

House Guest Rules

By Jill Evans Kryston, Etiquette Consultant

Q: As the travel season approaches, I'm reminded of several unpleasant house guest experiences we've had at our cottage over the years. Can you offer some advice to guests?

A: Summer is the season when many of us look forward to visiting friends and family. I can't think of a more appropriate time to demonstrate common courtesies and thoughtfulness than when invited to stay at someone's house, including that of a parent.

The best advice I can give is to communicate clearly, both before and during your stay. If the hosts have not provided specific information about activities and dress, it's up to the guest to find out how to prepare. A guest should also inquire about the house rules. For instance, there are hosts who do not mind if guests help themselves to beverages and snacks. Keep in mind, however, some things may be off-limits such as an ingredient for tomorrow's dinner. It's always best to ask permission and never assume anything.

The following suggestions will help to ensure that you'll be a guest who is always invited back:

1. Don't ask to bring children or pets if they have not been invited.
2. It's not only courteous but an obligation to give your hostess a gift. If there are children, take presents for them as well. Make sure it's something they will each appreciate.
3. Arrive when you say you will and leave when you're supposed to. Should you have a car problem or a delayed flight, take care of it yourself without burdening your hosts.
4. Offer your help whenever possible. Do not expect your hosts to wait on you hand and foot. A nice gesture during your stay would be to cook or take your hosts to dinner. Leave money for any expenses you may have incurred.
5. Let your hosts know ahead of time if you have food restrictions. Otherwise, be flexible about foods and meal times.
6. Keep your personal space tidy by making your bed each day and putting your belongings away. At the end of your stay, ask your hosts how they would have you handle the soiled bedding, then, neatly cover the bed with the bedspread.
7. Clean up after using the bathroom. Wipe the sink and shower, hang your towels, and close the lid on the toilet every time you use it.
8. Your hosts do not need to entertain you throughout your visit. When they are busy with chores or don't need your help, be prepared by having a good book, game or personal agenda. If out and about, leave your cell phone number and carry their contact information, then, remember to communicate regularly.
9. Be a cheerful joiner and a good team player. Do not complain, do not discipline your hosts' children, and do not conduct business when you should be having pleasure.
10. Always show gratitude even after you give a hostess gift, make a thank you phone call or send an email. In the world of manners, a written note on good stationery is the highest form of a thank you.

Do you have an etiquette question you want Jill to answer in her monthly column? Email your question(s) to: information@DefiningManners.com or mail to: P.O. Box 1703, Shavertown, PA 18708.

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