BETWEEN FRIENDS *with* ESTHER

EtiQuette



Dear Esther,

Thank G-d, my children have made wonderful friends in our neighborhood over the years, after somewhat of a rough start. But now I get overwhelmed by the sheer number of kids dropping by my house on a daily basis. Between each of my six kids having a friend and their sibling(s) over, I can sometimes have 15 little kids running around my house Shabbos afternoon. *Baruch Hashem*, I am not stressed about our food budget as both my husband and I work full time, but the hard part for me is the shopping, preparing, serving, and cleaning up all the food that extra kids consume after school, at Shabbos party, and at shalosh seudos. My neighbors with large families, most of whom do not work, seem to easily add a seat for my kids at their meals. I do not want my kids' friends or their mothers to feel I am not welcoming. I also want to use the opportunity to teach my kids about being generous and hospitable, but I am exhausted and worn out at the end of a week of eight-hour workdays. How can I find the right balance between my need to have some peace and quiet when I get home and my fanciful desire to be a Balabatishe Mama for my kids and their never-ending stream of friends and tag-a-long siblings?

Signed,
Wannabe SuperMama

Dear SuperMomma,

You've got your hands very full and it's no wonder that you are exhausted at the end of the day. However, I will point out that having extra kids over (when you've got six of your own) is hard for everybody, working or not. In fact, I can see a stay-at-home mother feeling it's harder for her to have extra mouths to feed and fights to break up since she's home with kids 24/7 and really never gets a break from the chaotic world of children. Also, everyone has different temperaments and what's hard for one person may be easy for another. I have a friend with a very demanding full-time job who loves having kids over and it's really no sweat for her. Another friend is a homemaker with all her children in school till 4:00 and having even one extra child in her house almost always results in a frantic call to the guest's mother to "please come pick up your child now, the kids are running around and it's just too wild." You mentioned that since you and your husband both work full time, you are not troubled by the expense of extra children in your home. Perhaps you should consider tacking on the expense of household help to take over the preparing, serving and cleaning up. Then you can enjoy your Shabbos rest and your Shabbos guests too.

You are right in your desire to have an open home and model hospitality, generosity and reciprocity to your children, but you need to do it in a way that preserves your sanity too. Perhaps the rule is one friend a day and your children take turns inviting friends. Maybe one Shabbos afternoon you are up to three friends coming over for two hours (why do they have to stay till *shalosh seudos?*). Just because your neighbors can handle 15 extra kids on Shabbos does not mean that you must follow suit. You don't need to be the one with the entire gang over, but you also don't want to be the one with the immaculate, quiet house with no visitors. Do as the Rambam says and take the middle road.

Signed,
Esther



PERHAPS YOU SHOULD CONSIDER TACKING ON THE EXPENSE OF HOUSEHOLD HELP TO TAKE OVER THE PREPARING, SERVING AND CLEANING UP

Dear Esther,

My daughter has approached me with a request to babysit her seven-month-old for ten days, while she and her husband take a vacation to California. I often take in my grandchildren, usually when my daughters and daughters-in-law have new babies. I'm horrified to think that she'll leave behind such a young baby for so frivolous a reason. Can I refuse solely on this basis? Or do I mix out of her decision and open my home to my grandchild?

Signed,
A Bothered Bubby

Dear Bubby,

You can certainly refuse your daughter's request to watch her seven-month-old while she goes on vacation, if you are not comfortable with it. This is not "mixing in to your daughter's business" as the business involves you as well. If, after you refuse, she decides to hire a babysitter instead and you don't agree with that decision, saying so would be mixing in, which you may want to risk doing anyway out of concern for your grandchild. Sometimes a Bubby should speak up and share her wisdom! I hope your daughter is mature enough to heed your advice.

Young readers whose children are still small: Don't Wait. Speak with your kids now, and regularly, about the importance of the mother-baby bond and the need to forego or postpone some fun things, or inconvenience yourself, for the sake of the baby who needs you. Describe your own decision-making process along the way. ("Cousin Menucha is getting married in France next week. Tatty and I would love to go to the wedding and then stay a few extra days to tour Europe, but Chanie is only a year old and we can't shlep her around on such a hectic trip and I wouldn't leave her at this age...") That way you'll never be a Bubby writing to Esther Etiquette with this distressing dilemma.

Signed,
Esther

Dear Esther,

I like to come to shiurim and lectures early in order to secure a good seat. I get very annoyed when an hour (!) into the program, a woman with a baby will approach me and request that I switch seats so that she can sit next to her baby. Similarly, elderly women often walk in late, expecting a seat to be vacated for them. Am I being cranky, or is my annoyance justified?

Signed,
Kranky Kreina

Dear Kreina,

I think you are partly justified and partly cranky. Women with babies should not be at shiurim or lectures (unless they are specifically for mothers with babies) and so the disturbance of a mother with a cumbersome stroller and kvetching baby is annoying already, even before she asks you to switch places with her. I'm not sure I would hold on to my seat though. I'd probably just swallow my annoyance and move over.

However, when it comes to the elderly, they can expect to have people move for them just because they are older. They are coming late because things take longer for them and they move more slowly and we should understand that. This is part of respecting our elders. When you reach that age and are still *iy"H* attending those beloved shiurim, I hope that the youth will get up graciously for you. Set a good example now.

Signed,
Esther