

the power of "hello"

If your child's greeting skills consist of hiding behind your legs or mumbling "Hi" while staring at the ground, don't despair. Cooperative, eager-to-please 5- and 6-year-olds are at the perfect stage to learn the art of a warm greeting. Here's how to transform those hellos:

play the big-kid card Discuss with your child how meeting someone in a friendly and polite manner shows respect for the other person and makes your child appear more grown-up.

break it down Make a list together of what constitutes a polite hello, including eye contact, a smile, a clear greeting ("It's nice to meet you"), an extended hand, and in many cases, an introduction ("My name is Michael").

get some practice Role-playing with stuffed animals or puppets gives kids an opportunity to practice their new skills without feeling self-conscious. The next step is family members. Ask Dad or Grandma to pretend to "meet" your child each time he or she enters the door.

make a game of it Pretend to greet your child, and then have him judge whether your greeting sounded nice—or not. For example, try saying the right words, but with a pouty expression or a frown on your face, so your child can see how the greeting quickly changes tone.

prepare for an event Review the rules before a family gathering or social situation, and look at photos of people your child might see there. —Esther Chapman

