

Hate other people's kids? Here's what to do

What do you do when kids are ruining your restaurant meal, wrecking your movie, or taunting your child? Dr. Ruth Peters offers this advice

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Places like movie theaters and restaurants were once destinations for refuge and relaxation, but now they've become the freewheeling playgrounds of other people's energetic and, sometimes annoying, kids. It may finally be true that nobody loves your kids like you do. So what's a parent to do? How should you handle situations when other people's kids are misbehaving? Clinical psychologist, Dr. Ruth Peters, was invited to appear on "Today" to offer some advice. Here are her tips:

When and where kids misbehave:

- **At restaurants**, children who are fussing, talking too loudly or running around and their parents don't do anything about it.
- **Children on public transportation** (subway, planes, trains, buses) who are four years old and up who are allowed to stand up in their seats and bother the folks in the row behind them.
- **Children in the movies** who constantly ask questions and the parents don't answer or ignore them.
- **Children at the park** who hog the slide, are rough, or nasty to your own kids.
- **Kids at school** who tease your child, disrupt the classroom and make it difficult for the teacher to teach and the children to listen.

How are parents the enablers to "annoying" childish behavior?

- They ignore crazy behavior with no attempt to remove the child from the situation, or to at least play with them and try to distract the whining and fussing behavior.
- They're defensive: "It's your kid who is too sensitive and can't handle my child's precociousness (i.e.: teasing and bullying)."
- They insist on not "breaking their child's spirit." That is, they're afraid to give consequences for behaviors, hoping that the child will just "get it" and become a caring, sensitive human being.
- They bring a child into an obviously adult situation: This occurs in fancy restaurants, inappropriate or boring movies, plane rides without bringing toys, coloring books, snacks to entertain him/her.

Is it possible that kids who might not misbehave in their own home act up in someone else's when their parents aren't around?

You mean, are there really that manipulative? Yes! They're brilliant at it. Some are seasoned professionals. The question is, what are you (as a parent) going to do about it?

Types of child rudeness:

- Others people's children don't listen to you at your house. They jump on your furniture, sneak food out of the kitchen, disobey your rules.
- They try to manipulate your child into breaking a home or school rule.
- They steal toys or possessions from your child.
- They talk back to you, in a rude manner, and becoming upset if you reprimand.
- They get too rough with your little one or a pet.
- They don't follow your car rules, house rules or safety (in the mall, playground, parking lot).

- They show off or brag about their possessions.
- They dump your kid for another on a whim.

Should you, as an observer, try to stop the misbehavior? If so, do you say something to the parent, to the misbehaving child, or ask a third party, (i.e. a waiter) to assist you?

Depends upon the situation. If there is a third party to help, such as at a restaurant, I would ask to be moved if possible to another location. I don't think that management would want their waiters commenting to their patrons too much about the behavior, and waiters do not have the time to delicately handle the situation themselves. It's usually just more practical to move your group to another location, specifying that you'd like to not be in the child section! When we go to a restaurant and I see that we're being led to a table next to preschool triplets (yes, this has happened) I ask to sit elsewhere from the get-go. No point in tempting fate! If there is no third party to help out, it's often best to ignore the unruly child if you'll soon be out of the situation. But, if you're stuck (it's a parent and kid who are usually at the park at the same time that you go, and you can't alter locations or times) You should probably speak to the parent and ask her to keep her son away from your child if the kid keeps picking on your daughter. You can make a quick suggestion to the kid to play nicely, and you may be able to intimidate him if he sees you standing closely by. Of course, talk with your daughter about trying to stay away from the heathen if possible!

How should people "deal" with other people's annoying kids? How do they retaliate?

Most parents are defensive. Yes, they do get it, they know their kid is rude and either they are rude themselves and don't care about the effect that it has on you, or they've managed to avoid taking responsibility and want to live in ignorance. In other words, you'll probably be talking to a wall. But, I have found that sometimes being cagey on your part can be helpful. That is, saying something like, "Boy, my older one used to love to run up to people and burp in their faces also. In fact, he could burp the entire alphabet by the time he graduated from elementary school. The way that I got him to stop it was to...." and then give a suggestion or two. In this way you are taking the blame first (defensive folks like that — they hate to be criticized), and they just may listen. It's worth a try, but you have to be willing to take it on the chin initially.

It's one thing if annoying children misbehave in public places, but what if a friend's child is a guest in your home and is acting up?

Discuss your house rules in 25 words or less. No jumping on couches, no throwing balls. Outside behavior stays outside. If this doesn't work and the perpetrator continues, give a warning that his mother will be called if it occurs again. If the creepy kid keeps it up — call his mother, who probably won't be available since she's not answering her cell phone because she needs a break from junior. At the very least, use this as a teachable moment to show *your child* how frustrating this is, that his buddy *will not be invited over again*, and put up with it until the mom finally comes to bail you out!

I remember a time when I'd be out with my parents and if I so much as crawled under the table, I'd hear about it later. Are children nowadays more "spoiled" or has there been a decrease in "responsible" parenting? Some might say ADHD has something to do with it.

Excellent question. Let's not blame it on ADHD. Let's dump it where it belongs —the buck stops with the parent. End of discussion! We've all been humiliated and mortified. Parents need to be in the same boat. We've all been there.

It seems that there is an unspoken rule that you can't scold another person's child. So what do you do if a kid becomes annoying around you?

You need to say something to the parent that doesn't put them on the defensive. However, a lot of parents are very defensive and won't listen to your message.

Tips for parents: How to help your kids change from the Tasmanian devil to the lovable little kid:

Realize that you, as the parent, not only have the right, but the responsibility to *say no* to your kids, to connect behavior with consequences (so the judge doesn't have to do this at age 15), and

that if they don't hate you at least once a week you're probably doing something wrong!

Dr. Peters is a clinical psychologist and regular contributor to "Today." For more information you can visit her Web site at www.ruthpeters.com. Copyright ©2006 by Ruth A. Peters, Ph.D. All rights reserved.

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