Even the most carefree parties demand guests and hosts alike to meet certain expectations. The host must have planned sufficiently, and then look after the assembled partygoers to varying degrees. Guests should fit their behavior to the occasion, with the Party Animal calming down at a reserved affair, the Show-Off yielding the spotlight, and the Shrinking Violet making an effort to blossom.

Six Ways to Be a Good Host

No matter the kind of party you're throwing, there are some things a host should remember, even before the party starts.

1) Invite clearly. Include necessary information for your guests in the invitation. Is the party a casual get-together or more formal? What about the attire? Maybe a guest would benefit by knowing ahead of time who else will be there, which you might mention when they RSVP.

2) Plan well. Preparing your guest list carefully is key to a successful party. Then do as much as you can ahead of time. (Lower the stress level by serving food and refreshments you know will work.) Get everything ready well before your guests arrive, so you'll feel relaxed from the very beginning.

3) Remain calm. Giving a party can be enjoyable, especially if you approach it with simplicity. Get help if necessary, and don't let your guests think you're huffing and puffing. They'll feel far more comfortable if they don't have to wonder whether they're causing you any trouble.

4) Keep your guests feeling welcome. Make sure guests are warmly greeted, then made to feel welcome throughout the party. Look after each guest as much as you can. If you notice that a guest has an empty glass or if there's one person standing alone, remedy the situation as quickly and cheerfully as possible.

5) Be flexible and gracious. Your soufflé falls. Or one friend arrives with an unexpected guest. The ruined dessert? Have a fallback. The uninvited guest? As discourteous as it is for someone to spring a surprise on you, be gracious. No polite host would ever send an uninvited guest packing.

6) Be appreciative. Thank people for coming as you bid them good-bye. And don't forget to thank anyone who brought you a gift.

Six Ways to Be a Good Guest

Even at the most casual parties, there are some things a polite guest should do:

1) Tell your host whether you're attending. And do it immediately. If you delay your reply, you could hinder the host's planning and also make it seem as if you're waiting for something better to come along. Even if no RSVP has been requested, it's thoughtful to let your host know if you won't be able to be there.

2) Be on time. Punctuality means different things to people in different locales, but in general guests should arrive at or shortly after (usually only fifteen minutes) the time stated in the invitation. Do *not,* however, arrive early.

3) Be a willing participant. When your host says that it's time for dinner, go straight to the table. If you happen to be asked to participate in a party game or view Susie's graduation pictures, accept graciously and enthusiastically no matter how you really feel.

4) Offer to help when you can. If you're visiting with the host in the kitchen as he prepares the food, be specific when you offer to help: "I'd be happy to work on the salad or fill the water glasses." Even if your offer is refused, your gesture will be appreciated. When the party's end draws nigh, you could also offer to help with the cleanup.

5) Don't overindulge. Attacking finger foods as if you haven't eaten in a week will not only attract the wrong kind of attention, it will also leave less food for other guests. Also be sure to keep any consumption of alcoholic beverages on the moderate to low side.

6) Thank the host twice. In some parts of the United States, a second thank-you by phone is customary the day after the party (the first having been delivered on leaving the party) - a gesture that's gracious anywhere. If the party was formal, written thanks are in order. In fact, a written note is always appreciated - even after casual parties.