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PARENTING / MAY 1, 2016

Ask Ariel: The Neighborhood Babysitter



Dear Ariel,

I work full time from home. This means I am able to pick up my kids from the school bus stop every day. This is important to me — it gives me a chance to greet them, talk to them and get some mommy time in. Unfortunately, I invariably get a call or text asking me to pick up one of the neighborhood kids and watch them “just for a few minutes” when their parents are late. If this were truly a one-off, it would be fine, but it’s turning into a daily event. I end up babysitting, sometimes all afternoon. I would like to tell these parents I can’t watch their kids, but I’m afraid of creating bad feeling with the neighbors. Should I just suck it up, or is there a way to stop this?

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—Not the Neighborhood Nanny

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Dear NNN,

Neighbor relationships can be mighty complicated, can't they? From your description, there is more than one family who has been taking advantage of your work-from-home arrangement. The good news is that you are part of a community that feels comfortable asking for help when they need it. The bad news is that they seem pretty insensitive to the needs of your family.

I am a firm believer in telling the truth, even if it can be a tough thing for the listeners to hear. I would talk with your neighbors individually and not immediately following a forced impromptu childcare session. I would say exactly what you have written in this letter: that you have chosen a career path that provides you the opportunity to spend those critical afternoon hours with your own children. By explaining your perspective and the professional choices you have made to afford your family the luxury of time together, most reasonable neighbors will understand and look elsewhere for last-minute babysitters.

If you feel you can't tell your neighbors the truth for fear of creating bad feelings in the community, you are being way more sensitive than they have been. These people have repeatedly asked you for childcare help that you have never offered and have come to resent. Rip off the band-aid and tell it like it is. The resentment you feel now will only continue to fester and end up destroying the friendly neighborhood relations anyway. Best to speak your truth and hope for the best.

0 SHARES

Ariel Frager

Ariel Frager is a school counselor and has a private therapy practice that specializes in treating children, adolescents and



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families. She lives in Portland with her husband, son, dog and kitty cat.

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