

**The Cost of Overindulging Children**  
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**The Walton Tribune, Sunday April 25, 2010**

I carry great concern about how often we can overindulge our children. Most of us have done it from time to time, but to regularly use overindulgence as part of our parenting repertoire is flat out dangerous, for parents, but especially for our children.

So, what is overindulgence? A colleague of mine in The International Transactional Analysis Association and a prolific author, Jean Isley Clarke, has written about indulgence and I quote Jean: "Overindulging children is giving them too much of what looks good, too soon, too long. It is giving them things or experiences that are not appropriate for their age or their interests and talents. It is the process of giving things to children to meet the adult's needs, not the child's."

Overindulgence is giving a disproportionate amount of family resources to one or more children in a way that appears to meet the children's needs but does not, so children experience scarcity in the midst of plenty. Overindulgence is doing or having so much of something that it does active harm, or at least prevents a person from developing and deprives that person of achieving his or her full potential.

Overindulgence is a form of child neglect. It hinders children from performing their needed developmental tasks, and from learning necessary life lessons"

Recent comprehensive research found that overindulged children were likely to grow up to become "externals" rather than "internals." Externals want to become rich and super wealthy, to become famous, to achieve a "unique look and have a deep need to have people comment on how attractive they are.

Internals want to grow and learn new things, to be able to look back on their life as meaningful and with satisfaction. They also want to share life with someone and have a committed intimate relationship. Internals want to work to make the world a better place and to help people in need.

Overindulgence takes place at every socio-economic level. A super wealthy example is where a high school student complained to his parents that because he was arriving at school late driving his luxury car, he had to park far away from the school entrance. After steady complaining for months, his parents bought him a condo directly across from the school! True story! A lower socio-economic example is where a child who has been hounding a parent is allowed to stay up late watching age inappropriate TV while finishing a stale do-nut.

So, are their specific ways we can change habits of overindulging? You bet!

1. Do not soothe our children's painful emotions with toys and luxuries. Sooth them with our calm presence, voice and tenderness.
2. Counter children's manipulation where we feel guilty by simply practicing saying "I won't get that for you, but I have a way you can earn it!"
3. Parenting is not a popularity contest! Want to create a living hell for ourselves for the next umpteen years? Become a buddy to our children. They don't need a friend in a parent; they need a mentor. Parent/child friendship is for later.
4. "No" means "No."
5. Let the emotional sting of discipline happen – the emotional sting has a lesson. Whatever the consequence, consider 1/3 time off for good behavior.
6. Hold onto our better judgment and avoid thinking, "I know I shouldn't have..." Stop our own unhealthy sway of emotions.
7. More than discipline, guide children to make amends.
8. Take time to help our children manage difficult emotional times.
9. Get a children's dictionary and look up all the words of emotions. This will help us with better dialogue with our kids.
10. Attach good and clear thinking to children's emotions.
11. Use emotional words in everyday language.
12. Overindulgence is an impulsive act. So, slowly contemplate how to respond to our children's misbehavior, guilt trips, etc.
13. One television per household – creates better family gathering. Research indicates children who have TV's in their room spend less real time with family and friends.