

To Avoid or Embrace?

One of my daughters has a friend whom I have often seen walking along the streets of our neighborhood by herself and at various times of the day/night.

This same friend required a ride, during the school year, to various functions as her parents always seemed to be unavailable. Many times, we would drop her off after a function and see that both parents' cars were in the driveway. I often thought perhaps they were stuck at work at the beginning of the activity, but why not pick her up from the activity?

I didn't let it bother me personally as it wasn't too much effort on our part as we were already transporting our daughter to the various activities anyway. I did, however, get really bothered for the little girl. I bet it made her feel horrible that her parents seemingly never participated in her activities. I also actually got bothered that I never heard from or saw her parents.

Anytime my child needs to get a ride from someone else, I make it a point to thank them. To me, their lack of appreciation for someone ensuring their daughter's safe arrival home was a direct reflection of their attitude towards their child. This makes me think they really don't take a vested interest in her.

Up until recently when she spent the night, our car rides were really the extent of my communication with this little girl. She arrived for the sleepover in the early afternoon (by walking to our house). I made a typical dinner for us consisting of chicken, veggies and rice. We sat down for our family dinner. It seemed as though this was a foreign concept for her.

The food was served, we blessed the food and began to eat. She simply sat there staring at her food. "Are you not hungry?" I asked. She responded, "I only eat chicken nuggets." Well, anyone who knows me, knows that chicken nuggets in my house are a rarity. I actually did have some in the freezer because they had come free with another purchase. My husband could see that I was biting my tongue. I was raised that you "Take what you get and you don't throw a fit" when it came to something done for or given to you. I couldn't believe that she was going to actually let the food waste simply because it wasn't her staple. So, my husband went to the freezer and made her some chicken nuggets. While he did that, I discussed with her why she only ate chicken nuggets, why we ate healthy meals... I was very saddened by the conversation.

The night went on. Morning came and she didn't eat breakfast. She said she wasn't hungry—she usually doesn't eat breakfast. I encouraged her to eat, but it didn't happen. Hours went by and I thought that for sure her mom would call her home or would come to pick her up. I had stepped out to run an errand and actually saw her mom walking their dog outside and heading our direction. I thought, "Oh, she's probably on her way to pick her up." I pulled over and introduced myself and let her know that her daughter was still at our house. (Thinking she was

going to say she was on her way to get her.) Nope. The mom replied, “Oh, that’s good.” Excuse me? Not once did the mom thank me for letting her daughter spend the night, nor did she express any interest in really even talking with me.

I again held my tongue and went home.

The little girl didn’t leave until I finally suggested she eat dinner at her house that night—at 6:00 p.m. That was not the normal sleepover form that I was used to.

Something in my gut tells me this little girl is headed down a road less desirable than what I’d like to see her travel. Yet, my motherly instincts have torn me in two directions. On one hand, I want her to have as little contact with my own daughters as possible as to not poorly influence them or cause my children to be associated with any sort of negativity this child might end up in. However, the other motherly side of me wants to embrace her and show her what a family can be like, be a good influence on her and use her experiences as a tool for teaching my own children.

At this point, I’m opting for the second one. My daughters are both very strong individuals and the one who is friends with this little girl is very responsible and very proud of her beliefs and convictions.

Am I right to be frustrated with the other parents? Where does my responsibility as a concerned mother lie? Where should my boundaries be? What would you do?