

# Do Manners Matter?

EXPERTS SAY WE'RE TURNING INTO A BUNCH OF SAVAGES.  
**SHOULD WE CARE?**

**A** major crisis is threatening America. And no, we're not talking about the economy or climate change or the fact that there are four TV shows on the air starring members of the Kardashian family.

The problem is that Americans have become extremely—even dangerously—RUDE.

The evidence is everywhere, from the guy chatting on his cell phone in the middle of *The Dark Knight Rises* to your best friend never thanking you for the awesome birthday gift you gave her. And while obnoxious behavior is nothing new, 69 percent of American adults surveyed in 2010 said they think Americans are getting ruder. What is going on?

## A Code of Behavior

According to experts, impolite behavior is worse than annoying; it's threatening our civilized way of life. Think about how many fights are caused by rudeness—brawls that break out when people cut in line or road rage that erupts when one driver cuts off another. "Good manners are a code of behavior for how we treat one another," says



P. M. Forni, a civility expert and Johns Hopkins University professor.

A few years ago, shoppers at a New York Walmart took rudeness to a new, and extreme, level. Before the store was scheduled to open for a pre-Christmas sale, a crowd smashed the store's glass doors and charged inside. Many were hurt. One man was killed. The shoppers rushed by. No one stopped to help.

Of course, most rudeness doesn't result in death and destruction.

But the Walmart stampede is an example of what can happen when people fail to show consideration for others.

## Who Cares?

Manners might not seem like a big deal, especially when you consider all the serious problems facing the world, like war, poverty, and disease. You have a lot in your own life to worry about too—school, sports, pressures from

friends and family. Does it really matter if you forget to say “please” or “thank you”?

Besides, our society has become more casual. We send text messages instead of handwritten letters. We say “no problem” instead of “you’re welcome.” It’s not that people don’t care about each other; it’s just that our standards of conduct are less formal than in the past.

Plenty of Americans, however, are fighting to keep formal manners alive. At etiquette schools around the country, you can learn how to address the Queen of England and the difference between a salad fork and a dinner fork.

Ultimately, though, knowing which fork to use isn’t as important as simply being aware of those around you. After all, most people aren’t deliberately rude. That kid on the bus wasn’t trying to gross you out by picking his nose; he just has a bad habit. That girl at the mall didn’t realize her headphones were emitting an earsplitting whine; she was just grooving to Rihanna. In other words, most rudeness results from simple carelessness.

Still, you might feel dorky as the one person who holds the door for others or refuses to start eating until everyone is served. But don’t worry. Studies show that teens with good manners are more likely to be successful: They get higher grades, receive better pay at their jobs, and are more impressive in interviews.

Even better? Your good manners will make the world a happier, safer, and more peaceful place. ●

# What Do You Think?

## Should you care about manners?

Use evidence from the article to support each side of this debate. Write the information on the lines below.



YES

THANK YOU FOR ASKING.

1 Experts say that bad manners are threatening our civilized way of life.

2

3

NO

BURP.

1

2

3

**EXAMINE POINTS ON BOTH SIDES—AS WELL AS YOUR OWN BELIEFS AND EXPERIENCES.** Decide what you think. State your answer in one sentence below. This can become the thesis statement for an argument essay on this topic.



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