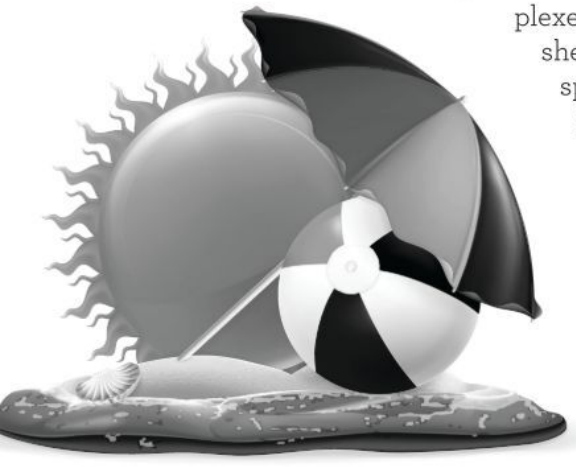
BETWEEN FRIENDS with ESTHER EtiQuette

Dear Esther,

The weather is warming, and as I empty coats and woolen sweaters from my family's closets, and begin the task of going through bathing suits to determine the sizes needed for this year, I am reminded of a chilly encounter I had several months ago with a generally warm neighbor of ours. This neighbor has a beautiful pool which she graciously shares. During my morning walk around the neighborhood I crossed paths with my neighbor. "Good morning! Thank you again so much for allowing our family to use your pool last summer. It was such a treat for my kids! I hope we can use it next year, too," I said sincerely. My neighbor sort of shrugged and walked on. I am perplexed. Why would she be so unresponsive? Do you think I can call her again this summer?
— Southern Bella



Dear Bella,

Your neighbor was very generous to you this past summer. Your morning "thank you," while sincere, was presumptuous. It only came about as a result of a chance encounter. It could be that she simply felt uncomfortable with your voiced expectations (or in your words, hope). Don't call your neighbor to ask to use her pool yet. Wait for your neighbor to invite you to use the pool. It could be that it was over-used by you, or perhaps by others, last summer. Unless your neighbor says something like, "You are always welcome to use our pool, just call me," don't call. She'll let you know when it is available for your family.

I have another thought, and forgive me if this does not apply to you, but it may be important for our readers. When I was growing up we had a friend whose pool we used frequently. Our family was privileged to have an open invitation to her pool and a key in case she was not home. However, we kids knew the rules of the pool (created and strictly upheld by our mother).

We were never permitted to enter the home of our pool host. Who wants little kids in dripping bathing suits tramping through their house? If we needed to use the restroom, we went home and swimming for the day was done. It became routine for us to use the restroom before we left for swimming.

No food at the pool. Period. Only water bottles. The last thing my mother needed was our friend walking out to a pool deck covered with crunched up chips and smashed berries.

The last ten minutes of swim time was cleanup time. All tubes, pool toys and balls were removed from the pool and put back in their designated places.

I would also suggest that if your neighbor grants you use of her pool this summer, have your children write a thoughtful note to her expressing their gratitude. You could include a little gift too. Don't thank her only if you happen to bump into her on the street before the following summer. In short: Don't take her for granted.

Hope your summer is a wet and not too wild one!

Dear Esther,

I teach in the local girls' high school with a few women my age. There are two teachers I am friends with and two are just co-workers. My husband is planning a birthday party for me and he wants to know who he should invite from my work. Should I invite the co-workers, if I am inviting my friends? I have no relationship with them outside of school and I would rather not.

PC Pessy



Dear Pessy,

I do not think you must invite a co-worker to a personal birthday party your husband is throwing for you. However, inviting a group of co-workers and leaving out a select few is unacceptable. It sounds like there are too few teachers in your school to start picking and choosing. Invite the extra few to make everyone happy. B'rov am hadras melech. Be a benevolent queen on your special day!

Dear Esther,

We share a backyard with our neighbors. Somehow we have always landed the exhilarating task of removing dead rats, exterminating ant hills, and any other maintenance needed there. Why? Because if we didn't we'd have a backyard museum of rodent skeletons. And much as I hate being solely responsible for a joint duty, I hate the smell and sight of dead rats more. How do I communicate my frustrations effectively and respectfully to my neighbors?

Mira

Dear Mira,

Sit down at your desk and email your neighbors, explaining to them that the state of the shared backyard is both families' responsibility. Request a meeting between you and your husband and the couple next door to discuss how you will proceed in the future. At this meeting, explain the problem and propose the following solution: Divide the year in half. Six months of the year the backyard's business is your business and six months of the year it is theirs. Each couple has 48 hours to act on a problem such as mice. If the problem is not taken care of, the other couple can outservice the labor and bill the couple whose turn it is.

Good luck implementing this solution! But if you notice a problem when it is not your turn, don't just sit there steaming until the 48-hour deadline passes. Pick up the phone and remind them about your agreement, and ask them to take action.

Dear Esther,

My son is married to a lovely girl whom we adore. The only issue is the way she dresses. I know I have no control over the way she dresses in her home or on the street, but do I have a say about how she presents herself in my daled amos? My husband becomes very uncomfortable when too much is exposed in front of our younger sons. Can I mention something to my son? I do not want to confront my daughter-in-law as I fear she will become angry with me, but my son is very level headed. I am thinking of telling my son how much I love his wife and their visits, but telling him truthfully that her manner of dress is making my husband and me uncomfortable. Perhaps he can suggest to his wife to cover up a bit more when coming to the in-laws. What's your opinion, Esther?

Shviger Who Is Sweet as Sugar

Dear Shviger,

I think it's a really, really bad idea for a mother-in-law to complain to her child about his or her spouse. Just don't go there, no matter how tactful and sensitive you think you are being. Highlighting a person's inequity to his or her spouse is never okay. The fact that the someone is your daughter-in-law only deepens the potential damage.

Your son made the choice to marry this woman, flaws and all. Now, accept her and love her as she is. You are not her mother and she is no longer a child, and you cannot and should not try to raise her. Worried about your grandchildren's chinuch? Then set a good example for them, and most importantly, get along with your daughter-in-law so you (and your good example, and your hashkafos) will be a big part of those children's lives.

Daughters-in-law, you're not off the hook. Etiquette is a two-way street. True, your mother-in-law should not be interfering in your relationship with your husband, or pointing out your flaws to him. But for your part, when you're in your in-laws' home, don't show blatant disregard for the Torah laws they uphold and value.



