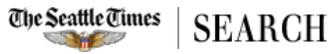




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Living: Saturday, August 18, 2007

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We're all behaving badly

By **Stephanie Dunnewind**
Seattle Times staff writer

Parents have always been on the receiving end of nasty looks when kids throw temper tantrums in public. But anecdotally, complaints about unruly kids *and* snotty bystanders seem to be on the uprise.

Are kids more ill-behaved, or are other people just less tolerant these days? Experts say the answer may be yes to both.

Here are some possible reasons for increased conflict:

Less civilized society. "In my opinion, children and grown-ups are, in general, less polite and less considerate than in the past," said Corinne Gregory, president of Bellevue-based The **PoliteChild**. With many adults — not just parents — acting rudely, children have negative role models.

More information. With hundreds of parenting books, magazines and Web sites, parents are overloaded with often-conflicting advice. Adherents to one approach may frown on other styles, either out of insecurity or a sense of superiority.

Internet support groups and parenting blogs feed this judgment free-for-all, where parents are often blasted by "sanctimmies" (or daddies). The Washington Post, for example, recently started requiring visitors to register before they can comment on its work-family "On Balance" blog (blog.washingtonpost.com/onbalance). A post last month called the "anonymous nastiness" counterproductive to discussion.

Changing lifestyles. Some cite "cool" parents who want kids to like them so much, they fail to enforce rules. "Parents have to show children there are boundaries and limits to their behavior," Gregory said.

Many families are busy with work and activities, leaving everyone stressed out. "Our culture of dashing here and there is particularly hard on some kids," said Lynne Reeves Griffin, author of "Negotiation Generation."

More child-free adults. The percentage of households with at least one child under 18 dropped from nearly half in 1960 to about a third in 2000, according to The National Marriage Project's analysis of census data. That percentage is projected to keep falling, to 28 percent by 2010. The Project's 2006 report decried a "cultural devaluation of child rearing" that has left parents facing a society that "is indifference at best, and hostile, at worst, to those who are caring for the next generation."

Nationally, an Illinois city gained media attention for limiting part of its milelong beach to those age 21 and up. A Chicago restaurant keeps a grown-ups only room. Incidents of families getting kicked off airplanes have prompted calls from business fliers and parents for designated family sections on flights.

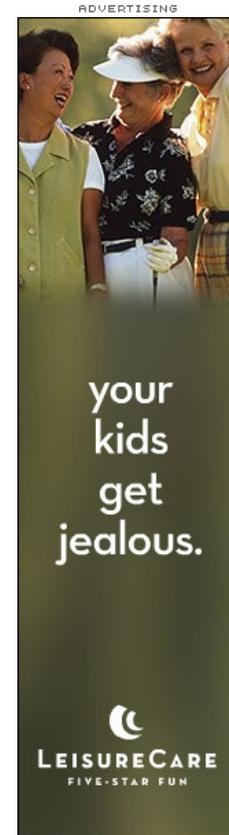
"As a society, we have less leisure time, and when we do get it, we want to relax," said parent educator Bridgett Blackburn. "We don't want someone else's child interfering with it."

Parents admit they used to judge, too, BK (before kids). "I tend to not go to restaurants too much, as I get tired of that look you get from other patrons," said Kathryn Harrison, a mom of two. "They try to hide it but it is there, and I recognize it because I invented that look before I had children."

Stephanie Dunnewind, Seattle Times staff reporter

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