

Restaurant's New Rule: No Kidding!

By Reg P. Wydeven
August 13, 2011

When our kids were babies, my wife and I would love to get out of the house and go out to eat. One such night my wife had a hankering for some broiled haddock at a local supper club, so we loaded up the kids and headed out.

When we arrived, the hostess seated us in a back corner, presumably for a romantic, intimate dinner. After asking for a high chair and booster seat, we were told they had neither. It was at that point I deduced that we were secluded in a corner so everyone *else* could have a romantic, intimate dinner.

It turned out the hostess made a pretty logical move. Because you couldn't color on the placemats and their meals didn't come with a toy, our kids got a little antsy. Knowing all too well that fussiness follows antsy-ness, we wolfed down our meals and fled before the kids disrupted anyone else's meal.

We were never made to feel unwelcome, however, we got the distinct impression that bringing the kids to the supper club was not a great idea. Well, Mike Vuick, owner of McDain's Restaurant in the Pittsburgh suburb of Monroeville, has done more than made kids feel unwelcome at his establishment: he banned them altogether.

Vuick sent an email to his regulars informing them of the policy banning children under the age of 7 would go into effect on July 16, 2011. He claims the policy was implemented in response to customer complaints. Vuick opened McDain's, which he describes as "upscale casual," in 2002 and insists that young children have been an escalating problem. He believes, however, that the problem isn't so much the kids, but rather their parents.

Vuick explains that the problem is "a three-part issue." The first, he says, is "the increasing number of small babies that can't be controlled. They can't be quiet and really they can't be expected to."

The second issue is kindergarten-aged kids who "have shown increasingly poor manners." Finally, Vuick claims the children's parents are not controlling their loud kids and who "act like we're the ones being offensive" when staff members ask them to calm their children down. He feels that, "parents have gradually diminished their cooperation."

According to Vuick, the response has been overwhelmingly positive. He claims to have received hundreds of emails in support of the ban. A few parents, though, who frequent the restaurant are upset about the policy. Vuick doesn't understand their objections, stating, "If I had children of these ages I would never contemplate taking them to this place," adding "we've never even had a children's menu." Vuick is not the first restaurateur in the country to forbid kids. Top Chef contestant, Dale Levitsky, banned kids from brunch at his restaurant.

While it is illegal to discriminate based on age, it's only against individuals *over* the age of 40 – not kids under the age of 7. Several state and federal laws prevent discrimination against certain protected classes, including race, color, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. Children, however, do not fall under one of these protected classes, therefore, McDain's anti-kid policy is perfectly legal.

I just hope Butch's Pizza never bans children. If they do, though, my kids can wait in the car. After all, I eat pretty fast.