

# Safety for Children

Category: Me, Too

written by Ellen Zhang | January 18, 2023

“I will never let my children have sleepovers,” a mother told me firmly. I was talking to her child as my patient, and he wanted me to convince his mother otherwise.

Growing up, I went to sleepovers from elementary to high school, and I have fond memories of staying up to play Nintendo, laughing over movies and waking up to make breakfast together. Now that I am older, I realize that my parents allowed me to sleep over with people they trusted and at places where I would be safe. Yet, making that distinction is incredibly hard. There is no exact science to it.

The question of whether children should be allowed to have sleepovers is being explored on popular social media platforms, like TikTok and Instagram. As a medical student, I have the unique perspective of hearing patients' vulnerable and challenging stories about their own experiences of sexual harassment and sexual assault. During a psychology rotation, I saw a teenage girl who had attempted suicide. She relayed to us that she was raped by a family friend and her parents weren't even willing to admit the harsh reality of what had happened. I felt a knot twist in my stomach as I bit my lip and listened to her story. As a writer, I can be reflective and verbose. In that moment, I had no words: to make her feel better, or express my hurt or anger.

The Me, Too movement has given individuals, like my patient, a voice. Yet, it is painful that parents must agonize over decisions, such as whether their children should be allowed to attend a sleepover. Ultimately, the decision is one that the parent, not the physician, must make, and it is filled with risk, nuance and uncertainty.

*Ellen Zhang*

*Boston, Massachusetts*