



Apartment noise and how to be a good neighbour

For many people moving to Copenhagen it may be the first time living in an apartment building or at least for a long while. Generally people in the UK live in houses and for many a family home will be significantly larger than a family apartment in a European capital city, especially in Copenhagen.

Most apartments in the central parts of the city will be at least a hundred years old and with that comes the inevitability of noise.

A standard turn of the century apartments buildings will have eight apartments, two on each floor coming off a main stairway with a second back staircase to the yard. This narrow stairway was generally used by domestic staff in more affluent apartments and as an access to the outside privy (which thank goodness in most buildings is a thing of the past).

In the first building we lived in I can honestly say that we heard very little noise from our neighbours. Sometimes the little children downstairs crying in the morning, the lady upstairs doing her exercise DVD (infrequently) and some noise on the stairs. As our bathrooms were separated by a wall there was the feeling that a personal boundary was being crossed if your neighbour was using their bathroom at the same time. Once we had our son I was conscious that we were contributing a little more, less social, noise but our neighbours, then as now, were very relaxed about what they termed 'family noise'. As one said children are not noisy forever plus children are generally in bed early and the noise ceases but if you are the kind of people who have loud obnoxious parties that is a lifestyle choice you are unlikely to grow out of.

I believe that there is an element of managing your expectations about how much noise you will hear from your neighbours — moderate footfall, children scampering around, the rumble of a TV or music, children's voices and playing sounds, the occasional raised voices, water noises and the occasional intimate acts would be norm but all should be generally bearable. You will be undoubtedly be contributing a similar level of noise yourself. One friend had her downstairs neighbour complain in the daytime that he could hear her two-year old running about — to me that is the downside of apartment living that you need to get on with and some slack needs to be given, after all she won't be two forever.



The place we now live in, from our floor downwards, has normal considerate neighbours — families with children of varying ages, an old man, a middle-aged lady and some slightly geeky male Master's students. But hit the top floors and it is more like a frat house at times. Loud parties well after the agreed house rules times and when asked to turn down the music at 5am our immediate neighbours upstairs felt they could negotiate how loud it could be!

It is a hard thing to tackle. There are house rules that the owners of the apartments see when buying the property but there are no real sanctions if these rules are broken. In general in Denmark these rules are not excessive — simply don't make noise after a reasonable hour. You have to assume the rules are passed onto tenants. If tenants are causing the problems you can contact the owners if you can and complain and it is up to them to deal with it. Sometimes just pointing out the noise is unacceptable can work as people may genuinely not realise how loud they are.

HOW TO BE A GOOD NEIGHBOUR

To me there are obvious things you can do to remain a good neighbour

- If you have wooden floors don't wear heavy shoes indoors.
- Don't run your washing machine late in the evening especially if you use a fast cycle.
- Don't put your speakers on the floor as the sound reverberates.
- Move your bed away from the wall so any bedroom activities is not too intrusive to others.
- Try to instil into kids that too much stamping about it not good but remember they are still just kids.
- If you think your TV or music seem loud in your room, it probably can be heard by your neighbours
- If you plan to have a party let your neighbours know in plenty of time, let them know when you plan to finish and turn down the volume at the time specified in your house rules.
-

None of these things will really impact on your daily life but make you a much better neighbour.

In a culture where people expect to be told if their actions are causing a problem but there is a trust that people will live in a considerate way to others, tackling anti social noise can be a troubling issue.