

Two flat whites, hold the crying kid

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Is it ever OK to complain about other people's kids?

- ☐ Yes, children should be seen and not heard. 21%
- ☐ No, let kids be kids and let off steam. 4%
- ☐ It depends on the situation. 74%

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NO TIME FOR TEARS: Can you ever criticise someone else's parenting?

Parent trap battle scars

A few Sunday mornings ago, when the summer had started to kick in, my partner and I headed to our local cafe for breakfast. It was hot and we were hungry - we'd just spent the morning at the christening of a good friend's first born.

The cafe was full and we snared one of the last free tables. As we began reading the menu, the atmosphere suddenly changed.

"Is that a child crying?" my partner asked me with a concerned look on his face. I replied yes but thought to myself, this wasn't normal crying. This was a piercing, shrill cry and sounded like the child was in pain. I glanced around and everyone in the cafe looked disturbed.

A couple sat down at the empty table beside us but after hearing the crying, left and went to the cafe across the road. I asked my partner if we should do the same - and just as I did, the crying let up.

We agreed to stay. A few minutes later, as our coffees arrived, the crying started again. This time it was louder and with a higher pitch. Every single person in the cafe, including the staff, seemed to notice the screeching sound.

After around 10 minutes of continuous crying, my partner had clearly had enough. "It's one thing for a baby to cry but this is ridiculous." Thinking that he wanted to leave without eating, I began to gather my things. But he had other ideas. "No one has said anything to them, so I am."

He was too upset to listen to my suggestion to leave - and instead walked over to the parents of the toddler. "I'm sorry, but your child has not stopped crying since we got here," he said. "Everyone in the café is upset by it. Can you either take your child for a walk or find another solution.

"This is my Sunday too."

"Chill out mate", came the father's reply.

My partner walked back to our table. A few minutes later, the mother and her child began walking towards the door.

As they walked passed us, she turned to my partner. "We are leaving and you are a despicable human being."

Once outside the door she mouthed the words "f*** you."

A few minutes later, the father walked passed our table and stuck his finger up at us. By then, the entire cafe was watching on. I said to my partner that we should leave, now.

A waitress, who regularly serves us, came over and asked if we were OK - it wasn't the first time this family had been told to do something about their child.

"That child is a problem child," she said. "She is always crying. Customers have told the family this before." After apologising, she said that the cafe is often caught in the middle of these situations but can't really say anything.

The experience really rattled us and got me thinking. What would I have done if that was my child, did my partner make the right call? Should we treat children in the same way as you would anything else that compromises others' peace - and should the cafe have stepped in at some point?

Do we even have a right to comment on others' parenting?