

DO THEY KNOW IT'S CHRISTMAS?

You've decked the halls, but your family and guests are behaving badly at the party. We ask the experts how to handle festive faux pas.

OUR EXPERTS

● **Raelene Tan** is an etiquette consultant and has authored books on the subject.

● **Eunice Tan** is founder of Image Flair Academy of Modern Etiquette.

● **Agnes Koh** is director of Etiquette & Image International.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY KID RIPS OPEN THE PRESENT AND SAYS HE DOESN'T LIKE IT – IN FRONT OF THE GIVER?

RAELENE It's the responsibility of the parents to have taught their child, from infancy, not to open a present immediately upon receiving it – and, most importantly, to always say "thank you" for being given a gift. It's never too late to start teaching or learning.

EUNICE Talk to your child in private about how his actions could hurt someone else, and why we should appreciate gifts even though we may not like them at times. Ask Junior to apologise to the giver and tell him how much he appreciates the gift.



I GET A STORE-BOUGHT TURKEY FOR THE PARTY AND GRANDMA MAKES A SNIDE REMARK. SHE SAYS I SHOULD PREPARE HOME-COOKED FOOD.

RAELENE In the spirit of the season, smile at Grandma and direct her thoughts to an item you have prepared yourself.

EUNICE Say: "I would love to have prepared the turkey myself but this was highly recommended, and I bought it specially for you because I would like you to try it." Or suggest that no one makes home-cooked food like Grandma, so why compare? Let's focus on the company instead.

MY BEST FRIEND HAS AN AUTISTIC CHILD. WHAT CAN I DO TO MAKE HIM FEEL COMFORTABLE?

RAELENE Have a quiet area specially arranged, complete with toys, books or computer games. Also, prime your children and guests on the condition of your friend's child, so that they are not suddenly out of their depth.

EUNICE This way, your children know what to expect and are less likely to blurt out some awful comment. Remind them that everyone, regardless of colour, culture or condition, deserves respect.

ONE OF MY FRIENDS HAS A PICKY EATER WHO WILL PROBABLY NOT EAT MUCH AT MY PARTY.

EUNICE Ask what her child likes to eat and prepare that. Or tell the mother what you

plan to serve, so she can bring her own snacks if she prefers.

AGNES If you have prepared what she requested and she still complains about it, don't invite her the next time. People with special dietary needs should be mindful of their manners. If you as the host have made an effort, she should accept graciously if she wants to be invited back.

HOW CAN I ASK MY SISTER NOT TO BRING HER DOG?

RAELENE By informing her politely, in advance, that dog sitting will not be provided due to a full house and too much happening.

EUNICE You could say that some of the guests are allergic to animal hair.





WHAT IF THE KIDS FIGHT OVER TOYS?

EUNICE If your kid is the host, take him aside and tell him that he should let the other children play with his toys. If your child is a guest, tell him it's not polite to fight over toys. Suggest that they play board games instead.

SOMEONE GETS DRUNK AND SWEARS. MY KIDS ASK ME WHAT THE WORD MEANS.

EUNICE Explain that this is a word adults sometimes use by mistake. It isn't pleasant and children should not use it.

AGNES Use his behaviour as a teaching opportunity and tell them that swearing does not have a place in public. His behaviour is unacceptable and he will have no respect from others. If you say nothing, your children will draw the wrong conclusion.

THE KIDS PLAY GAMES AND THERE'S A SORE LOSER. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

RAELENE Direct the thoughts of all the children to another activity, without making a fuss of the sore loser. Always have back-up games and ideas (such as food) at the ready when children are present.

EUNICE Ask the kids to give each other "high-fives" and tell

them "good game". Assure the kid who lost that everyone is always a winner, and having fun is more important than winning.

IF SOMEONE ELSE'S KID ASKS TO TAKE MY CHILD'S TOY HOME, HOW DO I SAY NO?

RAELENE Without mentioning the item in question, gently take it from the child and offer something else, such as a take-home gift, or distract the child with an activity.

EUNICE Children have to learn that they can't have everything they want. Simply say: "I'm sorry but this toy has to get back on its shelf. But you can play with it the next time you come visit."

I HAVE A STRICT NO-GADGETS POLICY BUT SOMEONE GIVES MY CHILD ONE.

RAELENE It's the thought that counts with gift giving. Therefore, thank the giver and explain to your child later, after the party, that the gadget is not suitable for his use.

ONE SET OF GRANDPARENTS GIVES MORE EXPENSIVE PRESENTS THAN THE OTHER. MY CHILD SHOWS AN OBVIOUS PREFERENCE, AND ONLY HUGS THAT PAIR.

RAELENE Kids must be taught about gifts and the proper behaviour expected. From my own experience, children who are taught from young – and by example – will know how to behave, and they will feel comfortable in this knowledge.

AGNES Tell him that he has to hug the other grandparents, too, before he can play with his expensive present. He has to learn the 3As: acceptance, acknowledgement and appreciation. He should appreciate the other grandparents' effort in sourcing for the present, acknowledge it and give thanks. ♡



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