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## On the Spot: Where to change a child's diaper on an airplane

**A couple changes a 2-year-old's diaper at their seats in first class instead of in the bathroom. What's appropriate?**

By Catharine Hamm, Los Angeles Times

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Question: I recently flew first class from Orlando, Fla., to Los Angeles. There was a couple with a little girl, maybe 2 years old, and the kid screeched the whole time. The parents never showed her a picture book, gave her toys or did anything to distract her. I could have ignored the screeching, but when they changed her diaper, the whole first class filled with an unpleasant stench. As a mom and grandma, I felt this was disgusting. Maybe there should be a rule that kids needs to be changed in the toilet area. What's your take on this?

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Answer: The Federal Aviation Administration doesn't have a rule on where diaper changing should occur, only when — and the when is when the seat belt sign is off. If an airline has no regulation (check websites), it is up to the parent.

In thinking about this question, I tried to ignore the fact that the parents seemed less than attentive (or, said another way, dumber than a bag of hammers) by not addressing their child's needs for comfort and entertainment during a cross-country flight. Does their lack of parenting skills also assume a lack of manners?

Possibly, although their choice may reflect the difficulty of changing a child in an airplane restroom.

April Masini, who writes the relationship advice column "Ask April" and is the author of four books, agrees that the restroom is the place. But, she adds, "This is not for beginners. Airplane bathrooms are too small for even Clark Kent to become Superman."

Masini says the change requires "level-two yoga techniques," never mind the skills required for "Olympics-level origami." When your task is completed, "Emerge from bathroom and raise your hands in victory (somehow you got the baby into a sling so your hands are free) having completed the task in under three minutes so the line of folks waiting for the restroom will applaud, smile and wish all parents had babies like yours." If that doesn't work, she says, "Change the baby on the seat and write a letter to the airline asking how they expect you to change your baby during a cross-country or transatlantic flight without stops."

"Complain to the airline," says Masini, who doesn't have children, "not the mother."

Susan Kuczarski, author of books about parenting and families and the mother of three sons, says, "All parents must go to the plane bathroom and use either the top of the sink area, or a less favorable location, the top of the toilet with seat down, of course. While this is not easy, nor optimal, it is the only spot on the airplane that is acceptable."

For diapering her children (who are now 28, 26 and nearly 22), Kuczarski favored the top of the sink, using a changing pad (a folding affair that fits into a diaper bag).

"Life and etiquette have not changed since the time when my three sons were small."

Both authors make excellent points, noting that moms have enough challenges without passengers piling on to point out their deficiencies. If you do decide to say something, be kind.

But the real gist of this situation may be this: Good manners are good manners, or, to quote Alfred Tennyson, "For manners are not idle, but the fruit of loyal nature and of noble mind." Which leads to this question: As fliers, really as citizens of the world, have we lost our mind?

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