

Want to be a great neighbor?

Here are 9 things etiquette experts say you should do.

By Daniel Bortz

October 2, 2018

To live in a great neighborhood — and enjoy all the comforts that come with being part of a tightknit community — you have to be a good neighbor yourself.

There's certainly no shortage of examples of bad neighbors in TV shows and films (think Homer Simpson or any neighbor from "Desperate Housewives"). But what does it mean to be a genuinely good neighbor?

Here, etiquette experts share ways to build and maintain positive, long-lasting relationships with your neighbors. (It requires more than lending someone a cup of sugar.)

[*Want to 'age in place'? Make sure your home has these 6 things.*](#)

Share important information

One of the best ways to welcome new neighbors is by providing them with a "need-to-know" checklist, says Diane Gottsman, author of "Modern Etiquette for a Better Life." If you know a great housekeeper, handyman, dry cleaner, dog walker or lawn-mowing

service, give your new neighbor a sheet with their contact information. Also include suggestions on the best and nearest grocery stores, restaurants and pharmacies.

Keep up your curb appeal

Just one ugly home in a community can reduce property values for the entire neighborhood. Hence, you don't want to become known as the owner of "that ugly house" — i.e., the one with knee-high grass, overflowing gutters, dirty windows, peeling paint or toys scattered across the front yard. "You should be cleaning up the front of your house as much as possible," says Lizzie Post, co-president at the Emily Post Institute, a Burlington, Vt.-based etiquette-training business.

Be a responsible pet owner

"Pets can be a big bone of contention between neighbors, so you need to keep them in check," says etiquette consultant Lisa Mirza Grotts.

Start with pet etiquette 101: Clean up after your pooch. "When you take your dog for a walk, do not deposit your dog's poop bag into someone else's trash can," Gottsman says. "It sounds basic, but it happens a lot."

Organize a service project

You may want to attend block parties, community cookouts and other neighborhood events so that you can mingle and form friendships. But to go an extra mile, suggests Elaine Swann, founder of the Swann School of Protocol, coordinate a community-wide

project that neighbors can participate in together, such as decking out your neighborhood's playground for Halloween.

Live by a senior citizen? Assemble a group of neighbors to help spruce up their yard or hang holiday lights.

Invite your neighbors over

Recently moved in? One way to build rapport is by inviting your neighbors over for a housewarming party (instead of only inviting your friends). But, "Let people know that you're not accepting gifts," Post says. "This should be simply a social event."

Once you've established a relationship, you could form a neighborhood book club or weekly softball game to deepen friendships.

Don't be the town gossip

Part of being a good neighbor is avoiding gossip. However, Post says there's a difference between "good" gossip and "bad" gossip. "If a neighbor's mother passes away, communicating that news to other neighbors so that people can attend the funeral is good gossip," she explains. Bad gossip, meanwhile, spreads negative rumors (e.g., "I heard Jerry got fired from his job. I can't say I'm surprised").

Be a respectful party host

Keeping music at a reasonable noise level when you're throwing a party is common sense. An aspect people frequently overlook, though, is minding where their guests park. "The last thing you want is for your guest to block your neighbor's driveway," Gottsman

says. You also don't want your guests' cars to take up the entire block, which is why Gottsman suggests hiring a valet service.

Abide by community rules

When you live in a homeowners or condo association, you have to comply with the community's rules. Still, a lot of people don't take the time to review their association's rules, Swann says. These rules may dictate parking restrictions, trash and recycling schedules, landscaping requirements, move-in procedures and more.

Breaking your association's rules can not only result in fines but also ruffle feathers with neighbors. "It's your responsibility to police yourself if you want to avoid conflict," Swann says.

Also, check local codes to make sure you're following city ordinances, particularly regarding noise. (For example, Arlington prohibits shouting, yelling and other loud noises from midnight to 9 a.m.) A new survey by [Improvenet.com](https://www.improvenet.com) showed that six of the top 10 complaints people have about their neighbors involve noise, whether from music, voices, parties, kids, pets or the TV.

Handle conflict judiciously

No matter how friendly you are, you may have disagreements or quibbles with neighbors. Handling these conflicts with tact is crucial.

Generally, if you have an issue with a neighbor, your first line of defense should be to try to resolve the problem with the person directly. This should be done face-to-face — not over text message or email, where messages can get misconstrued, Swann says.

Let's say your neighbor's dog is peeing on your garden. Broach the subject by starting with a compliment, and then suggest working together toward a solution: "Duke is such a sweet dog. However, I have noticed that he's been peeing on our begonias, and I would really love to curb that behavior so that my flowers don't die on me." If you can't resolve the issue one-on-one, contact your homeowner's association.