

The Boundaries and Blessings of Sharing Your Home with Others

Living the Gospel includes inviting people into our homes—sometimes temporarily, but at other times more permanently. While homes are customarily built for shelter and investment, they are also built for sharing! Sharing sometimes goes beyond planned purposes: when grown children return, parents come to live, or friends and relatives show up and stay—and stay. Making it a positive experience takes preparation, rules/controls, and sometimes tolerance to be beneficial for both parties. When your home teeters on hotel status, what are the guidelines to keep the experience pleasant?

“More than half of college seniors consistently report that they plan to come back home. In fact, demographers say parents shouldn’t expect to have an empty nest until their last child turns at least 24” (Kiplinger.com; March 17, 2005, by Janet Bodnar, et. al.).

According to the United States Census Bureau’s American Housing Survey, nearly 16 million families had at least one child over the age of 18 living at home in 2003. Most returning kids are males (March/April issue of AARP Magazine 2007).

Besides our own under-aged children, who might end up living with us? Returning adult children, extended family members, friends and neighbors, business associates and church members, performers, job seekers, vacationers, the aged, parents, foreign visitors, students from exchange programs, professional students, the mentally or physically challenged or those unable to live by themselves; those that we might baby-sit for money (toddlers or special needs persons), boarders/renters.

Why do they live with us? Medical emergencies and accidents, financial reversals, best friends of children, interim between quarters at college or in between jobs or after or before missions or military service, temporary divorce sanctuary, a new experience, a “safe” house, latch key kids, vacationers.

On the point of “financial reversals,” recent job market declines plus credit card and student loan debt are forcing many college graduates to seek shelter with mom and dad until they can get on their feet financially. “Studies show that 32 percent of college students have more than four credit cards and they graduate with a degree and \$7,000 in credit card debt plus an additional \$20,000 or more in student loans” (Salvation Army, Eastern Territory, “Tips on Raising Children” Boomerang Kids by Judy Waggoner 2007). Are we rescuing them from dire circumstances or is it just a convenience?

How might the visitor cause irritations? Noise (TV, radio), food choices and kitchen use, cleaning (mess), bathroom and laundry use (electricity, water, toiletries and cleaners), schedules that conflict with household quiet times, personal pets, habits that are uncomfortable to live with (smoking/smells, level of cleanliness), parking of the car and other vehicles outside, use of personal items within the house like computers, garage, storage areas.

“Exaggerated Hosting”—Things We Do that Can Increase Our Own Frustration:

- Being a hostess at a restaurant is not like being hostess in our homes.
- An airplane hostess is employed to provide safety and comfort of passengers. We do the same in our homes.
- We shouldn’t preserve and host guests at the expense of spouse and family.
- “Oh, it’s nice to have guests so we finally have a decent meal for a change.”
- When guests come, we require an abnormal level of cleanliness

Guidelines for Inviting Guests into Your Home:

- Your lifestyle should not be compromised to match your guest's lifestyle
- Don't preserve guests at the expense of family.
- Shared use: how to solve problems before they become issues
 - Up to one week, just grin and bear it
 - Two weeks to one month – let them participate in cleaning/real costs/expenses by contributing money or goods in kind or trading a talent they have with a need you have or allowing them to buy dinner or some groceries or perform a beneficial service
 - One month to one year - Rules and guidelines: make a contract
- Financial Contributions: rent, telephone, lifestyle choices, utilities, transportation, food, household chores, errands, yard work, laundry, cooking, pet care, general maintenance. Put all responsibilities in writing (National Endowment for Financial Education newsletter, *Boomerang Kids Don't Have to be a Financial Drain*, August 19, 2003).
- Don't make offspring feel like children again.
- Drawing the kindness line vs. entitlement attitude
- Keep pleasant, make it a productive experience
- Both sides WANT the relationship to work
- Do small acts of love and kindness; work together to have common goals
- Give space especially to guests in their 20's; by their 30's you can establish more connectedness and relationship—don't be too distanced.
- Share all your expectations in advance
- Think of things to make your parent a part of your household; let them take on some responsibilities
- Where possible, make sure the person has their own private space—not shared space
- For short-term visitors: give them a map and list of area attractions so they can/ leave your home for awhile
- For longer-term visitors: sit down and discuss schedules like you would with a new employee
- Alert the existing/current family members ahead of time about who is coming and for how long, and what adjustments need to be made (shared bathroom, change parking space)
- Share expectations; set target date for departure
- Accept compensation so guests will feel dignity and not entitlement; we appreciate an exhibit more if we have to pay a little rather than if it's free
- Let guests help clean
- You can learn from them: languages, skills, hobbies
- Pets: there's a big difference between an English Sheep dog coming home and a guppy.
- Write out a contract of expectations
- Make guests more like a roommate than a child so they share in costs and chores.
- If you are a guest, make sure your child is covered with health insurance
- If you are a guest, ask children to divest themselves of their non-essentials so they don't come with so much baggage.
- It's not fair for your older children to buy motorcycles and new cars if you are paying for some of their stuff
- Include guests in fun activities
- Have the goal to move guests back to independence as soon as possible (a man shall leave and cleave) and enable them.

Blessings:

- Children use this first experience (exposure) as a foundation for a well-functioning home to pattern their own after.
- Guests see prayer, peace, music; parental example, and other positive examples
- Having guests brings your own family together in a common cause
- Unexpected rewards, like the friendship between parents, kids, and guests
- Having guests provides chance to mend some early regrets in childrearing