



## Baby Changing Blues: The Problem with Changing Stations

*Think about the last public restroom you were in. Did it have a baby changing station?*

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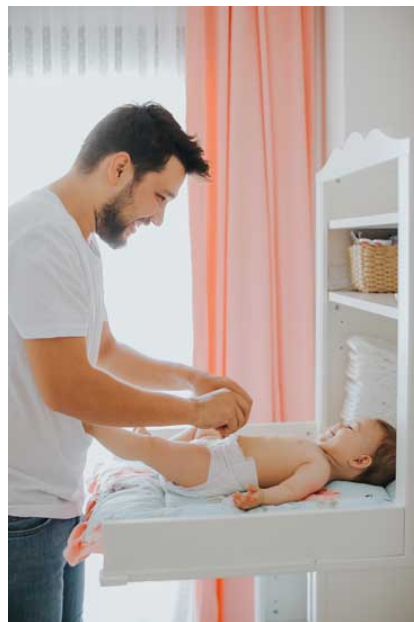


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## Battling It Out with Babies

*“I think it is strange that women’s restrooms have baby-changing tables, and so many men’s restrooms do not. I am a woman, so I have not seen many men’s restrooms, but*

*the few I've seen did not have changing tables. Don't men change diapers?" (Female, white, age 24, 5'2", 120 lb.)*

The design of most public restrooms does not work well for infants and toddlers and the parents who accompany them. Although babies' voices can be loud, their concerns have not yet resonated with rest-room designers and building-code officials. Diaper-changing stations installed in restrooms are a step in the right direction. Yet many parents find the location, design, and maintenance of these stations to be problematic.

Babies' diapers may need to be changed ten or more times a day. An infant needs to be changed about every two hours; a one- to three-year-old, about every three to four hours. If their diapers are not changed in a timely manner, children may develop diaper rash, infections, and other health problems.

Some diaper-changing stations are located in stalls designated for people with disabilities, while others are outside the stalls. When families occupy the accessible stall for purposes of changing diapers, it's inaccessible to people with disabilities who may need it. As one mother explained: "I feel guilty, so I leave the door open if I can. That way if someone needs it, I can see them and apologize."

Not all stalls for people with disabilities accommodate strollers or multiple users. As one mother put it, "I've had three of my kids in the stall with me at once."

Some changing stations work well for babies but not for toddlers. One mother complained of the changing station in the ladies' rest-room at a local toy store. The surface was large enough only for a tiny baby, but her young son had already outgrown it. "His head was not supported," she explained. "If my husband were allowed inside, he could cradle the child's head while I was changing the diaper, but instead he had to wait outside."

Adequate space is rarely provided for all the accessories carried in bulky diaper bags, such as extra diapers, wipes, creams, changes of clothes, and a clean changing pad to spread out on the changing surface. So if the bag is hard to access, the process becomes a juggling act.

For parents of twins or triplets, all the above problems are compounded. Oversize strollers are even more awkward to maneuver in tight restroom designs. Changing diapers and getting toddlers and small children to "go potty" becomes a major ordeal.

While serving as chair of the Chancellor's Committee on the Status of Women (CCSW) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, I led an effort to document the numbers of diaper-changing stations and lactation spaces across campus. Our building operation service workers collected data for us during their shifts cleaning campus restrooms. At that time, in 2003, our campus had 1,875 restrooms, and we were able to study many of them, but not all. Our final report

showed that of the 1,221 restrooms observed, only thirty-six had diaper-changing stations. Fifteen of these were men's rooms, and twenty-three were women's rooms.

Years later, as co-chair of our provost's Gender Equity Council, I led the effort to develop a checklist of gender- and family-friendly public restroom standards to be used by our campus's Facilities and Services Department during new construction and building renovations. We evaluated the extent to which restrooms in our campus's most public buildings, including those at the alumni center, the recreation centers, the student union, the museums, and the performing arts center, were gender- and family-friendly. We found that only about half these buildings had well-placed changing tables, if they had them at all, and none had retractable child protection seats to accommodate a second child. Even the newest facilities surveyed didn't meet the standards set out in our Gender Equity Council Design Checklist.

One of my graduate students, Muhammad Taimur, a father of two young children, shared my interest in diaper-changing stations because he and his wife, Sana, were facing this problem every day. He worked with me to study this issue both on and off campus. We found that twelve years after the CCSW study, out of over 1,880 restrooms on campus, only forty (2 percent) had diaper-changing stations.

Muhammad, Sana, and I teamed up to study nearby restaurants, eateries, and coffee shops frequented by students and their families. They took turns photographing men's and women's restrooms and interviewed each store owner or manager. Of the sixty-eight dining establishments they visited, only nine (13 percent) had diaper-changing stations, of which four, representing national chains like McDonald's and Panera Bread, had changing stations in both men's and women's rooms. Three were in unisex restrooms, and two were only in women's rooms. Fifty-nine establishments (87 percent) had no changing station at all.

In California, the state legislature with broad support approved two Potty Parity for Parents Acts bills that would have modified existing state laws to ensure that public places such as movie theaters and shopping malls installed diaper-changing tables in both men's and women's restrooms. But, in 2014, Governor Jerry Brown vetoed them both, stating, "At a time when so many have raised concerns about the number of regulations in California, I believe it would be more prudent to leave the matter of diaper changing stations to the private sector."

In 2015, Ashton Kutcher, a new dad, and star of the sitcom *Two and a Half Men*, brought widespread attention to this issue when he launched a Change.org campaign and posted on his Facebook page: "There are NEVER diaper changing stations in men's public rest-rooms. The first men's room that I go into that has one gets a free shout out on my FB page! #BeTheChange," Two days later, nearly 215,000 people had liked his post.

# Defined by DESIGN

The Surprising Power  
of Hidden Gender,  
Age, and Body Bias  
in Everyday Products  
and Places



KATHRYN H. ANTHONY

Foreword by Eric Schmidt, Executive Chairman and  
Former Chief Executive Officer, Google

Cover courtesy of Prometheus Books

Just one month later, New York State Senator Brad Hoylman introduced a bill requiring public buildings and other places of public accommodation to include changing stations in men's rest-rooms if they exist in women's restrooms. Hoylman, who has a young daughter with his husband, David Sigal, believes the double standard is "an anachronism that reflects the bias toward women being the caregiver. . . . That's simply not the case today. In addition to same sex couples of men and men in heterosexual couples, there are also a lot of single male parents out there too." Because of the lack of changing tables in men's rooms, the two dads were often forced to change their daughters' diapers on bathroom floors, in hallways, and even outside in parking lots. As of 2016, it appears the bill remained in committee and was not voted upon.

In 2016, US Representative David Cicilline of Rhode Island introduced H.R. 5147 at the federal level "to amend title 40, United States Code, to require that male and female restrooms in public buildings be equipped with baby changing facilities" what became known as the "Bathrooms Accessible in Every Situation (BABIES) Act." The term "baby changing facility" refers to a table or other device suitable for changing the diaper of a child age three or under. The bill, which passed the House and Senate in September and was signed into law by President Obama on October 7, 2016, applies to restrooms in publicly accessible federal buildings, those constructed, altered, or acquired by the Public Building Service of the General Services Administration. It goes into effect in October 2017. Not covered by the law are public buildings in general, such as movie theaters, shopping malls, and restaurants. Exceptions are also made for public building restrooms that are not available or accessible for public use; restrooms in public buildings that have conspicuous signage indicating where a restroom with a diaper-changing station is located on the same floor; and if new construction would be required to install the diaper-changing station and the construction cost would be "unfeasible."