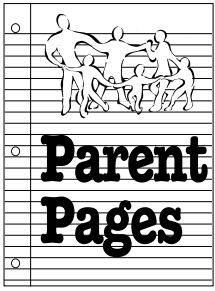


Who's in Charge When Children's Friends Visit?



Having friends visit is an event most of us anticipate with pleasure. Unfortunately, such visits occasionally result in chaos or in hurt, resentful feelings.

You may be surprised when visiting children do not abide by the rules taken for granted by your family. Visiting adult friends may think you are overly strict and resent your attempts to limit their children's behavior. On the other hand, if your lifestyle is far more relaxed, with fewer restrictions than the visiting children have at home, your adult visitors may become uncomfortable, perhaps wondering if their children will become unmanageable when rules are not in effect. Young children are sensitive to adult tensions and uncertainties and many will react with testing behaviors to find out who is in charge or what the rules are.

Here are several suggestions that may help make visits by other people and their children more pleasant.

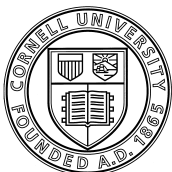
- ◆ When possible, childproof your home in advance of young children's visits. Put knickknacks and breakables out of reach. Store medicines, household cleaners, matches, knives and other dangerous objects safely away. Even if you believe children should be taught not to touch or taste other people's possessions, don't risk accidental injury in your home.
- ◆ Have some interesting playthings available. Talk with your own children ahead of time about toys they are willing to share and respect their decision to hide away a few very precious possessions. If you don't have children of your own, collect some clean, empty cereal boxes, milk cartons and egg cartons that may inspire your young visi-



tor to set up a make-believe store. Save some junk mail and add a cardboard box with a slot cut into one side for a pretend post office. Unbreakable pots and pans are favorites with the toddlers, while older children might enjoy dressing up with your scarves and junk jewelry. Paper, pencils and crayons are always good materials to have on hand.

- ◆ Expect to spend time playing and talking with young children during the visit, even if you have a lot of catching up to do with their parents. Children who are ignored may feel rejected and misbehave to get attention. Try to play or talk with them before they become whiny or demanding.
- ◆ If there are specific precautions children need to know, state them clearly and briefly. For example: "Our cat is very old. It's okay to stroke her like this but she does not like to be picked up. Please leave her on the chair." Or "In our house we keep the TV off during the day. Let's find something else for you to do."

~Continued~



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- ◆ If, in spite of your statement, the child breaks the rule, ask the parent, "Shall I enforce our house rule or would you prefer to?" If such a question is asked in a pleasant, respectful way, few parents will take offense. What happens if a visiting child misbehaves in a way you had not anticipated and his or her parent does nothing? Perhaps a three-year-old begins to tear a magazine on your coffee table. You might say, "I still need that magazine but I can find you some old newspapers to tear," as you gently remove the magazine. Or perhaps a visiting two-year-old has bitten or kicked your child. As you comfort the victim you might say to the two-year-old, "I'll try to help you talk to Bobby, but he doesn't like to be hurt."
- ◆ Be sure you are prepared for the unexpected emergency. Keep a list of emergency numbers by the telephone, including those for a poison control center, rescue squad or ambulance and fire department.
- ◆ Keep visits for young children short. Long adult conversations may have to wait a few years--or at least until the children are in bed! Meal and bed times can be particularly stressful for young children away from home. Plan carefully with the visiting child's parents to make these important routines easy and comfortable. When friends visit for a weekend or several days, don't expect children to play together for long periods without your help. Take them for a walk or to a park, have a snack with them, read a story, sing songs--even separate them briefly--to provide respite from the hard work of learning social skills.

*Source: : Jennifer Birckmayer, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, New York College of Human Ecology, Cornell University. **Parent Pages** was developed by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County.*