



Family Visiting Etiquette for Guests and Hosts

By Judy Arnall

I enjoy visits from our relatives, and I enjoy visiting our relatives too. It's wonderful to renew acquaintance with our extended family, and to catch up on family news. However, bringing children to live with another family for a few days (or even weeks!) can be challenging for both hosts and guests. A few simple rules of courtesy can help smooth the way for a fun and pleasant visit for everyone.

Rules for Guests

- Parenting styles can clash. Learn the rules of the house, and explain to your kids why things are different here.
- Your children might be picky about unfamiliar food. Don't insist that they eat up, but teach them to be polite in their refusal, and buy lots of bread and cheese and apples.
- Teach your children to pick up after themselves promptly.
- Communicate kitchen expectations: is this a help-yourself kitchen, or should permission be sought?
- Offer to make some of the meals, and take out your hosts, and definitely supplement the groceries and the wine.
- Your family should do more than their share of table setting, dish clearing, and dishwashing!
- If the home has hazards for children, seek permission to childproof. Older people forget what children can get into. They will appreciate that you care about their home as well as the safety of your children.
- Be willing to go to events to which your host invites you, even though you would rather sprawl in front of your hosts' television.
- Don't hog the house! Plan some independent activities, so the host family has some quiet time at their home.
- Bite your tongue when your host disciplines your child. Just let it go without comment (except for abuse of course). If they make a wrong call, talk to your child later in private about different personalities and parenting styles and how to handle issues in the future.
- When visiting local points of interest and restaurants, be prepared to pay for your host too.
- Be generous guests. And don't forget to leave a gift.
- Before leaving, return all things borrowed, including house keys. Strip beds, and put towels and sheets in the laundry room. Clean up your bags and garbage.

Rules for Hosts

- Show your guests where to find the phone, emergency numbers, laundry facilities, dishes, food, sleep areas etc.

- Turn off your security system unless you really need it. Wandering guests can inadvertently awake the entire street at 3:00 a.m.
- Recognize that the noise, mess and work level may increase, and find ways to increase your tolerance for it or schedule breaks from it.
- If you have special requirements, such as a quiet house at 10 p.m., communicate your house rules.
- If your guests include young children, they might be picky eaters, so obtain a variety of foods.
- If you publicly offer something to your own child, then offer the same to the visiting children.
- Bite your tongue. Some things will annoy you, but try to be diplomatic. The visit will end, but hurt feelings from words said in anger will not.
- Include guests in outings and family events.
- Don't discipline guest's children. Speak up to the parent instead.
- Be flexible about sleeping arrangements. Sometimes visiting children get homesick and prefer to pile on the floor with their parents instead of their assigned room.
- Respect your guest's room. It's their territory for the visit, and hence, is private.
- Childproof your house for babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers.
- Offer age-appropriate entertainment for your guest's children.

Sometimes the hosts and the guests each need to bend over backwards, but by following these simple rules of courtesy, communication and respect, the visit will be enjoyable and memorable for all!

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