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Get on the good guest list with these tips

By Joanne Richard

Don't let the door hit you on the way out!

'Tis the season to be merry but bad behaving guests can make the season scary and stressful. "It's as if all the warts start to come out - Aunt Mary constantly complaining, Uncle Jack always drunk, little Billy whining about missing his Nintendo," says etiquette expert Linda Allan. Duty and obligation often drive a host to extend invitations to family to stay over. "And despite the added effort, time and money expended by a host, guests can often be most ungrateful," says Allan. Showing up with pets, a fever, a bad attitude and then going on to run up phone bills, hog the computer and eat everything in sight – rude guests may possibly be making reservations at the Holiday Inn next year.

"We can't choose our family, and that means sometimes having to put up with things that we just wouldn't tolerate otherwise," says the manner maven, of Lindaallan.ca. "As we're most giving - and forgiving at the holidays, hosting family gatherings can be at once a treat and most trying."

According to Dr. Rick Kirschner, "when it's your home, and you're the host, you're not going anywhere because there's no way to get away. Either manage the madness or get swept up into it and maybe swept away by it too." If someone has to have at least a little holiday spirit, it might as well be you, adds Kirschner, author of *How to Click with People*. "Flexibility's a must, you have to start and then keep building a resonant container for the gathering, a way to keep everyone on the same wavelength instead of scattering to their worst behaviour. "And if they've already scattered and you're trying to bring them back, find the person most likely to be listened to, and have them do the talking for you," adds Kirschner.

Adds Allan: "The longer the stay, the tougher it gets." But hosts can be pretty enterprising when it comes to offering hospitality to those they most enjoy, adds Allan. "Some hosts invite those 'rude' guests to join them for dinner out, thus avoiding having them step foot in their home," Allan says. Other avoidance tactics, she adds, include things like a girls' night so the belligerent husband is eliminated from the festivities or a Saturday afternoon reunion so the dud nephew who works weekend days can't attend.

Meanwhile, Kirschner stresses the best way to be a great guest is to strive for it. "Observe the local customs. Pitch in when asked, listen when talked to, be generous with your time and attention but not overbearing, and talk with people respectfully, regardless of how they communicate with you." Don't get in the middle of other people's conflicts, unless asked - then stay neutral. "Here's the recipe: A modicum of decorum, a big helping of helping, and a dash of charm," adds Kirschner.

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How to never get invited back:

- Being too comfortable and overly familiar: Packing at-home casualness and behaviours into the host's home. "After the first 24 hours, guests tend to settle in and make like it's their home," says Linda Allan, etiquette expert. "They get up and go to bed when they like, have a nap even in the living room, serve themselves from the fridge without first asking their host – or better, waiting to be served. They don't tidy their room, wipe the bathroom counter or pick up after themselves."
- Ignoring the host: Guests act as if they're on a holiday while the host slaves away and others pitch in. "I've seen guests watch TV, play games, nap, make phone calls, etc. while others are busy preparing meals, planning for the next meal, washing dishes, buying groceries or tidying bathrooms," says Allan.
- Being inconsiderate of others: Putting themselves first no matter how many others may be affected. "I've had guests take forever in the bathroom in the mornings and evenings while others wait patiently for their turn. I've seen guests complain about their sleeping arrangements, pillows, lack of closet space, temperature in the house, meal schedule, brands of liquor in the cabinet, etc., while others try to accommodate them," says Allan, of www.lindaallan.ca.
- Arriving unprepared: They forget to bring things they need and then expect the host to provide these items. "I've heard of guests asking for aspirin, a nail file, blow dryer, stationery and stamps, thick socks, ear plugs, feather pillows, slippers, etc." she adds.

How to be welcomed back:

- Bring a hostess gift and leave a hostess gift behind.
 - Help out – but don't get in the way.
 - Compliment, don't complain.
 - Tidy up after yourself - and after others if need be.
 - Gladly offer to share some expenses.
- Courtesy of Lindaallan.ca