

Guest Blogger Jenny: Honesty: Is it Really the Best Policy With Mommy Acquaintances At Private Elementary Schools?

Description

Recently, I read a blog post openly advocating for total honesty among moms. Her theory was that this complete honesty, both about the joys and trials of motherhood, would open the doors of empathy in playgroups and parent organizations.

It's a really lovely theory. Honestly (and I mean that, honestly) I like it a lot. But its one major flaw is that honesty is simply not what anyone is looking for in superficial interactions. Most women in playgroups or organizations (like the PTA or just the parents within a class, say), have been thrown together simply by virtue of being fertilized around the same time, thus producing kids. This has nothing to do with personalities, parenting styles, life styles, health issues, neurosis, or indeed much of anything else. The same can be said for moms at private elementary schools too. Maybe there's a commonality by virtue of the fact that you all selected the same school. But, even that fact doesn't mean a whole lot.

For instance, it's good to nod sympathetically when an exhausted mom complains about how her five year old still doesn't sleep through the night. Sympathy is what she's seeking. Saying, however, that your little darling slept through the night by six months and lets you sleep in every weekend will gain you nothing but bruised enmity. What's the point? If you have a name of a pediatric sleep specialist to offer up, you could try that, but most likely she's just looking to vent, not for solutions. She probably gets enough dopey solution offerings from her husband, and you know how she feels about him.

Many of us, once in a group of women, get lulled into a false sense of security. Well, don't be fooled. If you have a complaint to lodge, by all means do so (as long as it isn't, like, too gross. I still have images stuck in my head regarding one woman's detailed description of her laser hemorrhoid surgery; the idea of being in that, ahem, position makes me nauseous). But steer clear of really good news.

What's really good news? If you still enjoy sex on a regular basis with your partner, avoid discussing it. They will curse you, either silently or quite openly. It's just the way it is, because it's very common and indeed fashionable to shudder at the mere idea of sex after babies. I don't know why.

The same goes for being skinny after having a baby. I was one of these women (sorry, I know I'm being honest, but it's my post and I'm making a point here). After post partum depression, not sleeping for three months and having the life sucked out of me by a preemie resembling a lamprey, I was super skinny. It wasn't something I bragged about, but I certainly couldn't hide it, either. Some of the comments I received included things like, "Yeah, I got the baby blues too, but I got over it. You were lucky to get skinny." I would say that skinniness caused by depression and desperation wasn't "lucky" in the slightest.

Keep in mind that I'm speaking about honesty being overrated only in terms of larger groups of women. Your friends, now, are quite a different story. How do you know if someone is really your friend and not just a group acquaintance? She is a friend if you've had more than two solo lunches or coffees and you'd still like to schedule more. She's a friend if you text her to report on something particularly heinous that just happened to you on the street. She's a friend if you call her just to discuss pretty much nothing, just because you find one another amusing. She's your friend if she shares your brand of humor, whether it's restrained and urbane or leans more toward the Jackass series of movies. Friendships have nothing to do with groups; they are individual endeavors. Your friend doesn't care if you're skinny, although she does care if it took personal suffering to get that way. And your friend will offer useful advice when warranted and patient listening when it's not.

All the caution I stress above is doubled when dealing with groups of moms in a private school environment. First off, if you say something personal you might regret (or really tick one of the other moms off), it's now out there with a group of moms you're probably stuck with for years (there's no bowing out of the playgroup here). And private schools can be hotbeds of gossip. Why make yourself a target? Just lay low and look around. You'll probably find one private school mom who will become a real friend, and then the two of you can huddle in the corner during school events, cracking each other up.

So, next time you're at a playgroup or a school function or wherever large groups of mommies are found, keep it light. Because, unfortunately, too much information can and will be turned against you. Think of being Switzerland, all bland and neutral, until you can hone in on the very few women who might be simpatico. Then, make your individual plans and let it fly.

http://thestir.cafemom.com/toddler/115447/mommy_white_lies_hurt_other
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