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BA says men cannot sit with lone children

BY LEWIS SMITH

BRITISH AIRWAYS apologised yesterday to a business executive who said he felt humiliated when a stewardess asked him to move because he had sat next to two unaccompanied children. The stewardess told him it was company policy to ban men from sitting with unaccompanied children.

The executive, who works for a head-hunting firm but asked not to be named, said: "The plane wasn't full so I moved to be closer to two of my colleagues. I barely noticed the children. I was upset and embarrassed when I was asked to move. I felt I was being singled out and that I was being accused of something."

Neither of the two children, both aged about 13, had made any complaint to the flight crew and the businessman had not spoken to them.

A spokeswoman for British Airways said flight crew and ticket staff were under instructions to keep men away from unaccompanied children wherever possible because of the dangers of paedophiles. She said the policy was a guideline rather than a rule because it was not always possible to seat children separately. The airline would not, for example, refuse to sell a ticket to a male if the only remaining seats were next to unaccompanied children.

British Airways regretted any offence that may have been caused: "We would like to apologise if we caused him any embarrassment but we have to balance the needs of the children against those of the adult. We certainly wouldn't want any of our customers to feel embarrassed and we certainly wouldn't want to cause anyone offence.

"We introduced the policy . . . in response to customers asking us to make sure their children are not seated next to men. We were responding to a fear of sexual assaults. "We have to try to ensure that the children are in the safest possible place. It's done with the best of intentions."

Virgin Atlantic Airways has no company policy barring men from sitting next to children flying alone but flight crew are urged to use discretion and common sense.

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