

Do you RSVP?

Social Awareness for Adults

By Deb Landry

Do you RSVP when invited to birthday parties, weddings and events? This article is dedicated to hosts everywhere pulling out their hair wondering who is attending the event they have been put so much effort into not including how much food and space they need, oh and for the guest a-like for assuming their host are mind readers.

As someone who has hosted several events this is a huge pet peeve of mine and simple etiquette 101. When I get an invitation, I immediately check the date, my schedule and decide if I want or can attend, then RSVP!

Lack of RSVP's is a growing problem. In fact, it fits right in with social behaviors that I teach children everyday. If we as adults and role models don't practice social behaviors, how do we expect the kids to?

I have found in my personal experience, that I often do not receive firm indications whether guests plan to attend (or not) even if R.S.V.P. is clearly printed on the invitation. This could mean either one of two things. First, it could mean that rudeness is a growing trend in our society (my choice). Or people no longer understand what the term means, because, let's face it, it is in French. Assuming the best, and that the decline in R.S.V.P.'s can be attributed to ignorance and not rudeness, I want to lay the facts out.

RSVP, translated:

The term R.S.V.P. comes from the French expression "répondez s'il vous plaît", translated in English "Please Respond" or "I'm having a major event here, and I want you to be at it because you mean so much to me, so just send out the stamped address card enclosed or click reply on the email and let me know if you will be there or not, it's okay if you can't come, I just need a head count so I don't have to order too much food and it is rude to ignore me when I have graciously included you in something that is important to me."

Okay, that's my opinion, so I thought I'd look it up on the internet to see what the experts have to say and to see if I'm blowing this out of proportion or to validate my feelings!

Here is a "Crash Course" in RSVP's.

Feel free to attach this on the end of any invitations you may send out in the future.

If R.S.V.P. is printed on an invitation, it means the invited guest **MUST** tell the host whether or not they plan to attend the party. It does not mean to respond only if you're coming, and it does not mean respond only if you're not coming (the expression "regrets only" is reserved for that instance, which I don't like to use). It means the host needs a definite head count for the planned event, and needs it by the date specified on the invitation.

Why it's Inconsiderate to Not RSVP:

An incomplete list of respondents can cause numerous problems for a host including difficulty in planning food quantities, issues relating to minimum guarantees with catering halls or restaurants, uncertainty over the number of party favors, difficulties in planning appropriate seating/space, and an added expense, among other things.

Helpful Hints:

Check your calendar. See if you are free on the appointed date and time. If you previously accepted another invitation for that time, you will have to decline the new one. If you are, free and want to attend, write it down so you won't forget.

Check your feelings.

Do want to attend this event? If not, you may decline, and you don't need to give any lame excuses either like this one that I got recently, "I can't come to your party on Thursday, because I have an appointment on Friday". Just say, "I'm sorry, but I won't be able to come." If you'd be happier staying home watching a movie, do that instead. Just let the host know not to expect you.

Make up your mind by the date specified on the invitation; if a "reply by" date was not listed, reply within 24 hours of receiving the invitation. What if something better comes up later? That doesn't matter. Maybe it will, maybe it won't, but it is rude not to reply quickly to any invitation and show up as promised.

Don't leave your potential hosts in suspense. If you want to hold your schedule open, the proper response to an invitation is, "Thank you for the invitation, but I'm afraid I will not be able to attend" -- saying, "No thanks," instead of, "Please wait until I see what else comes along." True, you might not get a better offer after all, and if you turn down the invitation, you could end up having nothing else to do that night, but you are abusing the graciousness of your hosts if you keep them on the string as your back-up plan.

Reply in writing or in kind.

The proper etiquette would be to reply in writing. But one may reply in the same format that one was invited; for example, an email invitation can be answered by email. For an RSVP to a wedding or other formal event, write the reply on a small plain piece of stationery. Write in the third person. "Ms. Deb Landry [i.e., you] accepts with pleasure, the kind invitation of Mr. and Mrs. Smith for Wednesday, the first of October." If unable to attend, change "accepts with pleasure" to "regrets that she is unable to attend." You never need to give a reason for not attending. Just let the host know whether you're currently planning to be there or not.

Communicate last-minute changes. What if the time comes and you can't attend after all? Maybe you're not feeling well, or your cat broke its leg, or there was some real emergency. Then, as soon as you know, get in touch with the host by telephone or email, to let them know you can't come, and apologize. Acceptance of a social invitation did not constitute a legal obligation; your RSVP just communicated your best intentions. Make a call and say, something has come up and I can't attend, I hope everything goes well and can't wait to

hear about the event.

Put Any Wording on your RSVP Card (wording shown is just an example)

Please reply by October 5th

M _____

Number of Persons _____

_____ Yes, I / we will attend
_____ No, I / we are unable to attend

Please number your entree preferences:
_____ Chicken _____ Salmon

Envelopes: If you select printing on your envelopes, your RSVP address will be printed on the FRONT of the envelope. If you do not enter an address for your envelopes, the envelopes will be shipped blank. We then suggest you stamp your address or attach return address labels.

No reply card:

Because hosts were making a lot of follow-up phone calls to inconsiderate invitees, the "reply card" was invented and is often considered standard and even necessary. However, if a reply card is not included with a formal invitation, you still need to reply in writing and provide the stamp.

Online options:

Some hosts may take advantage of online systems such as www.evite.com so that guests can reply from a telephone or from their computer. This is a widely used option for casual events, and it becoming more widely used for weddings and anniversary parties, as these systems now allow guests to select meal choices, the number of guests attending with them and leave personalized responses for the host (in the form of voice messages or personalized comments in a guest book), which the host can keep on a CD to share with family and friends or listen to at anytime. This option provides faster response times from guests and usually a more accurate guest count, no more lost RSVP cards.

Schedule uncertainty:

If you have other plans brewing but not finalized, you can phone the hosts and discuss it. They may have to say no (if they need a head count by a certain date, but they will probably say yes. Write a note on your calendar to RSVP by the date you said you would.

Bringing other guests:

If you want to bring extra people, re-read the invitation. It may allow another guest. Never bring people who were not invited by name, even your own children, unless you clear it with the host first. And don't bring the kids if no kids are allowed!

Dietary limitations:

If you have special dietary needs (not preferences!), tell your hosts in advance and offer to bring a dish that you can eat. The host may accept your offer, or they may volunteer to make something suitable themselves. Remember what is served is at the discretion of the host.

Invitations from businesses and non-profits:

If you are a major donor to a charity and they ask for an RSVP to a fancy sit-down banquet, do reply if you expect to attend, and don't show up unannounced if you didn't reply. You should be able to tell the difference between a legitimate invitation from a business or charity with whom you have a long-standing relationship, which warrants greater consideration and the scattershot junk-mail approach that some businesses and charities use. You are not required to reply to requests for RSVPs from those seeking their own enrichment; they are abusing a social custom and you can ignore it without committing a social error.

If an invitation doesn't say RSVP:

If you receive a social invitation that does not indicate to RSVP, you should still reply. It is polite to accept or decline any and all invitations.

Warning:

People you'd never think care about these things often do, from dates and grandmas to friends and employers. Depending on your crowd, you will get a reputation as either "rude" or "flaky" if you habitually fail to respond to invitations. In fact you may get yourself on a list on "not to invite" because of your rudeness. Show your compassion and respect for others.

What not to say and Why, don't be one of these people: "Oh, was I suppose to let you know I was coming?" translated, oh, I don't care enough about you and you're party is really not that important to me, that's why I didn't take 10 seconds to reply".

"You know I wouldn't miss it", translated, the host is a mind reader.

Here's a simple lesson you can teach the kids today. Be kind to someone that thinks enough of you to invite you to attend a special occasion!