

THE BULL IN YOUR CHINA SHOP

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

Our neighbor Jenny came over this morning and told us about her harrowing experience yesterday. Her son is getting married in a few weeks and she had arranged for the ring bearer and flower girls to come for a practice at her home. It was a nightmare. The mother of the bride had brought her three-year-old grandson with her. This little boy was to be the ring bearer.

The child ran from one thing to another completely unheeded by grandmother. First he grabbed an ornate decorative net from inside the house and tried to catch the fish in the fishpond. Jenny wrestled the net off him and told him not to go near the fish. He took no notice of her and teetered on the loose rocks surrounding the pond until Jenny pulled him back. He immediately climbed on top of a glass table on the patio and she had to take him down before he fell off or the glass broke underneath him, possibly leading to serious injury.

Into the house he ran and half way up the stairs he climbed into a nook where he proceeded to pound on its stained glass window. Jenny pulled him out. He ran into Jenny's bedroom, climbed up on the bed and began to jump on it with his dirty shoes on. He went down the stairs, shot into the garage and climbed up a tall ladder that was leaning against the wall. Jenny got him down, but he immediately started climbing another ladder. She repeated the process. Then, before she could stop him, she found him swinging on the side mirror of her car – the one that she had just paid \$365 to repair.

Jenny was beside herself, but she didn't know what to do. She was already finding working with the bride's parent difficult, without the grandchild throwing himself into the mix. It made it worse when the grandmother made no attempt to follow this child, control his behavior or apply any consequences.

We all know that toddlers are curious, fast and ready to challenge the environment. If you ever find yourself in this kind of situation, here are some suggestions for handling such toddlers. As soon as you see the child starting to touch your stuff and the parent is not watching, immediately tell the child to stop. Take him back to his parent saying, "Excuse me, Marion, but Jason took a net from in the house and was trying to scoop our fish out of the pond. I don't want him to scare the fish or fall in the water. I would really appreciate it if you would watch him. Thank you." You will usually find that the parent or guardian will do as you ask and be more attentive to what the child is doing from then on. If he continues to get into things he shouldn't be touching or doing things that are unsafe or mischievous, then take him back and ask the parent to stay with him all the time.

Obviously, this particular child has been able to run loose at his grandmother's house and at home. You don't need to be unpleasant, but you do need to make your expectations clear to the parent or guardian and approach them early in the situation. You are doing the child, yourself and other prospective hosts a big favor in explaining your expectations and correcting the situation immediately. If the visitor doesn't like it and you have been respectful in your request, then don't back down. This is a life lesson that needs to be learned, and it is your home.

When older children come and play at your house, you may find it necessary to tell them what they can and can't do at your place. If they don't do as you ask, send them home. It is appropriate to let the parents of kids that come to your home know your expectations. Again, be pleasant. You might say, "Sarah brought some videos over for the kids to watch and one or two of them had some very violent content. We explained that it was great that she wanted to share her videos, but we chose the ones without the violence for our kids to watch. We hope that you, too, will explain your expectations to our kids when they visit your home."

Isn't it a real pleasure to have well behaved children come to your home? Reinforce their good behavior and tell them how much you really appreciate how respectful they are and congratulate the parents on doing such a great job.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.