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## 5 Tips for Safe Sleepovers

June 29, 2015 by Janet Lehman, MSW



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Your child is asking whether she can sleep over at her friend's house, but you're not sure. Is she ready? Is her friend ready? And most importantly, is it safe?

Sleepovers can be a wonderful

way for children to experience different family situations and how they interact. Often, when staying at a friend's house, your child tries to be on her best behavior and to practice being a

"good guest." If yours is an only child, visiting friends with siblings allows him to see what it's really like to share with a sister or compete with a brother. Older children may get to experience different rules than in your home – some tighter or some looser. It's all a way to grow and develop.



Despite the benefits, allowing your child to sleep over at someone else's house can be scary—for him and for you. Many parents have questions about how to set up these situations so they are positive and successful. Here are some tips to help you know what to do when your child says "Can I sleep over at my friend's house?"

1. **Know the parent(s).** You will feel more comfortable if you are familiar with the parent(s) in the home your child will be staying at. It is, of course, generally good to get to know the parents of your child's friends. Other parents often have a different view of your child, and it's great to compare notes about your kids.
2. **Know the kids.** A way to do this is to have that child stay over at your house first. Inviting your child's friends to come to your home gives you a sense of how they get along. Do they play well together? Can they tolerate long periods with each other? Take the opportunity to observe your child with his friends.
3. **If something doesn't feel right, you can have the overnight at your house first, set up a shorter visit, or simply say "no."** It doesn't have to be overnight to be special. Instead you could suggest you'll take them to a movie and bring them home later than usual, or have the friend spend a day with your family on an outing.
4. **Visits need to be linked with your child's behavior.** If your child isn't behaving well it may not be a good time for a sleepover. Wait until he's earned this special situation through improved behavior.
5. **Don't get caught unprepared.** Let your child know in advance that if she wants to have an overnight with a friend you will need to know the child and know the parents. Let her know what you expect before she hits you with the request.

Remember that having sleepover experiences as a child can be a great way to learn and grow, but safety is the most important consideration. You're in charge and have the ability to shape the experience in a way that works for your child and for you.

**Janet Lehman, MSW has worked with troubled children and teens for over 30 years and is the co-creator of *The Total Transformation Program*. She is a social worker who has held a variety of positions during her career, including juvenile probation officer, case manager, therapist and program director for 22 years in traditional residential care and in group homes for difficult children.**