



Resisting Raising Children Who Feel Entitled Jan Faull, M.Ed.

It's easy to see how children can begin to feel entitled. Daughter wants a doll and Mom buys it. Next she demands a dollhouse, Dad says no, daughter pitches a fit in the toy store, so Dad buys it. Years go by...the child wants to take piano lessons, Mom and Dad agree to the lessons plus they buy a brand new piano. Then daughter wants to join the swim

team, Mom and Dad concur and so join the team's sponsoring country club. The family goes to Hawaii every spring for a vacation; the child begins to expect it.

Not only that...rather than teaching the child to save and wait for certain items, the parents find themselves buying videogames, clothes and gadgets because the daughter's friends have them. Soon the child begins to feel that she's entitled to whatever her friends have. The parents pull out their credit card and buy whatever the child wants; it's the parenting path of least resistance.

Now at age 10 she's taking on an air of entitlement. She acts as if she's entitled to a cell phone, going to the mall with friends, and pierced ears. If she asks and the parents say "no", she's indignant. She pouts, sulks, and claims they're being mean for no reason.

The parents know it's not in their child's best interest to indulge her every whim. They want to change their ways but realize that they've dug themselves into a parenting hole and don't know how to get out of it.

Okay, let's back up. Certainly children have some entitlements. What are they? Adequate food, shelter, warmth, mental and emotional health, intellectual challenges, education, fun, play, reasonable choices, creative endeavors, emotional and physical protection, love, sufficient clothing, fair treatment and good relationships.

Children are not entitled to having all their wants indulged unconditionally. When they're babies, yes; but as they get older, satisfying their wants (as opposed to needs) should be appropriate to their age and maturity. Children don't fare well in the short or long term if all their wishes are magically granted.

So when a child makes a request for something that she wants, parents have four options:

- Say "yes." Do so if you deem the activity or object to be appropriate and beyond the child's ability to acquire on his own.
- Tell him that you will not provide whatever it is that he's wanting, but that he can find a way on his own to acquire it.
- Teach him how to acquire it. Help the child save allowances by setting up a savings account at the bank. When he receives money for a gift, he can add it to her account. He can complete extra household chores such as cleaning the garage or mowing the lawn to earn money; these chores should be beyond the daily chores he's required to complete, such as helping with the dishes or putting away laundry.
- Say "no." Explain why it's inappropriate. Or tell him that you will help him acquire it when he's older.

If the child goes into a tirade because you're not indulging her demand, stay with her, as long as she is emotional, but stick with your decision. To deny a child something to which she feels entitled is painful in the short run, but in the long run the child learns to wait for gratification and to make plans to reach goal.

Children need to know that all they have doesn't appear by magic or come from money at the ATM machine; rather, they come as a result of planning, hard work, and discipline. You do your child a disservice if she learns that insulting parents, pouting or temper tantrums bring her what she wants.

It's also important to teach children gratitude and appreciation. It can be as simple as telling your child, "I'm buying this bicycle for you because I love you and I want you to have it. I hope you appreciate it and are grateful." Also, it is helpful for the parent to model an attitude of gratitude and appreciation. And attribute good fortune to hard work, not luck or chance or because you're more special or better than others.

Also, think out loud in regard to financial matters. When you decide to plan and save for a new item, tell your child how you will do so. If you restrain from buying something or going somewhere, allow your child to see you mull over the decision; modeling the discipline of denying yourself instant gratification.

Most people will agree that children born into privileged circumstances need to be taught responsibility to help others with less, to give to the community, to be humble, and not to flaunt their privileged lifestyle.

When you do allow your child a privilege, make sure you communicate that there are conditions attached:

- A cell phone is a privilege; it comes with the responsibility to keep track of minutes, pay the bill, use it where and when it's appropriate.
- A car is a privilege; it comes with the responsibility to observe the speed limit, keep it clean, pay for insurance and gas, and obey traffic laws.
- A college education is a privilege; it comes with the responsibility to be candid about living arrangements, grades and plans for graduation.

In parenting there's a constant turn-over of power and control from the parent to the child, a constant evolving from dependence to independence and a constant evolving from more entitlements to fewer entitlements.

Parents and teachers report that children who learn the discipline of denying instant gratification have better long-term outcomes; they also have better scores on Scholastic Aptitude Tests. It builds a child's character when he can make plans to reach a goal rather than feeling that he's entitled to it. Parents serve their children well when they prevent children from taking on an attitude of entitlement.

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