

Community Psychiatric Centers

E-PAMPHLET: THE OVERINDULGED CHILD

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In this e-pamphlet, we'll be targeting a subject of great interest to a number of parents that we see: how to manage the over-indulged child.

Do you find that your child, no matter what you give them, asks for more? For example, you prepare a breakfast for your child of pancakes that you think they might like but, after preparing it, they tantrum for waffles? Do you have a birthday party for your child, during which your child gets a number of wonderful presents, but at the end of the party they tantrum because they didn't get more.

Does your child think that you need to give into every whim no matter how difficult? If this is the case, you might be dealing with a child whom we call over-indulged. Over-indulged children are not born, they are created. Parents create children that are over-indulged by giving them an overabundance of what the child wants, but does not need.

However, it's not always the material things that lead to overindulgence. It

may be a permissive parental approach in which the child is allowed to read things not age-appropriate for them. It might also be over permissive and over protective of the child, not letting the child to grow and take charges on her own and do things on her own but, rather, doing everything for the child in a protective manner. We've seen a lot of children like these in our practice.

We've found that kids who are overindulged tend to grow-up to be oppositional. This is of course frustrating for the parent, and it's rather sad as well. Because the parent wants the child to be happy; they want what's best for their child, and yet the more they try, the more things turn out badly because their efforts are misguided. Consequently, the more they try, the worse things become.

Amazingly, it's counterintuitive; the more the parent gives to the child, the more the child wants and is ungrateful. It's a self-perpetuating cycle. If the parent takes a stand, usually the child knows, "if I tantrum, Mom or Dad will give-in." In that regard, it can be quite a challenge for the parent to finally stand firm, after years of over-indulging.

This problem can also be seen in places such as stores, with some children having temper tantrums and breakdowns when they don't get what they want. There is a sense of entitlement and mind-set of 'I deserve these sweets' or whatever the desired item may be. It can be quite embarrassing.

We've also found that the over-indulgence can be in terms of the relationship; parents acting as "friends" as opposed to a parent. Also, emotionally, there's a tendency to be overly doting and emotionally intrusive with the child. All of which tends to develop the tendency in the child to respond with anger, resentment, over-inflated self-esteem, as well as a loss of compassion for others.

The child grows up with a sense of entitlement. They develop this perspective not only regarding the relationship with their parents, but that the world should give them all the things they want. This can lead to having problems with friendships and, later, with dating and maintaining meaningful relationships.

Parents created the problem usually by having any number of irrational beliefs; that they cannot subject the child to any sense of pain or discomfort; in order to make the child happy, they must give him everything he wants; their child cannot be punished; and they cannot implement any consequence that involves discomfort. Of course, this is contrary to what happens in the real world. Children need to be disciplined appropriately and learn from their misbehavior and mistakes through logical consequences. In the absence of such discipline, much of the time you will end up with a child who is oppositional and defiant.

Another irrational belief of parents, which is targeted in treatment, is this tendency toward unconditional positive regard. Of course, such admiration and love is wonderful; however, these parents will demonstrate such positive regard no matter the behavior of the child; moreover, these parents see "love" as "giving" to the child and not carrying out discipline.

These parents tend to rationalize and "look the other way" rather than discipline.

It should also be noted that the extent of "over-indulging" a child is on a continuum. Most children are, at times, demanding and ungrateful; if parents respond accordingly then the child can move toward appreciation and cooperation. However, if such behavior is tolerated, or 'indulged', then demanding and ungrateful tendencies can worsen.

In treatment, parents come to understand that the child does not require constant comforting and they do not need to 'get what they want' all the time. It is taught that frustration is a useful and learning experience.

The treatment process begins with changing such irrational beliefs, which then fuels the parent making the necessary changes in discipline of their child. Moreover, in terms of treatment for these children and parents, the important thing is 'balance' between 'giving' and discipline. It's important for parents to not feel guilty for not giving the child everything they want. In that regard, a frequently repeated motto is that we, as parents, should give children everything that they need, but only a small portion of what they want.

Parents need help to understand that, by giving everything, the child only becomes more resentful rather than grateful. To help work on these changes, a combination of both individual and family therapy can be extremely effective, to support the family coming together and talking about these changes that need to be made within the family structure. The therapist also works to help the child be more reasonable, to improve coping strategies, and to enhance communication as opposed to tantrums. We have found that, with such support at Community Psychiatric, outcomes are quite positive.

Questions from Parents

We now have some questions to answer from parents:

"I'm trying to pull in the reins on my 10 year old. I think I've spoiled him through the years and now he thinks I should do everything for him. When I ask him to do a chore, he's defiant, and if I push, he tantrums. I am trying but things are not going well. What do you suggest?"

Hang in there, what you're experiencing is to be expected. This is the stage where

things can become quite taxing. When it gets rough, remember that your child expects you to fold. Have a plan of action, and stick to it. Please call us for help to firm-up that plan of action. Rely on action rather than words (avoid pestering and arguing). Our counselors will set-up a behavioral treatment program for you and your child to help you stick with the limits, and reward your child for self-control. This is the crossroads, but if he goes in the right direction, and you guide him through this successfully, it will positively influence the rest of his life. You can reach us at cpcwecare.com where you can get our phone number and addresses.

Hope you found this e-pamphlet to be helpful. Please call or email at cpcwecare.com with any questions or feedback.