DINING NAPKIN TRAINING CLIP FOR CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

A device for securing a napkin to a child’s clothing is disclosed. The device is an teaching aid used to teach a child how to behave at the dining table like grown-ups. It helps in establishing correct eating manners, encourage proper posture during the meal, and teaches the proper usage of dining napkins.
DINING NAPKIN TRAINING CLIP FOR CHILDREN

BACKGROUND

[0001] 1. Field of the Invention

[0002] The present disclosure is for a device that detachably holds a dining napkin or other soft object to an article of clothing. Particular to the usage in the training and care of children, the device features rounded edges and corners, and may be constructed from a soft, resilient material for safety concerns.

[0003] 2. Background

[0004] In bringing up children, it is often a great challenge to teach them proper manners at the dining table. Children can be rambunctious and have short attention spans when it comes to sitting still during a meal. It is also common for young children to spill food on themselves when eating. Bibs or trays are commonly used to protect against eating mishaps at a young age, but as a child grows older this quickly becomes impractical and unseemly.

[0005] When a child graduates to the use of dining napkins from using bibs, the dining napkin often winds up on the floor numerous times during the course of a meal. This is usually a result of improper posture, a lack of sitting still, or simply because the child is not consciously aware of the napkin on his lap. It would be beneficial to have a device that would act as the proverbial “training wheels” for dining napkins to train a child in their proper use. The device would be used to secure a napkin to a child’s clothing to protect against food spillage, and to assist in developing proper eating manners. It is also desirable for the device to be simple and safe to operate, so that even children can use it by themselves.

[0006] In attaching a dining napkin to the person, there are numerous napkin holding devices and clips known in the prior art. However, these devices may pose certain dangers when used with a child because they may utilize strong clamping mechanisms and sharp construction, and are only intended for adult use. U.S. Pat. No. 6,301,756 issued to Howard on Oct. 16, 2001, entitled “Clip,” illustrates a device that has large, sharp clamping teeth, which are fully exposed when the device is in the open position. U.S. Pat. No. 5,913,487 issued to Ochsman on Jun. 22, 1999, entitled, “Wearable Clamp for Releasably Holding a Napkin or Other Flexible Substrate and Method for Wearing a Napkin or Other Flexible Substrate,” is comprised of a planar base hingedly connected to a movable jaw and carries an L-shaped lever and a spring clip. The movable jaw is sharp and the construction has many components.

[0007] Other designs utilize a thin cord or string element to suspend the clipped napkin over clothing, which may pose a danger to children if swallowed. U.S. Pat. No. 6,502,284 issued to Juda et al. on Jan. 7, 2003, entitled “Clothing Protective Device,” discloses a pair of clipping halves that is connected by means of a string or decorative chain which is to be draped around the neck of the user. Similarly, U.S. Pat. No. 6,836,899, issued to Glasmire on Jan. 4, 2005, entitled “Device for Detachable Holding an Absorbent Napkin Across the Torso,” describes a device that features magnetic clipping ends that are also connected by a cord. Both devices may not be suitable for use with younger children.

[0008] Furthermore, most napkin clips and holders cover only the upper extremities starting from the neck of the user. For instance, U.S. Pat. No. 4,425,680 issued to Basseches et al. on Jan. 17, 1984, entitled “Napkin Clip,” describes a clip which may be attached to an upper clothing portion below the chin of a wearer. The absorbent napkin is inserted into this clip-like device. This device, however, does nothing to train children in the proper etiquette and use of dining napkins, and in fact merely wears the napkin like a bib.

[0009] What is needed is a device for securing a napkin to a child’s clothing, which is used to teach the child how to behave at the dining table like grown-ups. It helps in establishing correct eating manners, encourage proper posture during the meal, and teaches the proper usage of dining napkins.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0010] FIG. 1 depicts a perspective view showing an embodiment of the present device.

[0011] FIG. 2 depicts a side view shown with an inner gripping surface.

[0012] FIG. 3 depicts a front view of the present device.

[0013] FIG. 4 depicts the device in perspective phantom view showing an inner gripping surface.

[0014] FIG. 5 is a perspective view of the present invention illustrating the attachment of an absorbent napkin to a clothing surface.

[0015] FIG. 5a is a cross sectional view of FIG. 5.

[0016] FIG. 6 shows another embodiment of the invention in perspective view.

[0017] FIG. 6a shows a top view of the embodiment of FIG. 6.

[0018] FIG. 6b shows a side view of the embodiment of FIG. 6 in closed position.

[0019] FIG. 6c shows a side view of the embodiment of FIG. 6 in open position.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0020] FIG. 1 depicts an embodiment of the instant device. A clip 100 has a single piece U-shaped body 102 consisting of two oppositely aligned gripping sections 106 and 108. The body is fabricated from semi-rigid materials such as plastic, rubber or hard foam, such that the clip can easily be opened, even by a child. In alternate embodiments, the body can be made of wood, metal, cardboard or any other material known or convenient. The clamping force exerted by the U-shaped body 102 should be such that the clip will return to a closed position when opened, but will not clamp down suddenly on fingers. The clamping force should be sufficient enough to secure a paper napkin, yet the clip should be able to easily open wide enough to accommodate and secure thicker cloth napkins.

[0021] The edges and corners of the body 102 are rounded to provide safety. In alternate embodiments, the body 102 may be coated in a soft covering to further aid in safety.

[0022] FIG. 2 and FIG. 3 show an alternate embodiment of the device featuring gripping components 202a and 202b
located on the inner surfaces of gripping sections 106 and 108. These components may be constructed from soft materials such as rubber or felt to permit easy attachment and removal of articles. With these gripping elements, the gripping sections do not need to assert much force in securing the napkin. The napkin may simply be secured by friction from the gripping components 202a and 202b acting on the napkin.

[0023] In alternate embodiments, the gripping components 202a and 202b may have patterns that aid in gripping, such as small ridges or teeth. FIG. 4 depicts one such embodiment in plan view, having gripping components 201a (not shown) and 202b with integral rows of ridges 401. These patterns may differ in size and shape in alternate embodiments.

[0024] FIG. 5 and FIG. 5a demonstrate the attachment of a paper or cloth dining napkin 501 to an article of clothing 502. To use the device, the clip 100 is opened and one gripping surface tucked inside the waistband 503 or side pocket 504 of the child’s pants, shorts or dress. (FIG. 5a depicts the inner gripping surface that is tucked inside the article of clothing 502.) The dining napkin 501 can then be slid between the second gripping section facing outwards and the article of clothing, thereby securing the napkin to the article of clothing. The napkin is meant to be placed across the lap of the child (see FIG. 5), just like grown-ups. Alternatively, the clip may be also be used to secure a napkin to clothing of the upper body for eating foods that may create a mess.

[0025] A dining napkin may be gripped by the clip and remain secured to an article of clothing, as long as the child does not exhibit excessive movements during the meal. It is not an object of the invention to provide a gripping force that can withstand such movements, but rather aid the child in developing proper eating manners and napkin usage by reinforcement. If the napkin does slip from the clip, the child can be informed gently that he is not behaving properly at the dining table, such as not staying still, letting his legs slip off the chair, or generally not maintaining a good sitting posture.

[0026] In a further embodiment depicted in FIG. 6, the clip 600 comprises a top half 601 and a bottom half 602 connected by spring means 603. The spring means assert pressure on the halves to keep the clip in a closed position, as depicted in FIG. 6b. A slight pressure is applied by a user’s fingers to tabs 601a and 602a aft of the spring means 603 to open the clip. While the clip is in its open position, it can be clamped onto an article of clothing and a dining napkin in a similar manner as discussed above. The spring means exert just enough pressure to hold a dining napkin to the article of clothing when the clip returns to its closed position, as depicted in FIG. 6b. This ensures that a child will not be injured by the clip suddenly snapping or clamping down on the child’s extremities. Further, this embodiment has a rounded shape with no sharp corners, and is preferably made of a soft and pliant material for increased safety for use around children.

[0027] Although the invention has been described in conjunction with specific embodiments thereof, it is evident that many alternatives, modifications and variations will be apparent to those skilled in the art. Accordingly, the invention as described and hereinafter claimed is intended to embrace all such alternatives, modifications and variations that fall within the spirit and broad scope of the appended claims.

What is claimed is:
1. A device for training children in using dining napkins, comprising:
   a body portion consisting of substantially planar halves,
   said planar halves having oppositely aligned gripping sections, and
   said body portion exerting a resistance that holds the oppositely aligned gripping sections in a closed position.
2. The device of claim 1, further comprising at least one gripping component integral with the inner surfaces of said gripping sections.
3. The device of claim 1, wherein the body portion is fabricated from semi-rigid material.
4. The device of claim 1 wherein said body portion is fabricated from materials selected from the group consisting of rubber, plastic, gel, and hard foam.
5. The device of claim 1 wherein said body portion consists of a soft resilient material.
6. The device of claim 1 wherein said gripping component is constructed of a soft and resilient material.
7. The device of claim 1 wherein said gripping component has a substantially smooth surface such that articles may be easily inserted and removed.
8. The device of claim 1 wherein said gripping sections are enabled to fit closely against inserted articles.
9. The device of claim 1 wherein the resistance exerted by the body portion returns the gripping sections to a closed position gradually.
10. The holding device of claim 1 wherein said resistance exerted by the body portion is sufficient to secure a napkin.
11. The holding device of claim 1 wherein said resistance may be easily overcome to permit the insertion and removal of articles.
12. A device for training children in using dining napkins, comprising:
   a body portion consisting of two planar halves,
   said planar halves having oppositely aligned gripping sections, and
   spring means to exert a resistance that holds the oppositely aligned gripping sections in a closed position.
13. The device of claim 12, further comprising tab means for a user to exert pressure to counter the resistance of said spring means to place the oppositely aligned gripping sections in an open position.
14. The device of claim 12, wherein said device is constructed of a soft material chosen from the group consisting of rubber, foam and gel.
15. The device of claim 12, wherein said resistance exerted by said spring means will return, in a gradual manner, the oppositely aligned gripping sections to the closed position from an open position.
16. A method for training a child in the proper etiquette of using a dining napkin at a dining table, comprising:

- providing a device that can secure a dining napkin to an article of clothing worn by the child;
- said device having a clamping force that is just sufficient to secure said napkin to the article of clothing if the child sits relatively still at the dining table;

said clamping force being insufficient to secure said napkin to the article of clothing if said child exercises excessive movements at the dining table;

informing the child of his inappropriate behavior once the napkin becomes unsecured due to the child’s movements.

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