

**How to Raise a Spoiled Child**  
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*Today Contributor*

We're all afraid, as parents, of spoiling our kids. Sadly, it's the child who often comes out on the short end of the stick—spoiled children often grow to be spoiled adults. The real world (bosses, spouses, peers) does not readily accept adult tantrums or displays of low frustration tolerance.

So, if you want to cease spoiling your kids, make a commitment to tone down the following parental behaviors:

**Promoting a sense of entitlement**

Just because you may be able to afford to give your children lots of material items (video games, toys, clothes) or activities (trips to amusement parks, paint-balling, Build-A-Bear) doesn't mean that these are "givens". Children need to earn privileges and possessions, and these should be meted out judiciously. Giving doesn't necessarily mean loving. It's tempting to buy things your child will enjoy, just to see the excitement and to gather a quick hug from Junior when he gets to pick out a new video game at the toy store. But, is it appropriate for him to receive without working for it? Absolutely not. That's rule #1 in raising a spoiled kid—giving children things and privileges without having had to earn them. If you want to destroy any hint of a work ethic, then give unconditionally. Children who grow up with a feeling of entitlement ("if I want it I should receive it") rarely develop appropriate frustration tolerance. They tantrum when told "no", and usually give up easily when the going gets tough (difficult math problems, issues with friends).

**Being consistently inconsistent**

Kids are like human calculators—if you threaten a consequence and follow-through inconsistently, trust me, they are keeping count! It may be on a subconscious level, but children can easily predict when you're going to stand firm and when you're going to waffle and wimp out. And, they even have the adults in their lives pegged pretty accurately—Dad may be consistent 8 out of 10 times, so it's best not to mess with him, but if Mom is 50/50, it just may be worth the risk to misbehave and roll the dice with the consequences! So, if you want to raise a bratty, spoiled kid turn up the inconsistency! If you'd like them to behave better, then be sure that your choice of consequences are convenient, reasonable and something that you can live with. If not...don't threaten it as a punishment for inappropriate behavior. For instance, if you're really not going to give away the television from the bedroom don't say that you will. If you're more comfortable with taking it away for a week or two when your daughter fibs about completing her homework, then that's good enough.

**Using watered-down consequences**

I can't tell you the number of times, in therapy, I've suggested an intense (definition: actually gets your child's attention!) consequence that the parents feel is out of their comfort zone. For example, consider the 10-year-old addicted to video games who consistently refuses to turn the game console off and begin his homework. I see

absolutely nothing wrong, after he's been warned, with donating the game disk to charity, or even putting it through the shredder! Sound a bit much? Of course, but parents have to match tough behavior with a consequence that really matters to the kid. And, if it sounds expensive, consider the cost of continued therapy with me. At the end of the day, it's cheaper to lose a few videos than to raise a nasty, rude kid.

### **Yak, yak, yaking**

Face it, we just talk too much. Nagging, negotiating, and explaining with children usually are dead-end tactics. Once they've heard it three or four times, there's really no reason to continually explain why brushing teeth, completing homework, not arguing with a sibling or not throwing temper tantrums are important. Trust me, they get it...they just don't care! Normal kids are abnormally persistent and will manipulate, embarrass you in public, and tenaciously beg in an effort to wear you down. Don't buy it—it's page one in the spoiled kid manual of behavior. And yes, these behaviors can be changed—keep the lecture to fifteen words or less and put the kid in time-out, take away electronics for twenty-four hours, or shred a favorite CD! Do something to get their attention—don't lull them to sleep with another version of why they should be internally motivated, grateful or responsible. They'll get it in time, but you have to train your children to understand that they are not entitled to receive everything they want, that they must display good work ethic, and that a negative consequence will be consistently associated with inappropriate behavior.

### **Ignoring giving back**

Many of us are so caught up in our busy lives (soccer, school work, what's-for-dinner) that we ignore one of the most important life-lessons that we could be providing our children. And, that lesson is "giving back"—to those less fortunate in terms of finances, health or life circumstance. Children who are not involved with helping others (people, animals) tend to become self-centered. Take your kids with you when you help out at the soup kitchen, volunteer the family for walks/runs to raise money for various causes, and be sure to have your children "foster" a family at the holidays. They can save up and donate part of their allowance, or have a garage sale to raise money from the sale of their toys and sports equipment. The point is to help others not so fortunate, and in the process your children will develop an increased appreciation for their own health and lifestyle.

If you're guilty of many of the above behaviors, take heart—you can change. And in doing so, your children will become nicer, more cooperative and responsible folks to be around!