

Aunt Bossy

Written by Susan Murphy

Tuesday, 23 August 2016 13:35 - Last Updated Wednesday, 24 August 2016 09:46



Thanks, but No Thanks

Dear Aunt Bossy,

□□□□□□□□□□ *People we would rather not spend the evening with regularly invite us. There is nothing wrong with them; it is just that we like to be alone, or with people with whom we have vigorous conversations. Unfortunately, we see them in the neighborhood or at mutual friends' houses on a regular basis, and they often call when they are "in the area."*

How can we handle this?

Trapped

Dear Trapped,

I hear you. For my birthday, Terry Sweeney and Lanier Laney, Beaufort's resident comedy experts, were astute enough to give me a magnet from the wonderful Beaufort shop, Lulu Burgess.. It said: " There are 8 billion people on the planet and I can only tolerate about ten of them."

My number is a bit higher, but not much. However, as Disraeli said, "Life is too short to be bored." And I feel very strongly that it takes a real effort to be a good dinner partner or visitor, and those who don't make the effort should not be imposed upon those of us who do. Now, to your question:

This is tough, because (I am assuming) you like to be nice and don't want to hurt their feelings.

My first thought was that you should have a big party once a year and invite everyone. This would dilute them, but that would also encourage them to reciprocate. You could, of course, invite them and sacrifice one night a year when they invite you. If there is more than one couple like this, your sacrifice gets more serious, so think it over.

Otherwise, you have no choice except to be very friendly but firm about having other plans, which you do: You plan to stay home.

We all should put ourselves out to help others, but participating in someone's social life is not required. There are many people in real need of food, clothing, companionship, and caring with whom you can expend that energy.

That being said, I would still probably go for the once a year big party, including everyone. But, hey, I am co-dependent with the world, and can't bear for anyone to be left out, even bores.

While I am on the subject, where did we ever get the idea we have to reciprocate?

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Some people love to entertain, and are happy to have you visit. They don't necessarily want to go to your house. I, Aunt Bossy, live in a small house and am frequently invited by people who could house Congress. I prefer to believe they don't expect to cram into my space just so I can reciprocate.

Good luck.

Talk About It.

Dear Aunt Bossy,

□□□□□□□□□□ *I speak Spanish. I am new to English. I want to practice and learn. When people invite me for dinner, they always invite someone who speaks Spanish and put me next to that person. I do not like this because I want to be immersed. I do not want to be rude. What is the rule?*

Maria

Dear Maria,

It would be perfectly all right for you to tell your host that you really appreciate him/her trying to match you with a person who shares your language, but that it is holding you back. You might say that you really enjoy the company of the Spanish speaker, but when you are there, you would prefer to sit among the English speakers so you can speak a bit and listen and learn a lot.

Hopefully, your host is smart enough to seat you near the Spanish speaker, so you can get some help if you run into trouble. Be certain that you don't monopolize the person on one side of you at the table. Speak to both sides and across, if possible.

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Most people are happy to help you learn, but they are there to relax, so be aware of that. One important habit is to look alert and interested and make eye contact with other speakers, even when you don't understand everything. It will come.

One situation you should expect is running into another guest who wants to practice his/her Spanish. Be nice and let them, but do not let them take all your time. Also, you do not want to divide the group into two sections, each with a different language.

Be proud that you are soon to be bi-lingual. It is a wonderful thing.

Aunt Bossy is Susan Murphy, an internationally known Communication Skills Coach who adores spending every winter and spring in Beaufort. Ask for advice at bossymurph@mac.com

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