

## Beyond McDonalds

Fine dining with the kids

By Margo McDonough

Too often, kids and fine dining go together like oil and water. When my editor suggested that this month's column focus on fine dining with kids, inwardly I groaned. Just what we need—more unruly, loud and cranky children ruining special nights and special places for the rest of us.

I probably sound a bit cranky myself, like some hypercritical Miss Manners ready to swat your toddler's elbow off the table. Far from it. My own four kids—ages 3, 8, 9 1/2, and 14—have been caught plenty of times with an elbow on the dinner table. I'm not whining about such forgivable lapses in manners. My beef is with rude, disruptive behavior. We've all seen it—and heard it—crying; whining; little feet repeatedly kicking the back of the booth; or, worse yet, little feet running laps around the dining room.

It's not pleasant when it happens at casual restaurants, but it's much more annoying when it occurs at fine dining estab-

lishments. I'm not advising, though, that we keep youth away from high-end restaurants until they're 18. Although there are certain places I would never take my kids—for example, Le Bec Fin or Davios in Philly—my big brood has dined at some pretty fancy places without serious lapses in table manners.

I'm a firm believer that the only way children will ever learn how to behave and feel comfortable in nice eateries is to get experience. I'm equally adamant that parents must ensure that their kids' behavior doesn't infringe on the rights of others.

So how do kids get fine-dining experience without ruining everyone else's experience? "Preparing your children for a night of fine dining isn't as hard as it sounds," says cooking educator Elizabeth Brodt, "especially if you make good table manners an expectation every day of the week."

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Cooking educator Elizabeth Brodt helps Luke Duchemin (left), Hana Arai and Mary Monte make peanut butter brownies at Celebrity Kitchens.

Photo by Tim Hawk

**Open Mic Night!**  
ORIGINAL MUSIC hosted by Sam Smick  
8pm - 12am

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 14, 2004  
7:00pm - 10:00pm  
Celebrity Kitchens  
40 Geoffrey Dr. Newark NJ 07102  
368-8373

**Upcoming Performers:**

<b>Fridays:</b>	<b>Saturdays:</b>
3/26: The Alternative	3/20: Mike Beck
4/2: Mike Mead	3/27: Stevie O
4/9: Patrick Thomas	4/3: Toney Mowen
4/16: Courtney Jansen	4/10: Brian Richman
4/23: Ted Richardson	4/17: Mike Magee
4/30: Nick & Joey	4/24: Wesley Ochs
	5/1: Bryan McCabe

40 Geoffrey Dr. Newark 368-8373



Photo by Tim Hawk

Morgan Howell (left), and Stephanie Angelone prepare teryaki chicken at Celebrity Kitchens

Brodts teaches children's cooking classes at Celebrity Kitchen in North Wilmington. She's a stickler for good manners and works mini-etiquette lessons into many of her classes. Typical was a recent session for Cub Scouts who were at the cooking school to earn a badge in "healthy eating." Although nutrition was the focus, Brodts also made sure that this boisterous bunch of 7- and 8-year-olds practiced such table basics as using a napkin instead of a shirtsleeve and chewing with your mouth closed. And she worked in such niceties as which fork to use first and where to put your silverware when you're finished with a course.

Brodts' own three children, ages 7, 12 and 15, are polished, well-behaved diners at even the poshest places. She credits their good manners to constant practice. "Even when we are in very casual restaurants, the kids know that the same rules apply," says Brodts.

Brodts holds a "fine dining night" at home several times a month. On these occasions, the family eats in the dining room of their Greenville home, dresses slightly nicer (no sweatpants allowed) and lingers after the meal for leisurely conversation.

"It's a great way to reinforce table manners," says Brodts. She notes that such a dinner can serve as a trial-run before an upcoming formal dining occasion, such as a family wedding, bar mitzvah or anniversary dinner.

Brodts also is a realist about pint-sized attention spans. So, before dining out, she always prepares a small backpack of quiet toys, books or games for her youngest child.

Of course, all the toys in the world won't keep kids happy when the wait time and/or meal promises to be lengthy. When her children were toddlers, Brodts and her husband made restaurant wait times bearable by taking turns going on walks with the children. She's seen other parents expect their small kids to endlessly sit and wait for a table and then wonder why the kids get restless as soon as they're seated.

Alternately, Brodts suggests asking for take-out—even fine dining establishments frequently will accommodate this request—when wait times are longer than expected and small children aren't holding up well.

Now that you have a few tips on fine dining with the kids, where should you go? Stay away from places that seat families at the bar—it happened to Brodts at an upscale Wilmington steakhouse that was unmistakably sending the message that it doesn't welcome kids. Start by checking out these kid-friendly fine dining establishments, suggested by Brodts and *Out & About* writers and editors. Your kids will be welcome as long as they behave: