A family from China (or Kenya, or India, or Lebanon, or Honduras) has moved into your community and your child has formed a great friendship with one of the children who is in her class. Now she has been invited to her friend's home for supper and is nervous because she doesn't know what to expect. She knows what to expect at her home but what do they do or eat in China, Kenya, India, Lebanon, or Honduras? I had the opportunity to give some advice in TABLE MANNERS FOR KIDS
, a book I wrote with my sister-in-law, Peggy Post. Here's what we had to say:

Chinese food – maybe it's your favorite! How about sushi? Or – for some of you it might be Italian or Indian or Middle Eastern. You may find yourself in a situation where the food being served is completely new to you. Many foods, spices and herbs are an acquired taste so don't be surprised if you don't like everything. It's polite to try at least a little of everything, but you don't have to finish it all. You certainly may ask what things are, but be careful not to react negatively. If someone says, "Oh, that's eel," and eel is not something you have ever eaten, you don't want to say, "Euwww!" Instead, you simply say, "No thank you, I think I'll try this other dish."

Some ethnic food is supposed to be eaten with your fingers. Watch your host and see if they break off a piece of their pita bread and dip it into the small dishes on the table or do they put some of the food directly onto the pita bread with a knife or spreader. Just follow their lead and you will be fine. Just as you may ask what the food is, you can ask how to eat it correctly. If you can use chop sticks, by all means do so. If you don't know how, ask for a fork, or, better yet, ask someone to show you how to use them correctly. If you know you are going to a meal that is traditionally eaten with chopsticks, try them out at home and practice to hone your skills. Some of the fun of eating foods from different cultures is to learn the traditional way of eating them. Somehow Kung Po Chicken may actually taste better if you eat it with chopsticks. pp. 83-84.

I want to repeat two sentences from this selection. It is the most basic piece of advice we can give and is the key to enjoying a dinner – no matter how different it is. **"Watch your host…. Just follow their lead and you will be fine."**
Talk with your daughter before she goes. Give her the opportunity to ask you any questions she may have about entering another culture. And if you don't know the specific answer, you can simply remind her to do what her friend does and to always act respectfully. If she does, she is sure to enjoy the good company of her friend and the new experience.

This article originally appeared as a post on Cindy's parenting blog, The Gift of Good Manners .