Teens in Eastern Idaho Learn Table Etiquette from Manner Mishaps Class

The Situation
Families of teenagers are spending less time together at the dinner table and are meeting their nutritional needs individually in front of a screen or on the go. As a result, teens are missing the opportunity to develop and practice the skill of dining with grace and poise that will benefit them during social settings in the future.

As individuals age they use the table manners practiced as teens especially during high pressure situations such as job interviews, dating, meeting the parents of special friends, and work related dinners. Table manners often influence the employer during the final stages of the job interview process. When dining skills are lacking, potential employers question the individual’s effectiveness in the boardroom, with clients, or with business dealings in general.

It is our responsibility as adults to teach youth table manner skills so they have the greatest opportunity for success. The Family and Consumer Sciences teachers in Eastern Idaho requested the assistance of the University of Idaho Extension Educators to provide subject matter expertise in the area of table etiquette. A team of extension educators developed a program, Manner Mishaps, which focuses on teaching table etiquette to a target audience of teenagers in an interactive method resulting in table manner skills being understood and applied.

Our Response
Manner Mishaps was developed to teach table etiquette in a fun interactive method that would result in quick learning and application of dining skills. Manner Mishaps focuses on social skills students will use throughout their lives in relationships and work situations. Table etiquette and basic manners are taught through creative teaching methods including the use of a PowerPoint presentation, the video “Etiquette Hotline,” and a game requiring student participation.

With the use of the PowerPoint presentation, the students learn how to set a table properly by adding one piece of tableware at a time. Through demonstration, the students learn which piece of silverware to use with each part of the meal, how to eat different types of food, and what to do with the napkin. The video encourages students to refine their table manners by illustrating examples of poor table etiquette. It also gives the students examples of many different social settings in which table manners are important. A game similar to Jeopardy® is used to reinforce the material and also allows the instructor to determine if the information was understood and assimilated.

Program Outcomes
Since the program was developed in 2002, 188 students from Bonneville and Jefferson counties have participated in Manner Mishaps. Evaluation methods measured knowledge gained, probability of the use of the information in the future, and the
effectiveness of the program. A 10-question pre- and post-test was administered to measure the knowledge gained.

The average score on the pre-test was 64.2% correct. The average score on the post-test was 96.2% correct which indicate an increase of 32%. The correct answers in the game revealed that the students were able to understand and apply the information presented.

At the conclusion of the class the participants completed a survey to determine whether or not the students felt the material would be helpful to them in the future and to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Results of the survey are:
- 98% agreed or strongly agreed that participating in the program would be helpful in their future.
- 97% agreed or strongly agreed that the program was interesting.
- 98% agreed or strongly agreed that the program was useful.
- 98% agreed or strongly agreed that the activities were helpful.

As long as our society values table manners, there will be a need for teaching table etiquette. Manner Mishaps has been requested each year since it was developed in 2002.

Occasionally some of the students have participated in the program the previous year. Upon returning to a school, the educator was greeted by a student making this declaration as she entered the room: “I remember you! You taught us how to fold our napkins and place them in our laps when we eat. I still do it that way today and I even taught my Mom how to fold her napkin when she eats.”

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