



Minnesota Poison Control System

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Bernie's Birthday Story

It was an exciting day at Jessica's house. It was her brother Bernie's birthday, and everyone was helping to get ready for the party. Daddy was blowing up balloons, Mommy was decorating the cake, and big brother was painting a sign that said "Happy Birthday Bernie."

Jessica jumped into the kitchen. "How can I help, Mommy?" she said. "I have a special job for you Jessica," her mother said, "I'm trying to decorate Bernie's birthday cake with frosting and he's trying to decorate it with his fingers. Would you take Bernie in the other room, maybe he'd like to play with his ball." "Yeah," smiled Bernie. "He does like his new ball, Mommy," laughed Jessica. "I saw him trying to eat it this morning, but it was too big for his mouth." "Bernie likes to put everything in his mouth," sighed Mommy. "Do you remember our poem about eating things you find, Jessica?" "Oh sure Mommy," said Jessica.

"It may look pretty. It may smell good. But before I taste it, I'll ask if I should."

"Great!" Mommy said. "Big 5-year-olds like you understand that the poem means you should never eat or drink anything without asking to see if it is safe or if it is a poison." "Bernie does not understand that, so when you are with Bernie, you must ask for him." "Okay Mommy," squealed Jessica as she chased Bernie into the living room. As they rounded the corner, they almost ran into their big brother, Mike, who was standing on a stool trying to hang Bernie's birthday banner on the wall. "Hand me the tape please, this needs an extra piece." "Sure Mike," Jessica said. "You've done a great job!" "I like the dinosaurs you painted on the sign, don't you Bernie?"

When Jessica looked down at Bernie to see if he liked the dinosaurs, she saw that he had picked up a can with paint brushes in it and was about to take a drink. "Wait Bernie!" Jessica said, as she snatched the can away. "You don't remember our poem, do you?"

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"Oh no!" Mike said as he jumped off the stool. "Did Bernie drink that?" "No" Jessica said. "We have to ask if it is safe first." "It's not! It's the stuff I got from the garage to clean my paint brushes." "You saved Bernie, Jessica, it would have made him very sick," Mike explained, as he took the can from Jessica. "Daddy told me that I should be very careful because this is poison." "Yuck," Bernie said. "Yes, yuck," Mike said as he headed for the garage to put the paint cleaner away. "I'm glad I stopped you Bernie," Jessica said as she gave Bernie a hug. "Who wants to be sick and in bed on their birthday?"

"Ding-Dong" went the doorbell. In burst Grandma and Grandpa. Grandma was carrying a giant bouquet of flowers from her garden, and Grandpa was balancing a basket of apples and a pile of presents. "Happy birthday Bernie!" Grandma said while reaching down to give Bernie a big hug, but instead of giving his grandma a hug, Bernie grabbed a handful of Grandma's flowers and stuffed them in his mouth. "Oh Bernie," Jessica moaned. "We didn't ask first." "Listen to your big sister, Bernie," Grandma said. "Not everything from my garden is safe to eat." "That's right," Grandpa said,

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Bernie's Birthday Story (continued):

"Why Grandpa," Jessica said, "you know Mommy's poem too?" "Yes," Grandpa laughed, "I was around when she learned it."

Jessica's daddy popped his head out of the kitchen door, "It's birthday party time!" he said. "It's a good thing," Jessica said, "because I think Bernie is hungry." Everyone went into the kitchen and sat around the big table that Daddy had decorated with balloons. Grandma put her flowers in a vase next to Mommy's beautiful cake. Bernie laughed and clapped his hands as everyone sang "Happy Birthday." When Mommy gave him the first piece of cake, Bernie said "Yum," and grabbed it with his fingers and stuffed it in his mouth. Then Mommy cut the second piece of cake and said, "This one goes to Jessica, my big helper." As she scooped on a spoonful of ice cream, she said,

"This does look pretty. This does smell good. It is safe to eat, since Mom said you could."