

- Manners and customs

Do good manners matter?

Some people think they are old-fashioned and unnecessary.

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What you need to know



- Manners are rules for how people should behave around each other. Professor Pier Forni, who researched manners, called them “traffic lights for life”. “They make it so that we don’t crash into one another in everyday behaviour,” he said.
- Some manners are based on being sensitive to people’s feelings. Others are rules about things like holding a knife and fork the right way, which is also called etiquette.
- Good manners aren’t the same everywhere. In some countries burping is a way of thanking the chef for a good meal but in others it’s definitely not.

Whether it’s putting your elbows on the table or talking with a mouth full of food, everyone has to watch their manners at some time. Manners have developed over thousands of years and are always changing. Around 100 years ago, children in the UK weren’t allowed to speak unless an adult spoke to them first. Now young people can make their voices heard in places like school councils and climate protests. Manners also mean different things in different countries. Slurping food is considered rude at some tables, but at others it’s a sign that people are enjoying their meal. Some people say that manners show respect for others but perhaps they are just random rules people follow because they’re told to. What do you think, should manners matter?

Yes – manners bring people together

Good manners cost nothing. In fact, kind words and behaviour benefit everyone. When someone has good manners it shows they care about other peoples’ feelings and want them to be comfortable. What’s more, studies show that when someone is kind to another person that person’s brain releases a feel-good chemical called oxytocin, which causes them to be kind back. In other words, well-mannered people make the world a happier place. Manners also help keep everyone healthy, which is why people should cover their mouths when they cough and keep dirty feet off seats. Although manners change over time, they aim to do the same thing, which is make people feel comfortable and respected.

No – people should behave how they like

Manners put pressure on people to behave in a way that doesn’t reflect how they really feel. If someone says “thank you” or “sorry” when they don’t mean it, they’re not being polite, they’re pretending to be nice. It’s better if everyone is just honest about how they feel. Lots of “good manners” don’t even make sense. Not putting your elbows on the table at dinner comes from medieval times when table tops could easily flip over, so why bother about it now? In Europe, manners were a way of showing how sophisticated and rich a person was, but does it really matter what type of knife people use to eat fish? As long as people are kind and considerate to others, they should be allowed to behave how they like.