

# is your child ready for a sleepover?

MUCH MORE THAN JUST HAIR-BRAIDING AND MIDNIGHT SNACKS, SLEEPOVERS CAN BE A VITAL FIRST STEP ON THE ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE

**W**alking into my six-year-old's classroom the other day, I found a huddle of little girls excitedly planning a sleepover party. "We get to pretend to be orphans and everything," whispered my youngest. "And then we stay up all night and watch eight DVDs." They had written their list (nightie, teddy, glitter hairspray...) and were busily organising who would bring what for the midnight snack.

For me, it was another day, another sleepover party; my nine-year-old had set the scene many moons ago, and her younger sister had packed her first sleepover bag by the age of three. So when, five minutes later, this classroom scene had turned into a nightmare of nervous mothers and whining children each begging the other to reconsider, it occurred to me that the anxiety attached to The Sleepover was one rite of passage that might just have passed me by.

To me, it's a night off, a perfect opportunity after years of broken sleeps and exhausted evenings to book a romantic night in a local boutique hotel, or to have a lie-in on a Sunday morning. The joy of going to the cinema and then going to a bar for a late drink rather than rushing back for the babysitter has become a regular treat.

To my children, a sleepover is an endless party, bunking down in front of the DVD with their friends after an evening of makeovers and dens, and waking up in the morning for pancake-making and more makeovers. This is the night when mess can be made, when food can be eaten outside the kitchen, when rules are left outside and a scribbled 'KIDS ONLY' notice is Blu-tacked to the door.

It's a dream date that my daughter will have described in the tiniest detail to her friends, but to some of their mothers, this was a leap into the void. "Sophia still crawls in to my bed most nights," apologised one mother. "Jenny's father would have a fit!" said another as her five-year-old tugged on her sleeve in desperation. "I'm sure that Gilly wouldn't want a house full of giggling girls," said another, barely able to contain the subtext: "We barely know her". The sleepover may well be the first ▶



Text **Gilly Smith**  
Photography **Tim Evan Cook**  
Stylist: Tracey Jacob at Era Management  
Fashion assistant: Natalie Chesterman  
Hair & grooming: Charlotte Forest  
Models: Grace and Molly at Bruce and Brown

Girl on left **Floral night dress £20 by Fig (ages 1-12).**  
Girl on right **White pyjamas from a selection by Graham & Green (ages 6 months-6 years); cashmere elephant £138 by The Cross; crowns £5.99 each from Harrods**  
See stockists details for details

