NEWS LESSON

When Did Having Friends Over Become Such a Big Event?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Would you invite friends over if your home was untidy?
2. What makes an evening with friends feel effortless?
3. Would you rather bring food or help clear up?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**dietary**	☐	A	in a way that nobody planned or knew about
2	**stylish**	☐	B	stop doing something completely
3	**embarrassed**	☐	C	fashionable and attractive
4	**unexpectedly**	☐	D	connected with the food a person can or cannot eat
5	**standards**	☐	E	the level of quality that you expect
6	**pattern**	☐	F	relaxed and not worried
7	**abandon**	☐	G	something that happens in the same way again and again
8	**comfortable**	☐	H	feeling shy or silly in front of other people

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

The message goes unsent because the flat is untidy and dinner would be a takeaway. Somewhere along the way, the standard for having people round quietly rose.

1 You are about to invite a friend round when you notice the laundry, the dishes and the fact that dinner would probably be a takeaway. The message remains unsent. A simple visit has somehow become an event for which the home, the food and the host must all be properly prepared. Meeting in a café next week feels easier, even if next week eventually becomes next month.

2 Part of the problem is the pressure to present a perfect home. Social media offers endless photographs of spotless kitchens, stylish furniture and carefully prepared meals. Ordinary life is less impressive. There are clothes hanging up, bills on the table and perhaps a bathroom that could do with cleaning. It is easy to feel embarrassed about these things, even when the people we invite are unlikely to notice them.

3 Food adds another layer of stress. A host may worry about allergies, dietary preferences or whether a meal is interesting enough. A relaxed get-together can turn into hours of shopping, cooking and cleaning. Busy working lives make arranging it harder still. Some people live far from friends, while others have become accustomed to arranging almost every social event weeks in advance. Popping round unexpectedly, once common in many communities, may now feel inconsiderate.

4 Research using the American Time Use Survey, which covers the United States only, has found that Americans spend less time socialising with friends than they used to. It cannot tell us about other countries, but the pattern may feel familiar. Streaming services, home entertainment and the convenience of staying in offer attractive alternatives, particularly when everyone is tired. Once the sofa has won a few Fridays in a row, it tends to keep on winning. Sending the invitation means choosing the harder option.

5 Of course, choosing a quiet evening at home is not necessarily a problem. People need rest, and meeting in public places can be enjoyable. But regular friendships usually require more than exchanging messages and reacting to photographs. Spending time in someone's home can create a different kind of closeness, one that does not depend on buying anything or organising an elaborate activity.

6 Perhaps the answer is to lower our standards rather than abandon hosting. Ask friends to bring a dish, order a takeaway or simply offer tea and biscuits. Tell them the house is a mess and invite them anyway. The most memorable evenings are not always the ones with the best food or the cleanest furniture. Often they are the evenings when people feel comfortable enough to stay for one more conversation.

Sources: Socius. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. A survey found that Americans spend less time with friends than they used to. T F NG
2. The survey research can tell us about other countries too. T F NG
3. Staying in for an evening is not always a bad choice. T F NG
4. The decline is sharper in cities than in the countryside. T F NG
5. The writer advises waiting until the house is clean before inviting anyone. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

accustomed **alternatives** **convenience** **elegant** **inconsiderate** **particularly** **relaxed** **spotless**

1. The flat was _____ after she spent the whole morning cleaning it.
2. After years of living alone, he was _____ to eating dinner in silence.
3. It would be _____ to arrive at nine at night without phoning first.
4. Eating out is one of several _____ if you don't want to cook.
5. Evenings out are _____ hard to organise when people work shifts.
6. People often choose the sofa over the pub for the sake of _____ .

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By the time her guests arrived, she _____ the table. (SET)
2. The invitation _____ before the weekend, but nobody replied. (SEND)
3. If I were you, I _____ them round this weekend. (INVITE)
4. She _____ her friends for months before she finally invited them. (NOT SEE)
5. Guests _____ to bring a dish at our house. (ASK)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Adjectives, verbs and nouns often choose one preposition. Notice the pair in context and do not translate it from your own language.

at by for in of on with

1. Whether the evening goes well can depend _____ how relaxed the host feels.
2. She apologised _____ the mess in the hall.
3. She is brilliant _____ making guests feel welcome.
4. The simple invitation resulted _____ a long, friendly evening.
5. He is jealous _____ friends with big gardens.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What one rule would make hosting feel easier?
2. Have online images raised expectations for an ordinary evening at home?
3. Which would you choose: a perfect dinner next month or a simple one tonight?

9 Role-play: come round on Friday?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the host

You want to invite a friend to your flat on Friday. It's a bit untidy and you have no special food. Persuade your friend to come anyway.

Student B · the friend

You'd prefer to meet in a café. You're tired and you don't want to see a messy flat. Ask questions and say what would change your mind.

Useful phrases

Why don't you come round on Friday?
I'm afraid the flat's a mess.
I wouldn't mind that at all.
Let's meet at a café instead.
I'll bring dessert if that helps.
That's a fair point, so let's do that.

Afterwards, tell the class: where did you decide to meet, and why?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 D · 2 C · 3 H · 4 A · 5 E · 6 G · 7 B · 8 F

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 T · 4 NG · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 spotless · 2 accustomed · 3 inconsiderate · 4 alternatives · 5 particularly · 6 convenience

6 Verb forms

1 had set · 2 was sent · 3 would invite · 4 had not seen · 5 are asked

7 Language focus

1 on · 2 for · 3 at · 4 in · 5 of

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