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## How to Handle 5 Sticky Parenting Situations

When parenting styles clash, awkward situations arise. What to do when you find yourself at odds with other parents, in-laws, or even your spouse



Jeff McNamara

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### Situation 1

**The Sticky Situation:** A child has a weight issue and you hear the mother using harmful tactics — lying about leftovers, belittling the child — to keep her from eating too much.

**How to Handle It:** Very carefully. “This is a potential minefield, because the child is being lied to and there are signs here of a potential eating

disorder. You have to be careful,” says Sharon Fried Buchalter, Ph.D., a psychologist, a life coach, and the author of *Children Are People Too* (People Too Unlimited, \$25, [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)).

Unless the other mom asks for your advice on her parenting, don't offer it, says Buchalter. And if the mother expects you to exhibit the same strict behavior when her child is at your house, say the following: “I am not comfortable policing her food intake, but I do want your child — and mine — to eat healthfully. Maybe we can come up with a plan.” Discuss meals if necessary, and have healthy snacks ready for a playdate beforehand. If there are several kids (and many bags of chips) involved, perhaps for a birthday party, put each child's portion in a separate bowl or cup. “Label the bowls with the children's names so it's clear whose food is whose and how much they get,” says Melissa Leonard, an etiquette and protocol expert in Westchester County, New York.

### Situation 2

**The Sticky Situation:** Your child is invited to a slumber party, but you know the parents are prone to drinking a bit too much, even around the kids.

**How to Handle It:** “The risk is too great to allow your children to stay overnight,” says Sue Fox, the founder of the Etiquette Survival Group and the author of *Etiquette for Dummies* (For Dummies, \$22, [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)). If there were an emergency, the parents might not be able to drive to the hospital, for example.

Don't go into too much detail with your children, as they will probably share sensitive information. Simply say you prefer having the friends sleep at your house instead. In talking to the other parents, attribute your hesitation to

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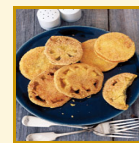
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another, less sensitive, topic, like the amount of television you allow your kids to watch or their sleeping habits. Emphasize that you aren't criticizing the other parents' tactics but you have different rules in your house that are important and your child's spending the night compromises them.

### Situation 3

**The Sticky Situation:** You are opting not to vaccinate your son until he is six months old, and you're getting a healthy dose of criticism.

**How to Handle It:** Vaccinations are a touchy subject, so the best defense against critics is information. Most parents begin vaccinations when a baby is two months old, but some choose to wait until six months or a year, as breast-fed newborns get antibodies from their mothers that last about a year. "It's not easy, because you are going against the norm. But you can inform fellow parents about websites or research you've read," says Buchalter.

Practice what you'll say; hearing the justification out loud helps you avoid getting defensive or emotional on the spot. If you face really nosy opposition, laugh it off. "Say, 'Wow, you must know more about this than my pediatrician. Do you think you could come to my next appointment and explain this to him?'" says Ariane Price, a mother and a performer with the Groundlings Theater, in Los Angeles.

### Situation 4

**The Sticky Situation:** Your son has befriended Danger Boy. Suddenly he's talking about guns, playing violently, and perching on ledges to test out his flying skills.

**How to Handle It:** If you're afraid that your child is getting into life-threatening situations, don't let him play with Danger Boy alone. "Young children don't always understand the difference between fantasy and reality. Their favorite cartoon characters fly, so they think they can, too," says Buchalter. And if you are worried about the child's continued influence, talk to his teacher first, as she is trained to deal with dangerous behavior and bullies.

If the child is a neighbor, talk to his parents. "Tell them that you don't like the way your child is talking. This doesn't put blame on them as parents, causing them to become defensive. Ask to talk to the kids together, so you become allies," says Karen Deerwester, owner of Family Time Coaching and Consulting, in Boca Raton, Florida. At home, make guns or weapons a topic of discussion rather than brushing them aside as off-limits. "If you dismiss them as 'something we don't discuss,' you only make them more fascinating to your child," says Buchalter.

### Situation 5

**The Sticky Situation:** A friend is always leaving her child with you, often for longer than planned, instead of asking for help from her husband or family members.

**How to Handle It:** "You don't know what's going on behind closed doors, so those extended playdates may be more of a kindness to this mom than you know," says Leonard. Be compassionate and flexible if you can, but don't be a doormat.

"The next time she asks to drop off her son, set a limit," says Leonard. Rather than asking what time she'll be back, say, "We'd love to see him, but we have plans at 2 p.m., so it would be great if you could pick him up by 1:45." There's no need to elaborate, make excuses, or apologize. Your plans could simply be to spend time together as a family. But this lets the other mother know that you have a life.

### Your Turn

How do you handle sticky parenting situations? Share your advice by [posting a comment in the Your Words Community Area](#).

*Written by Bari Nan Cohen  
Real Simple Family 2007*

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