



Parenting Tips

WHO'S IN CHARGE WHEN FRIENDS AND THEIR CHILDREN VISIT?

Having friends visit is anticipated with pleasure. Unfortunately, visiting children may not abide by your family's rules and visiting adults may think you are overly strict or too relaxed. Here are several suggestions that may help make visits by other people and their children more pleasant.

Childproof your home in advance when possible. Put knickknacks, breakables medicines, household cleaners, matches, knives and other dangerous objects safely out of reach. Have some toys your children are willing to share available. Respect their decision to hide away a few precious possessions. Unbreakable pots and pans are favorites with toddlers, while older children might enjoy paper, pencils and crayons.

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. Keep visits with young children short. Long adult conversations may have to wait a few years--or at least until the children are in bed!

State specific precautions clearly and briefly: "Our cat is very old. It's OK to stroke her but she does not like to be picked up." "In our house we keep the TV off during the day. Let's find something else for you to do." If the child breaks the rule, ask the parent, "Shall I enforce our house rule or would you prefer to?"

If a visiting child misbehaves 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 remove the magazine.

Be sure you are prepared for an emergency. Keep a list of emergency numbers by the telephone, including those for a poison control center, rescue squad or ambulance and fire department.

Plan carefully with the visiting child's parents for meal and bed times to make these important routines easy and comfortable. 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.

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