

## Family visits...

Posted on Jul 27, Posted by [Webmaster](#) Category [Telling Tales](#)

I'm hiding out; in my bedroom, on a Friday night, watching the Golden Girls. Don't pity me. I love those girls. In fact, they're the highlight of my evening. You see, this week I have played hostess to my brother, his wife and their three children (two of which are in pre-school). They stay with us every year after making the trek from California to Tennessee. And just to add a more variety to the mix, my oldest niece, her husband and their new baby joined us. So every night since they've been here (6 days, 16 hours, 41 minutes) it's been a party with all my brothers, sisters, their spouses and children. It's been fun. Especially when my 4 year old nephew uses his 9 octave scream when I tell him he can't drink his grape juice upstairs, when my 2 year old niece locks herself in the pantry and empties a full box cereal or when my dad leaves my house without telling anyone because... he can!

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All six of my brothers and sisters parent differently. My oldest brother is very hands on and gets almost giddy when he talks about how his children transitioned from parallel to interactive play seamlessly. One sister is the over achieving mom who puts all other room mothers to shame with her flawless appearance and exquisite room mother etiquette. Another sister uses humor to make dealing with her teenager easier by telling folks she's saving for her daughter's college expenses or bail, whichever comes first. Another brother has decided his parenting duties involve an allegiance to repopulating the state, just in case. My little sister embraces her role as the proud mama of an overweight cat with an attitude problem (but I implore you to find a cat without an attitude problem). I'm not a perfect parent either. My children have eaten cookies for breakfast and before dinner. I've allowed them to watch too much TV and forgotten to alert the tooth fairy about a lost tooth.

The point is, when all these parenting styles spend any amount of time together in a confined space, disagreements are going to happen and nerves will be pounced on. Like when my little

brother walked in with his 5 small children (all of them clutching open juice boxes), tells them to go upstairs to play (unsupervised with open juice boxes!) while he catches up with our oldest brother. Or when my 4 year old nephew disassembled my favorite floor lamp and his parents reprimand him by saying, "Was that the right choice?" Before I could say, "That was not a good choice you little twit!" I was distracted by my niece throwing a poopy diaper in the kitchen trash can.

That's when I decided to make my exit. Not long after retreating to my room, I could hear laughing. The kind of laughing that makes you laugh. Why was I letting all these inconsequential things bother me? When I walked into the kitchen I gave my big brother a hug-because I know he's not a hugger. Before I walked away, he looked at me and said, "What is wrong with your hair? You look like a skunk with those highlights. Oh, I ate the last piece of cake." I didn't care. I love these people. Of course, I will love them even more in 2 days, 10 hours and 17 minutes.

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