

Boundaries With Other People's Kids

Children need boundaries whether they are your kids or someone else's. How you choose to handle the situation could mean the difference between offending someone and indirectly teaching the child a valuable lesson.

Yesterday, our babysitter told me a story about some out of control boys she encountered this past weekend, in the park. Her story involved three young boys, ages 3, 6 and 9 who had a very intimidating father with them. The boys were misbehaving and acting inappropriately, but their father was not paying any attention to them except if a child was crying. Our babysitter was offended by the children, but too scared to tell the father, for fear that he would beat the boys.

So, the question is what do you do in this type of situation? You probably wish that you could simply and sweetly tell the dad that his children are clearly calling out for his attention, and leave it at that! But, the reality is that you cannot tell a parent how to raise their own children. Children who bully or act out are looking for attention from someone and if their parent isn't going to give it to them, they will find someone who will.

So, here is what you can do in situations where a child that is not yours is misbehaving and the parents are doing nothing about it or are not present.

- Have a chat with the child about their behavior. Tell him or her that what he or she did is unacceptable in your home. Ask him what his mom or dad would do if he or she did the same thing at home. If you are in a public area and the child continues to misbehave (while the parent is preoccupied) then leave.

- If the child is at your house to play, give one warning and then make arrangements for the child to go home. Tell the parent that you would appreciate if they could discuss the reason for the early departure with their child when they get home.

- Tell the child the rules in your house and explain what happens if they are not followed. You should not punish the child, but you can tell him that he will have to go home if he can't follow house rules.

- Provide an alternative activity if the child is rough housing or doing something disruptive to your house. Playing a board game, dancing or making art are great outlets for healthy expression.

- If there are a number of children present (birthday parties) and one child is acting out, bring him or her into another room for a few minutes to "help" you organize or do something quiet, like make a drawing for their parent. Sometimes kids just need a moment to regain composure in a quiet place during stimulating social events.

Whatever you do, know that a child who is acting out wants attention and love. You cannot tell parents how to discipline or raise their children, but you can show your own children that you will not tolerate certain behaviors (even from their friends) in your home. You can also role model healthy problem solving skills for them. Always remember the importance of role modeling for your kids!

Boundaries can be an uncomfortable thing to enforce, especially with other people's children. But, firm boundaries are necessary to keep children feeling safe, secure and contained! Having firm boundaries is a responsible choice.

Resources:

Dr. Kutner

Family Education - Disciplining other people's kids

Families.com - Should You Discipline Other People's Kids