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Is it Okay Not to Invite Young Children to Your Wedding or Special Event?

By [CNE](#)

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Is it acceptable to have a wedding or special event and not invite the young children of a close friend or family member? Debi Lewis says that excluding kids from an event sets a certain tone and has consequences for your relationship with the hosts. Lisa Sadikman argues that it's the hosts' choice full stop, the world doesn't revolve around your children.

It's Not Okay That You Didn't Invite My Baby to Your Wedding

By Debi Lewis

In the swirling cold of a winter fourteen years ago, my husband and I called all of our closest family members to announce joyfully that we were expecting our first child at the end of May: the first baby on both sides.

After the news sunk in, I received a phone call from my brother's fiancé. I liked her and the way she and my brother had fallen for each other. Their romance was lovely, and their engagement quick. I'd only met her a few times, but my brother sounded so happy and talked about her so much that I felt like I knew her. Their wedding was planned for the end of June, and she'd asked me to be a bridesmaid. She called me at work and asked if I had time to talk about something.

"I want to offer you some help," she said. "When you come for the wedding, I know the baby will be so little...I wanted to offer to help you find a good babysitter." In the moment, I didn't understand. It was my first baby; the idea of a babysitter had not even occurred to me, and so, at first, I considered it: *did I want one?* And then, I had my very first intense parental instinct, and it whispered insistently inside my head: *hell no.*

"That is so sweet of you, Carrie*," I answered, "but I can't imagine wanting a babysitter. The baby will be nearly brand new! My brother said you'll be inviting my mother-in-law, which is fantastic. I'll just ask her to hold the baby during the ceremony. I think that should be fine."

Carrie paused, and then said: “Well, we’re not really *having* children at the wedding.”

I know now, years later, that the topic of whether babies or young kids *should* be allowed at weddings has been debated ad nauseam. There are dozens of articles that take each side of the question, and then hundreds more that analyze the merits of setting a cut-off age, hiring a babysitter, inviting children to the party but not the service or the service but not the party, and every other permutation of making a wedding work for families that include children.

When Carrie told me that they weren’t having *children* at their wedding, my stunned response was that I wouldn’t be bringing a *child*, I’d be bringing a baby. That baby would not be able to cry loud enough to be heard from behind a sanctuary door, or run up the aisle and grab flower petals, or throw food at the reception. That baby would be nestled against me in a sling or sleeping in someone’s arms. I could not for the life of me understand how that newborn baby—who would be whisked away by my mother-in-law if she made any noise—posed a threat to the success of her wedding. But after a while, the real reason the baby wasn’t invited emerged: the bride did not want to “compete” with it.

While I believe that the bride and groom are the stars of the day, the idea that a baby might usurp that stardom says much more about the wedding couple than it does about the baby in question. There are many solutions to the concern about interruptions and distractions potentially posed by a child at a wedding: a frank conversation with the parents about the amount of noise the bride and groom will tolerate; a relative or friend poised to take a crying or fussing kid out of earshot; or, if none of those is possible, the suggestion that the child only be present for portions of the celebration where their noise won’t be noticed. If distraction is the main concern, that is easily managed.

To be clear, I accept that it is the wedding couple’s prerogative. If the question under consideration is, “Does etiquette allow for a couple to invite only adults to their wedding?” the answer is yes. It *allows* for a bride and groom to invite only the people they want to invite. If, however, the question is, “Is this decision likely to affect your relationship with the parents whose children you are excluding?” the answer is also, unequivocally, yes.

There are as many acceptable ways to get married or stage an event as there are people who stage them, but none is without consequences. The consequence of not inviting a guest’s children is that the guest is likely to feel their children are unwelcome—both at the event and, to some degree, in the hearts of the hosts. Parents might welcome an opportunity to leave their children at home, but an invitation for the entire family allows the parents themselves to make that choice. Being forced to decide between an occasion and one’s children is something a parent will never forget, and that parent will remember the hosts as the ones who forced the decision. For more casual relationships, maybe this doesn’t matter. For close family, it probably does.

No matter how acceptable the decision made by my brother and his wife was according to the rules of etiquette, there is no getting around the tone they set. This applies to any couple at their wedding; when they choose to exclude the children in their extended family, the wedding ceases to be a celebration of their two families joining together. It is not the prelude to a life of messy beauty and generosity. While it is a performance that they have every right to choreograph, the way they do so sends a message about their priorities.

When I remember my brother's wedding, I don't remember the beautiful ceremony, the joy on the bride's face, or the love with which my brother must have given her their first kiss as husband and wife. I remember the bride's grandmother coming to me at the reception and grabbing my hands. "Where is that new baby?" she demanded. "Why didn't you bring her!?"

I steeled myself, my breasts aching, and answered. "She wasn't invited."

**This name has been changed.*

Debi Lewis is the mother of two daughters and blogs regularly at swallowmysunshine.com. You can find her essays at Brain, Child Magazine, RoleReboot, Mamalode, The Mighty, Kveller, and ChicagoNow. She is currently at work on a memoir about her younger daughter's journey through medical mystery.