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Have you ever been embarrassed by your child's behavior in public? My first embarrassing episode involved my toddler throwing himself to the floor in a department store in Berlin, Germany and pitching one dandy temper tantrum. Fortunately, this only happened once.

But today we are inundated with bratty kids in public.

We have parents who take the children out to eat and let the children run between the tables or climb around in the booth disturbing other diners. Even when we wait to dine until late, there are often parents there with children who really should be in bed; children who are cranky and disruptive. Or sometimes the parents take too long over after-dinner conversations and the children get bored and restless.

Or parents who take the kids to a movie and haven't taught them to be quiet.

Or parents who let their children run unsupervised through a store and play hide and seek or tag, or damage the merchandise.

And parents who can't control their child's displays of temper when the child doesn't get what he wants.

It appears that some parents just don't care what their children do in public. I was once in a department store during a particularly hectic sale event. Several customers waited patiently for the one harried clerk to get to them. One young mother also waited while her two children - around 7 and 9 years old - jumped up and down on the bedding displays. She seemed oblivious to their behavior.

I turned to the elderly lady next to me and asked, "Why is she letting her children jump on that display?" It immediately occurred to me that I was asking the wrong person, so I turned to the mother, "Why are you letting your children jump on that display?"

She looked at me in disbelief. People rarely confront others in public for rude or otherwise obnoxious behavior like that. I think I was onto something. "They're not hurting anything," she replied.

"Yes, they are," I insisted, "Someone is going to have to fix that display that they messed up."

She looked at me like I was some kind of weirdo, "They're not hurting anything."

I didn't stop. "What if they fall off and get hurt? Are you going to sue the store?"

"They won't get hurt," she said.

"Do you let your children jump on the furniture at home?" I asked.

She kept insisting that they weren't hurting anything.

"But this doesn't belong to them and it wasn't meant to be jumped on." I knew these clerks weren't allowed to say anything to customers when their kids acted up in the store, but nothing was stopping me.

The mother, finally embarrassed and out of answers, quickly gathered her kids and left the department.

Two elderly ladies turned to me and said, "I wanted to say that . . . I'm so glad you said it." I'm glad I did, too. It needed saying. The clerk confirmed that she wasn't allowed to confront the mother. She was relieved that I had said something.

Many aspects of what is considered acceptable public behavior is based on societal pressure to conform. When parents are not held accountable by others for their children's public

behavior, there is no incentive to make the children behave.

It is very hard, as parents, to expect our children to exhibit proper public behavior, when society doesn't encourage it. When indifferent parents allow their children to misbehave in public, it undermines the efforts of conscientious parents.

Have you ever wanted to say something to somebody when their children are acting badly in public? There's no need to suffer that behavior in silence. If the parents are going to allow their children to inflict their misbehavior on you, you have every right to comment on it. Sometimes, silence isn't golden.