

Up In Our Sandbox: Remote Control

[| Print |](#)

Written by Claudine M. Jalajas



It's the dawn of a new era: Your kids venture to other kids' houses—without you. What are they up to when they're away? And how can you make sure someone's actually watching them? Maybe being dragged along on play dates wasn't so agonizing after all...

For me, play dates are a lot like changing diapers. Nobody wants to do it—but you have to. I always resented the fact that my kids had a better social life than I did. But, when your kids are little they need to be with other kids or they start trashing the house. I went to a play date this past week at my younger son's new friend's house. First the plastic machine guns made their appearance. Now, I grew up with three brothers and have two sons. I know that boys play with guns and I'm OK with it—to a point. My kids have the Daniel Boone-style guns and usually hunt ferocious beasts in the yard. We never point guns at each other or real people. When his 8-year-old friend put on the military network, I decided it was time to go.

And this is just what's happening right in front of my eyes. What happens when I'm not there? As I send my oldest son off to friends' homes to play on their own, I have to wonder if those parents are keeping a watchful eye on their kids— and more importantly mine. Your kids are running from house to house, yard to yard, hanging out on bikes, in large finished basements with big screen TVs hooked up to thousands of channels or hovered around a computer with unlimited Internet access, all without your watchful eyes.

Seeing Eye to Eye

I have a friend, let's call her Shmancy. Her neighbor, let's call her Spacy, has kids the same age. Shmancy and Spacy do not see eye to eye on parenting. Spacy's children (ages range from 5 to 9 years old) roam in and out of the yard and through the suburban neighborhood without a second thought. One hot day Shmancy's eldest daughter wanted to go swimming at Spacy's house.

Shmancy recalled talking to Spacy about the pool once before. Spacy said the kids were welcome anytime and followed it with, "They know how to swim, right?" Let me warn you that's code for, "I'm

not really watching your kids..." Shmancy went up about 10 minutes later to check on the kids. As she entered the back yard she heard some minor coughing. She went poolside and found Spacy's five-year-old son dog paddling, without swimmies, in water far above his head— not a parent in site. She asked the child, "Are you OK?" He could barely speak as he paddled with effort around the pool. Adult supervision? Dad was mowing the lawn and Mom was doing laundry.

The Power of Friends

Like future boyfriends and girlfriends, a friend can have a powerful influence on your child. Your child needs to learn how to be selective. While your child is very young (toddler/preschooler) it's easy to manage their friendships. Your child gets older and you're psyched that you don't have to sit and make small talk with someone you have nothing in common with, "So you say that baby poo is a great fertilizer for your garden? You collect it where? That's really interesting.

Do you know the time?" Then, it happens: Your kids start making friends on their own. With those you may not necessarily like, or more likely, kids with moms you may not like. Do you need to like the kids—or the parents? Most of the moms I talked to said the same thing: The nut doesn't fall far from the tree. Is the mom the pushy type always making excuses? You can assume that her child will start covering her tracks after she knocks your 3-yearold daughter on her butt for wanting to play with the dollhouse. "No, I just wanted to hug her. I didn't mean to knock her over that play table."

Are the parents really laid back allowing their child to do most anything without supervision? You can bet that in a few years that child will be the one roaming the streets looking for fun. Or maybe their child is the one with the poolside blender saying, "Seriously, I make the best margaritas!"

Are the parents not interested in school activities or sports? You're going to want your child to be around other children who have those same interests. "Skip practice! Forget homework! Look, I have this new video game where you can kill all sorts of people."

Great Minds Think Alike

Many moms say the majority of their own social circle evolved from the parents of their kids' friends—those who share similar parenting philosophies and value each other's concern. The parents like one another, the kids play nicely. What's not to like?

We live in a suburban area full of young children. Our streets are mostly quiet with a rare passing car. My eldest son Luc, 10 years old, is allowed to ride his bike to his friend Anthony's house as far as three blocks away. (Between you, me and the lamppost, I watch him from my living room window and Anthony's mother calls me when she sees him turn the corner to her house.) Anthony comes here to play and he's the only kid who can manage to not cause a fight with my younger son Max. So, he's on my extremely short list of acceptable friends. I don't know his parents well but we have met and they're polite and seem normal. In my book, that makes them model citizens. There are a few boys in the neighborhood that smile politely to me and yell hello to my sons as they ride their bikes. They've stopped several times, hanging over our picket fence asking Luc to join them. Luc always shakes his head no. Curious, I asked, "Do Greg and Seth (of course I changed their names!) get into trouble a lot?" He shrugged his shoulders and then guiltily said, "yeah." He looked down at his feet like I had just caught him eating a bowl of ice cream before dinner. I said, "You know, it's a GOOD thing that you don't want to hang out with troublemakers. I'm proud of you." He smiled.

Every once in a while there is a brief moment where I feel like I know what I'm doing. Then I see one

of my kids convincing another to eat mud pie and the feeling passes.

Claudine is a freelance writer and part-time web developer who lives on Long Island with her husband and three young children. She longs for the day when she can reach into the hamper without hesitating and thinking, "Should I be wearing gloves for this?"


[Email This](#)

[Bookmark](#)

Comments (0) 

 [Subscribe to this comment's feed](#)

Write comment

 Show/Hide comment form

[Close Window](#)