

## Kids' Corner *Writer FYI*

# Look Who's Coming to Dinner

Tips for taking the kids out to eat with little fuss

WAITERS SHRINK FROM YOU. HOSTESSES SEAT YOU IN THE FAR CORNER BY THE KITCHEN. BAD MANNERS? No, just another night out with the kids. Whether two months or 10 years old, children create special challenges for parents—and restaurant staff—when taken out to eat. If you plan right, though, dining out can be a satisfying experience for everyone, even that petrified waiter.



### set kids up for success

**Choosing the right restaurant** is your first challenge. Look for a place that is kid friendly, which isn't to say you should head straight for a theme joint with games and pizza. A restaurant doesn't have to have a jungle gym to be fit for kids: Pick a place with a children's menu or one that offers crayons or other enticements when you walk in. This at least indicates that children are welcome and that staff will be trained to accommodate them.

Noise level is important to consider. Your kids may disturb the peace in a romantic bistro where you could hear a pin drop, but they may also self-destruct in one of the new breed of airstrip-loud restaurants. In addition, make sure you choose a place where the tables are widely spaced. That way the noise from chattering children at your table won't affect your neighbors, and it will be easier to catch runaway kids before they

cause havoc at the next table. (Booths are a great choice if you need to pen in little ones with a will to roam.)

Also, timing is key. Go early, before the rush, and make a reservation as opposed to walking in and hoping for the best. This will cut down on waiting time, when kids tend to run amok. As in life, your family has only one chance to make a first impression on the staff. If your kids' pre-meal behavior gives them low expectations, your service may reflect this.

Never take your kids to a restaurant when they are ravenous. Breaking this cardinal rule is a surefire way to elicit bad behavior. For the little ones, bring a snack to keep them busy (crackers, Cheerios, carrot sticks, or apples) and for older kids, ask for a bread basket immediately. Another way to circumvent the hungry crazies is to order an appetizer (ask which one requires the least preparation time) right away for the table.

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