

# Out There

Small talk, big ideas



Time Out  
New York  
Kids

Time Out New York Kids  
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Say good-bye to tantrums by enrolling  
your child in etiquette class...  
By Katharine Rust

## Mind over manners

Kid behaving badly?  
Class is in session.

By Katharine Rust

You're standing on a subway platform waiting for a train, when a boisterous group of middle-schoolers blow past and, without apology, almost send you tumbling. Or perhaps at one time or another, you've sat in a restaurant next to a tantrum-throwing child, witnessed a playdate gone horribly wrong, or waited in vain to receive an unsent Bar Mitzvah thank-you note from your nephew. If these scenarios sound familiar, you might be convinced that kids are taking their behavior cues from Eloise at the Plaza (and you wouldn't put it past some of them to pour water down a mail chute, either). It's no wonder that kiddie charm schools have started popping up like zits on a teenager.

Samantha von Sperling, the owner and director of Polished, an image-consulting firm that offers private etiquette lessons to kids, believes there is an epidemic of ill-mannered children in the city these days, and holds hippies responsible. "We can trace it

back to the '60s," she says. "If you're a parent today, you most likely didn't get the right behavioral information when you were young. Your parents were so busy protesting, and you were so busy on the computer at Harvard, that you didn't even learn how to hold a knife and fork!" That may be true, but today's protocol classes go well

**"Your parents were so busy protesting... that you didn't even learn how to hold a knife and fork!"**

beyond what your parents taught you (or didn't), or what you might teach your own kids (or not). Is it possible that parents are leading such frenetic and exhausting lives that they have no time to instill social skills? Von Sperling certainly thinks so.

Her company offers both group and private lessons that run the gamut

from dining basics and common courtesy tips to online etiquette (or "netiquette"). But unfortunately, getting rid of your child's rudeness won't come cheap in this town; the boot-camp-like sessions with von Sperling, for instance, will run you about \$200 per hour.

At the Etiquette School of New York (the Manhattan branch of which just opened in October), manners and poise are taught to promote self-confidence. "Kids are so awkward for most of their childhood," says founder Patricia Fitzpatrick. "When they know what to do and how to behave, they're more sure of themselves and it makes things easier for them." Her school offers age-appropriate classes: Elementary Etiquette, for instance, caters to kids in grades one through five, who learn the art of proper introductions, polite table manners and developing listening and conversation skills.

Apparently, it's never too early to start training. "Parents should begin instilling etiquette in kids as young as age two," von Sperling insists. "A child should be able to attend high tea at the Ritz by the age of five." And, of course, thank you for it.

