

Sleepovers... Should You or Shouldn't You?

By Pattie Fitzgerald, Founder [Safely Ever After, Inc.](#)

It's the age-old question, but like most things in life, there simply isn't one "right" way to do things when it comes to our kids.

Sleepovers can be a fun "rite of childhood passage". Personally, I can remember some terrific (and safe!) slumber parties with my close friends. These experiences were part of a wonderful childhood, and many parents would like their own kids to be able to enjoy the same.

Yet, sleepovers can also be a slippery slope just by their very nature, and it's certainly appropriate for parents to have legitimate concerns. We've all heard stories about children being molested while at a sleepover. And yet many other children will enjoy sleepovers without anything bad ever happening.

Instead of offering one "absolute" about sleepovers, my perspective is... **sometimes yes and sometimes no.**

Is the sleepover itself really to blame?

Not necessarily. But, sleepovers can provide a molester or perpetrator easier access to a child than a typical play-date during the day.



So... what's the difference?

For starters, the very nature of a sleepover **IS** different than a daytime play-date. Once the kids are in their beds or sleeping bags, there is a quiet, vulnerable atmosphere when children can be caught off-guard if approached by another adult, or possibly even the older sibling of their friend. In this quiet environment, a child might be less likely to shout out for help, or even yell out a good, strong "**STOP IT!**", for fear of waking the others. The child may feel "trapped" and not know how to get away from the perpetrator. Lastly, during a sleepover, there may be more of an opportunity for a molester to

victimize a child, simply because they can wait until everyone else is asleep.

That's why it's important to talk specifically with your child about sleepover issues, before you make your decision.

Is the solution "No sleepovers – ever?"

That's one way to solve the problem and it's certainly a parent's right to ban sleepovers if you choose. But, some parents may feel differently based on their own experiences or parenting styles. They may want to allow occasional sleepovers depending on certain circumstances. **That's okay too**, provided you arm your children with clear safety instructions before ever allowing them to spend the night at another home.

Safeguarding a Sleepover – A Parent's Role

Before allowing your child to spend the night at any friend's home, you will need to have specific conversations regarding **“good touch/bad touch/confusing touch.”** You'll need to pose some **“what if”** questions, to be sure your child knows how to react to anything that feels uncomfortable or “yucky.” **There are many variables which can determine if a household is safe for a sleepover.** You might be comfortable letting your child spend the night at one friend's home, yet another home may be completely out of the question.

Run through the check list below, which will help you evaluate if this sleepover is a “safe scenario” or not. Consider who else may be at that home... for example, other relatives or adult friends? Is the older sibling also having a friend sleep over, do the parents have the same feelings that you do regarding the use of alcohol or other substances – particularly when children are around?

Questions to consider:

1. Do you know everyone who lives at the home?
2. Does anyone at this home give you an uncomfortable or “uh-oh” feeling?
3. Will the parents be home or are they having a babysitter in for the night?
(If so, who is the sitter and what do you know about them?)
4. Are other children going to spend the night as well?
5. Are the supervising parents having their own adult friends over?
6. Will the children be staying in all night or is there an outing or activity planned for earlier in the evening (such as dinner out, bowling, or a movie)?
7. Will your child need to take a bath there? If so, who will be helping them?
(Note: the smartest choice is for the child to bathe at home before going).
8. Have you told your child that they can call you at anytime, no matter what, if they feel uncomfortable or scared and that you'll pick them up right away?
*Even in the middle of the night!
9. Are you able to discuss safety concerns with the supervising parent(s) without worrying about what they might think of you?
10. Do the other parents make you feel guilty for asking questions, or try to minimize your concerns by teasing you or not taking you seriously?
11. Is your child generally able to speak up for themselves when they feel uncomfortable or uneasy?

12. Have you taught your child to trust their instincts and to listen to their own “inner voice”?
13. Have you discussed what to do if someone tries to touch them in an uncomfortable or unsafe manner?



About the author

Pattie Fitzgerald is recognized as a leading expert in the field of childhood sexual abuse prevention. She is certified as a Level One Agent and Child Safety Educator through the National Security Alliance/Kid-Safe Network, and previously worked as the original Community Outreach Educator for the national child advocacy agency, ***Parents For Megan’s Law***.

In 2007 she became a guest instructor for the **Los Angeles Sheriff’s M.E.R.I.T.** program and her workshops and curriculum are used at schools throughout the United States. Her published works have appeared in newspapers, national magazines, and trade journals throughout the country, and she has been featured on Good Morning America, CNN Headlines News, MSNBC, and local Los Angeles television and radio news programs. She is a member of the American Professional Society On The Abuse of Children and the International Society of Crime Prevention Practitioners.