

Sensitivity in hospitality

AN OPEN DOOR?

Some people practise an 'open door' type of hospitality. This is where others know that they can call in at any time and join in with whatever the family is doing. It tends to be couples or families who engage in this type of ministry, as it's very difficult to practise it if you are a single person. It would usually be inappropriate for a single person to give hospitality to a member of the opposite sex, or even to lone younger individuals of the same sex. Sadly, there is an ever-increasing need to be careful so as to give no 'appearance of evil' (1 Thessalonians 5:22. AV).

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But some are able to offer this 'open door' and it can be a great help and encouragement for many. However, it isn't appropriate for all. Some of us find that, while we love to be with and serve others much of the time, we also need time to get on with work at home. This is particularly so for those whose workplace is the home. It's

also important that family relationships don't suffer if we are practising this 'open door' kind of ministry.

CHILDREN

Young children often enjoy the company of others, but there is a need to give teenagers in particular time and space. I remember a young girl, whose parents had an 'open door'. She felt that there was never any privacy: 'If I want to talk to my mum we have to sit in the dark so people don't know we're in!' This built great resentment in her towards the church and Christian service.

Instead, I would encourage parents with children of any age to welcome your

children's friends into your home. There are good reasons for this. It's good for children from non-Christian homes to experience a Christian home. A young girl had visited our home a number of times and one day, as the children were about to eat, I asked who would like to say grace. To my surprise, this girl said that she would. It was very special to hear this little girl say a simple prayer of thanks to God. She had been listening and learning.

I also believe that, if you have your children's friends in your home when they are young, this practice is more likely to continue as they get older. As parents we need to keep the lines of communication open, and children who are used to having their friends welcomed into their homes are more likely to talk about their friends.

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Are we living consistent lives in front of our children? Are we usually fire and thunder behind closed doors, but sweetness and light when visitors are there? Our children will see this inconsistency and it will harm the example we are trying to set. A challenge for us as parents would be to think whether we'd be

happy for a visitor to see how we're behaving—remembering that there is one who always sees. If discipline of our children is necessary when visitors are there, this should be carried out in normal ways. Occasionally, in extreme situations, we may choose to ask our child to leave the room with us and then deal with the misdemeanour. Perfection is not required, but an aim towards consistency is. I confess to having been envious of friends who are able to speak in another language to their children without the guests knowing what is being said. But perhaps doing this isn't good manners anyway!

We also need to be careful that our children do not see us making an effort only for visitors and never for them. Mary K. Mohler illustrates this; her daughter once asked her about the chocolate cake she was preparing: 'Is that for people, or for us?' (from 'Devotions for ministry wives', edited by Barbara Hughes, Zondervan 2002).