

Going Visiting With Your Baby

By Elizabeth Pantley, Author of Gentle Baby Care

Babies love new places! There's so much to investigate and new things to touch. But many people aren't too happy to have your little one crawling or toddling freely about the house exploring everything in sight. While you think its adorable that Baby found the Tupperware, your host may not think it's cute that her tidy cabinet has been rearranged by sticky baby hands. If your host has a big heart she'll let you know that your baby's exploring is okay. But even then, you run the risk of your baby breaking or losing something.

Bring toys!

The best thing you can do is bring along a bag of toys to seize your child's attention. You can purchase new items, or dig through your baby's toy box to put together a collection of forgotten favorites. Avoid bringing loud toys that may annoy others, and bring toys that will hold your baby's attention for a long time.

Bring your own supplies

Think about things that keep your baby happy at home or in the car, and bring these with you, such as your sling, a favorite blanket, a Boppy pillow, or a special lovey. If you are prepared, then your baby will be more content.

Safety issues

Visits with a mobile baby are tricky, especially if you're at a home that isn't childproof. If you want to avoid physically shadowing your baby around the house, bring a few safety tools, such as outlet plugs and a folding baby gate to section off stairways. When you arrive, assess the area and ask if chemicals, medications, or fragile vases can be put away during your visit. Remember that you're certain to miss some hazards, so keep a close eye on Baby during your entire visit.

Food and eating

Whether your baby is new to solid food or has been eating it for a while, bring along a few favorites. If you don't bring snacks with you, your baby may not touch the dinner that's served and may cry for her favorite crackers. In any case, don't feel you must push your baby to try something new to the point of a temper tantrum. Politely requesting something simple like toast or cheese is perfectly okay and will be welcomed more than a loud and tense test of parent/child wills.

What if you're breastfeeding and your baby is hungry?

Do what comes naturally: Feed him! Breastfeeding is the most natural way to feed a baby. If your hosts aren't used to seeing a mother breastfeed, then you're doing our world a favor by introducing one more person to the beauty of baby feeding. Be thoughtful about other's sensitivities. This doesn't mean you need to hide, but your efforts to be discreet are a courtesy for those around you and may help others feel more comfortable about seeing you breastfeeding your baby. Using a sling, blanket or nursing shirt are easy ways to accomplish this.

Changing Diapers

Bring a changing pad; this will protect the surface you're using. If you don't have a pad, ask for a towel. Ask where your host prefers that you change the baby, or suggest a location: "Do you mind if I lay the towel on your bed to change the baby?"

Bring along (or ask to use) plastic bags to store messy diapers. Make sure that they are sealed so that they don't create odors. If you use disposables, put used diapers in a sealed bag and offer to take them out to the trash. People don't like stinky diapers in their bathroom trash.

Sleeping and napping

If your little one sleeps in a cradle or crib you may want to bring along a portable crib. If you don't have one, or if you co-sleep at home, this is a time when "anything goes." If your baby will sleep in your arms, then go ahead and enjoy an in-arms nap. If your baby is flexible, put a blanket on the floor and set up a sleeping nest. Don't leave Baby alone, since the area probably isn't childproof.

A great nap solution is to bring your car seat into the house and strap your baby in securely, or fashion a bed from a large box or an empty dresser drawer. Keep your baby close by or check on her frequently.

For co-sleepers, your first order of business is to create a safe sleeping place. Inspect the furniture placement in the bedroom. If you know that pushing the bed against the wall would make the situation safer for your baby, then politely explain to your host. Let her know that you'll move it back before you leave (and then remember to do so).

Be prepared for anything

Life with a baby is filled with surprises. Take a deep breath, and do your best to keep your baby content...and if things don't go as well as you'd hoped, remind yourself that "This too shall pass."

Show your appreciation

If you've had an overnight stay, if your host is helpful, or if you made special requests during your stay, remember to send a thank you note that expresses your appreciation.