**How Courtesy Scripts Change Language, Behavior and Classroom Culture**

**Courtesy Script # 1: Making a Request**

**Goal:** Children will be able to ask each other for things, or tell each other what to do, or not to do, in a courteous manner. When children are bothered by something, or need something, they will have the language to address it directly with each other.

**Why:** Talking directly with each other about our problems or requests builds autonomy. Children are able to solve their own problems and create change in the classroom on their own. It reduces tattling to almost zero (unless a child refuses to cooperate with the script). The 3 responses facilitate a wide range of interactions and address most situations.

**Person A**: *“Will you please…..”*

**Person B**: *Okay*

*Post the script on chart paper on the wall and practice it daily in the morning meeting routine.*

 *Sorry*

 *That wasn’t me*

**Examples:**

1. “Will you please scoot over.”
	1. *Okay*
2. “Will you please not draw on my paper.”
	1. *Sorry*
3. “Will you please pass me a crayon.”
	1. *Okay*
4. “Will you please not take my snack.”
	1. *That wasn’t me*
5. “Will you please…. not laugh at me; put away your trash; pick up your book bag; etc.”

**How to introduce and reinforce this script with children:**

1. Model with many examples (above)
	1. Requests must start with “will you please”
	2. Requests must have a calm voice, not an angry and frustrated “WILL YOU PLEASE!”
	3. The response must be in a normal voice, not “OKAY!! *Gosh*.”
	4. The response must be one of these three statements.
	5. And, we say “sorry” when:
		1. We mean it, *and*:
		2. When we see that the other person is unhappy because of what we did or said.
	6. We cannot ignore a “will you please…” request.
2. Do you tell the teacher if someone took your crayon? No. Use your please request. *May I please have the crayons back? We can share them.* Do you tell the teacher if someone took your snack off your desk? No. Use your please request. *May I please have my snack back?*
3. What do you do if you make a “will you please” request and the other person does not do anything or does not respond?
	1. **Then you tell the teacher.**
4. Teacher and student role play together in front of the class
5. Post the script on the wall (with corresponding pictures as necessary).
6. Children practice repeating the script with a partner each day in the morning meeting. For example, the teacher starts the routine by saying, “Tell your partner two ‘will you pleases’ and they answer with *okay, sorry* or *that wasn’t me*.”
	1. Remind children that they must respond when someone uses a please request with them.
	2. Remind children that if someone ignores a please request or does not reply in a courteous way (with one of the three responses) then you tell the teacher.
7. Make a big deal over various children who are using the please request and proper responses. Watch and listen carefully to all interactions to make sure that children are using this script. Intervene with reminders from time to time as children are learning this habit.

**Edwardo and Sondra demonstrate the courtesy script routine during a morning meeting**

Just as two children might go through introductions, a song and the calendar routine in your room, they can also role play with one another, in pairs, how to speak with courtesy. The teacher invites the children to turn to a partner and say three “will you pleases.” Children know to ask each other, “would you like to go first?” to decide who speaks first. They each take turns making up three please statements and then responding to the statements using the script.

Let’s listen in as Sondra and Edwardo practice their courtesy script. Edwardo is thinking of realistic scenarios during the school day when he might use a please statement, and is making up the actual request. Each child creates their own hypothetical but realistic situation (in italics below) to facilitate their spoken request.

Edwardo: “Will you please *put away the headphones*.”

Sondra: “Okay”

Edwardo: “Will you please *use kind words*.”

Sondra: “Sorry.”

Edwardo: “Will you please *not draw on my paper*.”

Sondra: “That wasn’t me.”

In this example, the courtesy script is facilitating all interactions that involve making a request. Children learn that making a request is done in a peaceful and thoughtful manner and that in a relationship of respect with another person, we respond to their requests with a similar attitude of peacefulness and thoughtfulness.

When children do not know how to make and reply to a request peacefully and respectfully several problems arise: they may be silent, not knowing how to speak up to say what they need, they may speak out in a demanding and angry tone, disrupting learning, or they may go the teacher repeatedly for all sorts of concerns that are peer related.

**Courtesy Script # 2: Sharing**

**Person A:** Can I share (this/that item) with you?

**Person B:** *Yes*

 *In two minutes (sets the timer)*

 *This is not for sharing (food, or perhaps certain personal items)*

This script implies that everything will be shared eventually unless sharing the item is not wise. The skill of setting a child-friendly timer will need to be modeled and rehearsed. As long as the teacher helps Person B follow through and pass the item as soon as the timer goes off, this routine becomes automatic. It’s especially useful during free play periods.

**Conclusion**

In my classroom, the courtesy script for *making a request* also covered sharing, such as, “will you please share the scissors with me?” But I included a specific *sharing* script because I wanted you to see that you can create your own courtesy scripts to facilitate every type of language and behavior. Simply watch and observe, and like magic you will discover another way for children to talk. Then, all you have to do is make and teach a script and you are well on your way to a more kind and harmonious classroom. After children learn the language of the script, they branch off and use their own words which are also sincere and cooperative.

 Besides the “ah ha” moments of learning and the excitement and joy of discovery, there is perhaps no greater feeling of magic for a teacher than to see her entire class interacting with complete dignity, around every possible activity, *independently* of her. The sense of peace, productivity and community is a joy to witness – and children are learning! Courtesy is music to my ears. When we teach children how to be courteous it becomes possible to imagine a world united in courtesy. Courtesy is magic.

Michael Haslip, Ph.D., haslip@drexel.edu