

# Are you overindulging your child?

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## PARENTING POINTS

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As parents, we want the very best for our children. We want them to be happy, and maybe we want them to have things that we were unable to have as children.

We may even feel a sense of pride as we do without so that we can put more time, money and effort towards our children's wants.

Providing and caring for children is a parent's responsibility, and putting your child's needs ahead of your own is sometimes necessary. However, it can become difficult to see the line between providing and overindulging.

Overindulgence can be defined as "the excessive gratification of a person's wishes." In simpler terms, it is just giving too much.

**When we think of overindulgence, we often think about material possessions**

For example, a child may have far more toys or clothes than necessary, or parents may feel pressure to keep up with trends and buy the latest and greatest items as they come on the market. When a child is constantly on the go with a variety of organized activities, it can become an overindulgence in terms of time and resources.

Understandably, it is hard for children to have a real appreciation for their possessions and experiences if they receive everything they ask for. If instead we strive to teach the difference between a want and a need, children can give thought to what they really want and learn to better enjoy what they have. A child may not be happy in the short term if she can't get what she wants right now, but the lesson will serve her well in the long term.

**Another form of overindulging is over-nurturing.**

This is when we do something for a child that he is capable of handling on his own. There are many reasons parents do this. Often it is simply faster to do it yourself, knowing that the task will be done correctly.

As children grow and learn so quickly, sometimes we don't even realize their capabilities, and continue to assist where we are no longer needed. We may get personal satisfaction from helping our children, even if we know they do not always need our help.

When children do not learn to handle tasks on their own, they may become more dependent and less ambitious than if they were required to take on more responsibility. Some children worry about failure, and are hesitant to try new things if they are not sure they will be able to do it as well as Mom or Dad.

To avoid falling into the habit of over-nurturing, pay close attention to your child's developmental level. Increase your expectations as he gets older and becomes more competent and confident.

Whether it is letting your two year old dress himself, your six year old set and clear the table, or your 10 year old prepare a simple meal, always test the boundaries of what your child can do. If you are by his side as he learns you may be surprised at his capabilities. His confidence will soar as he feels the satisfaction of doing things on his own.

**A third form of overindulgence is a lack of structure, or too much freedom.**

Children need to make choices and have some input into many aspects of their lives, but this needs to fall within certain limits. If there are no set guidelines or boundaries, or if they are not upheld with regularity, children can be confused about what they should and should not do.

Children need the stability of knowing that some things, like bedtime and meal times, happen at the same time each day. They need to know that there are acceptable ways to interact with other people. They need the reassurance that comes when Mom or Dad say something and then follow through.

Parents can create and maintain limits, and allow space within those boundaries for children to build their decision-making skills. This structure gives children a solid foundation to learn and grow.

It can be easy to slip into a pattern of overindulgence. However, when you are aware of your child's wants versus needs, when you are mindful of her developmental level, and when you offer the security of structure, you can make the transition from "too much" to "just right."