

# KIDS IN CROWDS

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

Recently I attended an adult function. It was one of those events where parents were given the option of bringing their kids as long as they brought stuff for the kids to do. It was great fun and everyone enjoyed it – for the most part. There was just one small problem. Unsupervised children. Although one mother made some attempt to watch her kids, at other times she seemed so caught up in conversations that she was oblivious to what they were up to. Dad was definitely there to catch up with old friends and took no notice of his kids at all. They scooped down ‘before dinner’ nibbles, tried climbing on the counters, ran around the room, opened closets and hit and pinched the other guests. It was a very awkward situation. My husband and I felt obliged to step in and curb some of their behavior because the parents obviously were not going to do it.

What was the problem? Was it possible that the children’s behavior was acceptable to those parents? Were the parents not aware of child protocol in adult company? Were we, as other guests, expecting too much from small children? Were the expectations of the hosts unreasonable or unclear?

How should children behave in adult company? I think it is unreasonable to expect kids to be ‘seen but not heard’. After all, they are invited guests. However, good manners should be in evidence. Given the above scenario, what preparation should parents make to ensure that everyone has a good time?

- a) Firstly, it is important to consider the event and the reason for your attendance. If you know you want to concentrate on the adult company, then consider a baby-sitter so you don’t have your attention drawn away by your children.
- b) If it is an evening event and you are going to take the kids, then make sure they either get some rest beforehand or are tired so they will sleep when they get there.
- c) Feed them so they won’t be hungry when they get there.
- d) Consider the conditions for inviting children. In the above case, parents were asked to bring things for the kids to do – activities that would absorb their attention and, if necessary, can be shared by other kids.
- e) Tell your children what you expect of them before the event. Tell them that it is not OK to twiddle knobs, open closets and drawers, run around, yell or touch other guests. Tell them not to jump on the beds or chase the cat.
- f) Describe the behavior you do want to see, like tapping your arm and saying, “Excuse me” before speaking to you. Tell them how to greet adults, by politely saying, “It is nice to meet you Miss Shirley.”
- g) Tell them when they may eat and always supervise.

- h) If the function is in a private home, tell them to only play on the floor away from other guests.
- i) Be sensitive to others If your child is annoying others and will not be corrected, then take him/her home.

It is imperative that you watch your children at all times both for others' comfort and for your kids' own safety There is an expectation on parents to have well-behaved, well-mannered children in adult company. Nobody else but you should have to be responsible for your kids in a crowd. I can't believe the number of unsupervised children I have seen in public places. It seems with some parents, that as long as there are other adults around, they are being supervised! By others? NOT!

When we teach our kids good public manners, it does them a great favor. Well-behaved, polite children always get a positive response from an adult. Kids want to be accepted by meeting others' expectations.

Every guest at a function deserves to enjoy the experience, your kids included. If they present with good manners, they will be invited back.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at [sally@forefrontfamilies.org](mailto:sally@forefrontfamilies.org). We invite you to also check out our website at [www.forefrontfamilies.org](http://www.forefrontfamilies.org) and our blog site at [www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com](http://www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com) for further assistance.