

WILL THEY WANT TO INVITE ME BACK?

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When my kids were growing up in the 80s and 90s, it was a fun treat to get invited to a friend's house after school to play for a couple of hours. They, too, could earn the privilege of inviting a friend over if they did not miss doing any chores for a full week. (We did not use money as a reward—it just wasn't in the budget so I had to be creative!) When I would pick them up, I enjoyed hearing about their afternoon. And I would usually end our conversation with the question, "Do you think they will want to invite you back?" **It's a good question for a kid to consider in order to see his/her behavior through the eyes of someone else.** It's a good way to develop empathy as well as self-awareness—both important qualities.

Today I would like to pose the same question to all of us who have adult children. When we visit our grown-up kids and their families, **do you think they will want to invite us back?** While it can be hard to gracefully make the shift in our relationship with our children as they mature and morph into friends rather than children, this transition is a "must." Even the government recognizes that they are no longer "dependents." After all, having a good relationship is at stake. The Henry Cloud/John Townsend book titled ***Boundaries*** has helped me realize I don't have a carte blanche to just insert myself into my kids' lives whenever I want. I've also had the benefit of

seeing it done the wrong way. My family of origin was oblivious to the notion that I was no longer the “baby sister” and frequently prefaced uninvited comments with the phrase, “Let me give you some unsolicited advice.” Whenever I heard that phrase, I thought, “Okay, brace yourself.” And while the content of their message was often spot-on, the way in which it was delivered often blinded me to what I could learn from them. Respecting our adult children’s boundaries lays a foundation for a good relationship. So how can we improve our chances of having that goal met? **Let’s talk about do’s and don’ts for interacting with adult children.**

Do’s

1. Do treat your adult child with respect. If you aren't sure what that would look like, then ask your child to tell you what that looks like to them. You are free to expect the same in return.
2. Do be a good house guest. When we visit our out-of-town kids and their families, we try to plan visits that span 3-5 days. Longer than that could put a strain on everyone. And while you are there, help out with some of the extra work you've created—wash some towels, clean up the kitchen, etc.!
3. Do be their biggest cheerleader—this goes for their spouses, too. One message we really want to send our adult kids and their spouses is that we are FOR them. Brainstorm how you can send that message in verbal and non-verbal ways.

Don’ts

1. Don't expect them to “mind” you. They are no longer children. So while it is good for them to show respect, they are not obliged to obey you. Your role has shifted to that of a consultant.
2. Don't try to be the parent to their children. You've had your turn to be the parent. Now it is their turn. Instead, be a grandparent—it's a less stressful job anyway, so enjoy it!
3. Don't make a habit of correcting them. Let them make their own mistakes. If you feel like you must offer input, do it in the form of asking questions. After all, you could be wrong.

The next time we visit our adult kids, let's make it our goal that after they tell us

goodbye, we hear them say, "I wish you could have stayed longer." That's a win!