

My dear friend, I don't like your child

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"It's a shattering reality when the offspring don't hit it off. Or, in some cases, the kids get along fine but aggravate the crap out of me" ... Kylie Orr

Having children invites a whole new world of people into your social circle, and they're often not the first people you'd associate with by choice. Mother's groups, playgroups, swimming lessons, childcare, preschool and school: a treasure trove of opportunities to make friends, both for yourself and your children.

I've met some amazing friends thanks to my children, people I visualise will be in my life well beyond these early years. I also have friends from my life before children, who have reproduced at the same time as me. It's exciting to imagine how much fun our offspring will have growing up together. There exists the utopian ideal: our friends' children becoming our own children's besties.

So it's a shattering reality when the offspring don't hit it off. Or, in some cases, the kids get along fine but aggravate the crap out of me, laxative style.

The dilemma used to have me lying awake at night, analysing why the kids didn't get along, or why they irritated me so much, and what impact that would have on my friendships. I used to wonder how I could adore an adult but despise their brood. My husband suggested that perhaps the children weren't annoying but that I was simply annoyed. I disregarded that with the disdain it deserved, but secretly wondered if I was indeed easily irritated by Other People's Kids (OPKs).

One friend had a child who was very physical compared to my eldest son, who was a quiet mouse of a thing. That little mouse is now a beautiful, sensitive, kind nine-year-old, and I look back with horror on the times I subjected him to a child who would donk him over the head with a giant Tonka Truck for fun, only to have the mother laugh as a way to "toughen up" my son. On all other levels, this friend and I gelled: we had similar interests and humour, and our friendship was a well-oiled machine. We did not, however, share the same parenting values. I persisted in the hope the child would grow out of his violent behaviour, but in the end the trauma my son showed if I even mentioned a visit just wasn't worth the pain.

Four children later, I know better. I would never tolerate that behaviour now. Instead, I would have an honest conversation with my friend; if there were no improvements, the friendship would have been placed on hold, indefinitely.

In the early days of parenting, I was desperate to get out of the house and break up those long days with adult company. Sociable and confident in new situations, I was happy to organise a catch up with someone I'd just met. Unfortunately these new associations didn't always pan out for the best.

A newly acquainted mother came over for coffee when our children were little. My young baby was finally asleep, after much wrangling, which I mentioned as the new friend walked in with her rambunctious girls, aged three and one. I was hoping the mother would remind her eldest daughter that she needed to play quietly. Hope on, sister. The three-year-old shrieked around the house, never quite sitting down to concentrate on any single activity. I tried the p*ssweak "Brittany, could you please use your inside voice? The baby's sleeping." Instead she just ramped it up, increasing her high-pitched tones outside the baby's room. She peaked when she lay on the floor outside his room, kicking the wall repeatedly. Yes, kicking. The baby woke before I had a chance to stop her, and the mother barely moved an inch to discipline her child. Our get-togethers promptly ceased.

I've never had an aversion to conflict – in fact, I'm ordinarily quite confrontational. But for some reason, when I'm around OPKs who are driving me

to despair, I can't bear to raise my voice. I don't want to be the mean one, and I feel it's not my place, but their parents'. Unfortunately, it seems that some parents check out when they check in to a friend's house, ignoring their child's bad behaviour. Perhaps it's simply a clash of values and parenting styles and a distinct disparity of tolerance levels (on my part).

When the children don't get along but the parents do, it can cause some serious friction; some people find the challenge too difficult and let friendships slide. As I age, I realise mourning friendships is extreme when I can catch up with these friends as peers, rather than as parents (that is, in non-kid-friendly hours): meeting for drinks, movies, girls' nights in, all the things we used to do before we had children, minus the angst of kids not getting along.

Of course, some friendships will fall victim to natural attrition when we become parents, and that's perfectly okay. Lives change, people move on, needs alter. For friendships that we want to have endure the cliff face of parenthood, we can teach children that parents are people too, people who have friendships that we value and nurture. As a result, our children sometimes need to suck it up and just deal with it if they don't like the children of those friends (I'm not oblivious to that little lesson myself). I think it's imperative that children learn they're not the epicentre of the universe, and that sometimes they have to tolerate a less-than-enjoyable experience because it benefits someone else.

I don't, however, think that forcing friendships on our children because it works for us is ever very successful – particularly if our children are left with bruises to show for it.

How have your friendships been affected by children – both your own and other people's? How do you deal with OPKs you aren't fond of? Read what others have said on the [Essential Baby forum](#), or comment below.

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