

Question: What's ruder than yakking on your cell phone in a restaurant?

Answer: Bringing an uninvited guest to an event.



It seems that many people today have forgotten that invitations are issued only to the people whose names are on the envelope. The Emily Post Institute has had a deluge of letters lately from dismayed hosts and hostesses who have had to cope with uninvited guests. In some cases it's just a question of annoyance or social embarrassment; in others it's a matter of considerable additional expense.

What's the big deal, you ask?

Consider this. You are hosting your daughter's wedding reception for 80 people at \$75 per person for the catering. At the reception, you notice that your cousins Dick and Jane have brought their four children (under age 7); eight of the couple's friends have brought dates and there are three people nobody seems to know. The caterer presents his bill for the 95 people who actually attended the event, busting your budget by \$1,125.

Or imagine your child's fourth birthday and one of the little guest's mother calls to ask if she can bring along a sibling. You say, "Sorry, we were really just planning on four year olds and don't have any activities for seven year old Johnny." Imagine your dismay when you open the front door to Johnny and little Sara, and see Mom pulling away from the curb.

Sadly, nowadays when many people receive an invitation they assume that they can bring their husband/date/fiancé and, if they have children, each of them as well. Well, they can't. In fact, it is the height of rudeness if they do.

Here's a little invitation 101

Invitations are addressed only to those who are invited. If the invitation says "Ms. Mary Smith," only Mary is invited. If the invitation says "Ms. Mary Smith and Guest," then Mary may bring a guest of her choosing. When Mary replies to the invitation, she should say, "I am delighted to join you for dinner on the thirteenth. I will be bringing my good friend Jim Alcott."

If children are invited, their names will be added below their parents' names, or the invitation will be addressed to "Mr. and Mrs. Sam Jones and Family". The Joneses would reply, "Sam

and I, along with Maddie and Tom, will be delighted to join you.”

If Mr. and Mrs. Sam Jones receive an invitation addressed just to them, you can bet your bottom dollar that it is a grown-up event. If the Joneses can't arrange a sitter, they should decline the invitation. That's true whether it is a wedding invitation or a less formal invitation to a barbecue. Even if the invitation is issued by phone, do not assume your children are invited, and do not ask if you can bring them anyway.

Almost as rude as the people who show up with uninvited guests are those who try to bully the hosts into making exceptions. “Hi, Ginger I got your invitation. I want to let you know that I will be bringing the children to the wedding. After all, they are family and it would be rude not to include all the family at the wedding, right?” Wrong! Whether the hosts drew the line at “no children” or “no second cousins,” it is their decision and should never be questioned.

And finally, the last word is about RSVP – French for “Repondez s'il vous plait” or, in plain English, “Please reply”. These little letters are the not-so-secret code that you should call or write your host within a day or two of receiving an invitation to let him know if you can attend or not. All invitations have some sort of a reply mechanism – an enclosed card, a phone number, an email address or a mailing address. A prompt reply is a basic courtesy.