

# The Sleepover Question

## What to Consider Before Saying Yes

By Daryl Wingerd

“Mom, Billy asked me if I could spend the night. May I *pleeeeeease*?”

How would you answer that question from your excited 9-year-old? What kinds of criteria do you consider when evaluating the pluses or minuses of sending your child to spend the night at someone else’s house?



Some parents are already cautious about allowing their children to attend sleepovers, but many others casually or routinely say “yes” without much thought. Perhaps they are unwilling to disappoint their child, or fearful of offending the inviting family. Maybe they just don’t see any potential harm in their kids spending the night at a friend’s house.

Are there really any significant risks associated with something as kid-friendly as a sleepover? If so, what are they?

### **You may risk undermining your own authority in your child’s life.**

Children who grow overly accustomed to spending time at friends’ houses may become less satisfied with, or even resentful of, time spent at home with their own family. Teens in particular are susceptible to developing an overinflated estimation of their independence, especially when they are too-frequently “released” from parental supervision for sleepovers or other kinds of outings with peers. Once this attitude takes root, parents who seek to continue asserting their God-given authority may find themselves on the receiving end of condescending tolerance, if not outright rebellion.

**You may be exposing your child to previously unknown risks.** Perhaps you completely trust the family with which your child will spend the night. How well do you know the families of all the other children who may attend? How familiar are you with the influences these other children have been exposed to, and may expose your child to in a setting where half the fun is staying up late with other children while not being closely supervised?

### **You may be exposing yourself to a serious accountability risk before**

**God.** By placing your child under someone else’s care for the night, you are trusting that person to temporarily take over for you in bringing up your child in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). In God’s eyes, however, this serious parental responsibility is not set aside or transferred to the temporary caretaker at a sleepover. If morally compromising behavior

occurs, or if your child becomes more deeply rooted in ungodly attitudes or a worldly mindset as a result of attending a sleepover, *you* will bear the ultimate responsibility.

Sleepovers are not a required part of childhood or adolescence, and some parents have opted to say no to them altogether. I commend them for standing by their convictions. They should not be ashamed to say, “I’m sorry, but we just don’t do sleepovers.” However, I am not of the opinion that every parent who is wise and caring must adopt that same stance. Keeping the above three potential risk factors in mind, consider a few suggestions to help you avoid trouble, while still allowing your children to enjoy an occasional fun night with friends.

**Establish a “no spontaneous sleepovers” rule for your family.** Limit sleepovers to those that are pre-planned for special occasions, like birthdays. This gives you plenty of time to consider all the factors involved, and keeps sleepovers in the category of a rare treat rather than the expected routine.

**Know all of the participants.** Communicate with the host family and automatically say no to any sleepover where even one child who will attend represents a known ungodly influence or a completely unknown influence.

**Insist on larger groups.** Children are far less likely to engage in excessively foolish or morally compromising behavior in groups of at least three. Groups of four or five offer even more accountability and safety. Automatically say no to any suggested sleepover where two children will be left alone together.

**Require direct adult supervision.** Say no to any sleepover where children will spend the night in a remote part of the house (such as a basement or an upstairs bedroom) with no supervising adult close by. Insist on a “bedroom door stays open” policy, or better still, an adult sleeping in the same room.

**Prepare and then debrief your children.** Before they go, remind them of the kind of behavior you expect from them—the same godly standard that they would be held to if they stayed at home (for example, what kinds of movies they may or may not watch). Don’t be shy about communicating your convictions with the host family. Afterward, ask your children to tell you about their fun night, and don’t forget to ask if there were any problems.

**Don’t be afraid to say no.** These are *your* children, *your* treasures, *your* responsibility. You shouldn’t expect every host family to change their own personal standards to match yours, but you also shouldn’t allow yourself to be pressured into saying yes if *your* expectations will not be met.