

Are You Raising an Entitled Child?

The conversation around child rearing has turned to overindulgence, self-absorption, and entitlement. Is the generation just now hitting adulthood, overly entitled? Do young people feel that they can lay claim to whatever they fancy? Are parents raising children who feel that they need not earn what they want; be it good grades, possessions, skills or jobs? Do children respect authority?

Jeffrey Zaslow wrote an interesting article in the Wall Street Journal titled, "The Entitlement Epidemic: Who's Really to Blame," in which he discusses this topic and cites some speculative reasons why children feel so entitled. He notes three possible causes for the twenty-something generation's overly inflated sense of self: indulgent parenting, consumer culture and the self-esteem movement.

Is it okay for children to be self-absorbed and overly entitled?

In a survey taken of the over 35 set, the response to the above question was a unified and resolute, no. "It is mind numbingly boring to be with people totally self-absorbed, and working or living with the entitled is draining and depleting," exclaimed one participant.

So what is going on with parents? Do they see that by overindulging they are causing harm to their kids? How hard is it for parents to stop overindulging?

Now is a difficult time for parents to be raising children. The introduction of the Internet has allowed material into homes that the parents and children of just ten years ago did not have to contend with. My Space, You Tube, and other social networking sites encourage self-absorption. Children spend hours posting photos and descriptions of their daily minutiae. The me, me, me focus is further encouraged by television programs, commercials, print ads and movies that sexualize children, promote indiscriminate spending and value fame without talent. Kids emulate talent-less fame seekers like Paris Hilton. Children have learned that life is all about them, their looks, their needs, their wants. Clothing stores sell adult styles, like thongs, belly shirts and make-up to very young children, blurring the line between adult and child. Society has further compounded the problem by making it taboo for parents to discipline, teachers to grade and coaches to score for fear of damaging self-esteem. Every kick of a ball, small line drawing or block tower is lauded as genius in the eyes of today's parents.

How is this current paradigm of value to kids?

Get into the head of the college freshman with the inflated sense of self. If he was raised in a school system that refused to give real grades, where teachers got reprimanded by his parents for marking his papers with red pen, and where he played sports poorly but his parents told him he was a "superstar" so as not to damage his self-esteem: imagine his shock when he receives his first term paper in college covered in red pen with a big D at the top.

Imagine the dismay of the twenty-three year old job seeker who expects her entry-level salary to be that of an experienced expert. Out of college she runs up thousands and thousand of dollars in debt because she believes that she deserves things that she can't afford.

How does the mother feel who has worked like a dog to give her children everything that she didn't have as a child, and her children are not satisfied and want more and more and more? Or the father whose every conversation with his daughter is punctuated repeatedly by her use of the word I?

Parents who overindulge certainly do not set out with the intention of raising entitled children; they are probably unaware that they are doing it. It is a struggle in our current culture to say no, to deny, to push, or to discipline. Some parents fear that if they parent incorrectly they could psychologically damage their children, causing depression, drug abuse, broken relationships, and failure to succeed. Some may worry that if they discipline, their children will hate them. Others enjoy their kids so much they would rather just be friends, and there are those who parent out of guilt for reasons such as divorce or loss.

Successful parents take a proactive role in their children's lives. They set limits around spending and other requests, and manage children's expectations. They establish strict boundaries around computer use, especially social networking sites that keep children inwardly focused. These parents create the child's reality instead of allowing kids to view a skewed reality through different media channels. Effective parents teach kids that there is a clear difference between children and adults; that by virtue of education, hard work, age and experience, adults are to be afforded respect. They emphasize the truth that children are not on a level playing field with their parents, teachers, instructors or coaches.

The time will come quickly for children when, after having paid their dues, they can make all of their own choices. If parents start early by instilling

good values, modeling decent and loving behavior, and teaching respect, then their children will grow up to make smart choices, develop compassion for others, and appreciate the deeper meaning of life. The ultimate goal for most parents is to raise independent and gracious human beings with the ability to make appropriate and smart decisions, and who shift some of the focus away from themselves and onto others.

About the Author

Elena Neitlich is the co-owner and CEO of Moms on Edge, LLC. <http://www.momsonedge.com> Her company designs, manufactures and sells children's behavioral toys, games and parenting aids, Elena and her business partner created Moms on Edge with the mission to promote peace, quiet and good behavior in the home, and to alleviate the stress that parents can feel as they guide their children through the tough stages of childhood.

Elena is the proud mother of Noah (5) and Seth (2). She is committed to raising really great people. For more information about Moms on Edge or to contact Elena please visit <http://www.momsonedge.com>

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