

# Stop Overindulging Your Children

Jill Rigby

What do your children really *need* from you? Love, guidance, shelter, food, clothing, medical care, and an education.

That's it.

Everything else is a *want*, a luxury: video games, iPods, cell phones, the latest fashion—whatever new item their friends have.

Today, far too many parents fall for the “nag factor.” They know their kids are bombarded by ads telling them to buy certain products and that many parents are buying those products for their children. They know the pressure that comes from their children's peers, and so they buy their kids far more “stuff” than they can even use, all in the hope that their children will fit in and be accepted by their peers.

According to a recent survey of youth commissioned by the Center for a New American Dream, the average 12- to 17-year-old who asks a parent for products will ask nine times until the parents finally give in. For parents of tweens, the problem is particularly severe—more than 10 percent of 12- to 13-year-olds admit to asking their parents more than 50 times for products they've seen advertised. Kids have learned if they nag enough for long enough, parents will give in.

Parents, stop falling for the nag factor.

## **Refuse to overindulge your kids**

Sadly, our self-absorbed society has told parents to help their kids feel good about themselves, that it's the parents' duty to make their children happy. But underneath it all, kids don't need parents who make them happy. They need parents who will make them capable.

Dr. Connie Dawson, co-author of *How Much Is Enough*, writes:

“When parents give children too much stuff that costs money, do things for children that they can do for themselves, do not expect children to do chores, do not have good rules and let children run the family, parents are overindulging.”

Here are some other signs of overindulgence. As you read them, watch for your weak spot:

*1. Giving them things or experiences that are not appropriate for their age or their interests:*

- Allowing a five-year-old to dress like a pop star.
- Allowing a twelve-year-old to watch an R-rated movie.
- Removing curfew from a sixteen-year-old with a new driver's license.

2. *Giving things to meet the adult's needs, not the child's:*

- A mom buying her daughter the trendiest clothes, because Mom believes it's a reflection on her own style.
- A dad giving his son the "stand out" wheels at sixteen, so Dad's friends—as well as his son's friends—will think he's "the man."
- A parent giving his or her children the best of the best in order to make the parent look successful.

3. *Neglecting to teach children the life skills they need to survive in the "real" world beyond their home:*

- Tying shoes and dressing four-year-olds who are perfectly capable of dressing themselves.
- Doing the laundry for teenagers who are more than capable and need to learn to do it for themselves.

I admit that I slipped into overindulgence in raising my sons in more than one area. It's important to realize the harm this can do to our children. According to one study conducted in 2001, children who are overindulged are more likely to grow up to believe the following:

- It is difficult to be happy unless one looks good, is intelligent, rich, and creative.
- My happiness depends on most people I know liking me.
- If I fail partly, it is as bad as being a total failure.
- I can't be happy if I miss out on many of the good things in life.
- Being alone leads to unhappiness.
- If someone disagrees with me, it probably indicates that the person doesn't like me.
- My happiness depends more on other people than it depends on me.
- If I fail at my work, I consider myself a failure as a person.

So, for the sake of your children, stop overindulging them.

Instead, teach them the difference between a need and a want, and then make them work for their wants. For instance, rather than buying that new video game for your children, give them two options: Tell them they can place it on a wish list for a birthday or Christmas present, or they can do extra duties to earn the money to buy it themselves. If your children are willing to work for their "heart's desire," they'll take better care of it, be more grateful for it, and think long and hard before turning a "want" into a "need" in the future.

## Repairing the damage of overindulgence

Parents, you can begin to remedy the damage done by overindulgence by doing two things:

*1. Help your kids cultivate patience.* The truth is parents often *prevent* their children from learning patience. We've gotten just as caught up in our fast-food society as anyone else. We've forgotten that real life problems aren't solved in fifteen minutes, that it takes time to find solutions to everyday struggles. We're the ones who try to speed things up for our kids.

So don't be so quick to solve your children's problems for them. A bit of a struggle is good for them.

*2. Give children opportunities to develop responsibility and to feel valuable.* Your children need your help if they are going to learn necessary life skills. They need you to give them regular chores or duties and to hold them accountable for taking care of those duties. In so doing, you will help your children become adults, not just grown-ups.

All children will at times engage in a power struggle when it comes to carrying out chores or duties. But if parents give in and don't assign age-appropriate duties for their children, their kids will grow up to be irresponsible, which is heartbreaking for the parent and tragic for the children. No matter the age of the child, any duties you assign them should encompass these purposes:

- Helping your child learn life skills.
- Helping your child become a valuable member of the family.
- Helping your child become a valuable member of society.

By giving your children opportunities to help and serve each other within the family, you're preparing them to take care of themselves and go out and serve society.

Now that I've asked you not to overindulge your kids with their wants, I want to encourage you to overindulge them with love, real love. Love that molds and shapes them into the young men and women they are meant to become. Patiently help them develop patience, and with persistence and persuasion give them age-appropriate responsibilities. As you do these things, you'll be preparing their hearts and minds to accept the responsibilities God has planned for them.

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