What's not OK is an inability to politely ask for it again. Family cour-



EVE MARX PHOTO

Christopher and Camryn DiFiore learn the fine art of shaking hands under the tutelage of Melissa Leonard, certified etiquette consultant.

tesy was encouraged, including the proper way to address one's parents at the end of the day when they're

tired and just walking in the door. "It's bad manners to charge right up to your mother and ask if she got you

something," Ms. Leonard said. She cautioned against complaining about something right away and suggested that children ask their parents how their day was.

Company manners to prepare children for the holidays were discussed. "You always stand up when an older person enters the room," Ms. Leonard said. "You also get up when they leave." The first class closed with a brief rundown on table manners. "The most important thing is to sit up straight and not fidget," the etiquette teacher said.

Subsequent training administered over the next two days covered what to do when you feel jealous, how to answer the phone, being a good sport and instructions on opening pesky sugar packets. The fine art of small talk and how to make conversation, tipping, and to properly make a toast are included in the three-session lesson plan, as well as the correct way to eat soup. "Don't slurp," must be one of Ms. Leonard's mantras.

Giving children the knowledge of good manners and building their etiquette confidence is a gift, Ms. Leonard espoused. "More importantly, it will enable them to make a good first impression throughout their lives."

For more information about Melissa Leonard and her etiquette classes, contact her at [www.establishyourselfNY.com](http://www.establishyourselfNY.com) or call 844-1068.