

Dysfunctional Beliefs That Link With Overindulgence

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Dysfunctional beliefs are common in today's society, and so is overindulgence! But did you know that there is a relationship between dysfunctional beliefs and overindulgence? To answer this and other questions about overindulgence the **Overindulgence Research Project** was launched in 1995 and to-date has conducted three research studies involving 1,195 participants.

- **The first study** on overindulgence involving 730 participants, *Perceptions Attributed by Adults to Parental Overindulgence During Childhood*, was reported in the *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences Education* in 1998. It corrects some common misperceptions about overindulgence: what it is, who does it, how it feels, and how childhood overindulgence affects a person in adulthood.

- **The second study**, *Overindulgence, Personality and Family Interaction Among College Students*, was conducted in 2000 with 74 college-aged participants from a small midwestern university. This study shows that there are three types of overindulgence (it's not just about things), it is associated with some dysfunctional thinking and it is not related to income, education, or to any particular type of family system.

- **The third study**, *Overindulgence, Personality and Family Interaction and Parental Locus of Control*, conducted in 2001, involved 391 adults from 39 states and 12 foreign countries. In addition to confirming that there are three types of overindulgence and that very dysfunctional thinking is associated with it, this study also links overindulgence to ineffective parenting beliefs.

Research Findings From the Three Studies

Overindulgence has harmful effects. Our research suggests that parents are the ones who overindulge and that this behavior has its roots in some past event in the parents' lives (e.g., growing up in poverty, chemical dependency, being a workaholic, or death of a child). Adults who were overindulged as children reported things like, "I felt ignored." "I felt confused." "I felt guilty, bad and sad." "No matter how much I got I never got enough." They reported problems with overeating, spending too much money, buying too many gifts, as well as having conflicts in their relationships, excessive engagement in activities like work, school, exercise, or fun. They also were more likely to pass it on to the next generation by overindulging their own children.

Overindulgence is not just about stuff. There are really three types or forms of overindulgence: (1) **Too many**, (2) **Over-nurturing**, and (3) **Soft structure (lax rules)**. The **Too many** type of overindulgence involves material things such as excessive numbers of toys, clothes, sports equipment or

lessons. The **Over-nurturing** type has to do with over-loving a child, giving a child too much attention, or doing things for the child. The **Soft structure (lax rules)** form of overindulgence occurs when a parent does not have rules, does not enforce them, lets the child dominate or have too much freedom, gives the child excessive or unrealistic privileges, and doesn't insist on chores or expect the child to learn necessary age-related skills.

Overindulgence is related to dysfunctional personal beliefs. Research results also show overindulgence and dysfunctional personal beliefs were linked. The greater the overindulgence, the more likely our participants "totally agreed" with the following examples of dysfunctional personal beliefs: "If others dislike you, you cannot be happy." "I cannot be happy unless most people I know admire me." "It is difficult to be happy unless one is looking good, intelligent, rich, and creative." Our results suggest that the more people are overindulged the more they engage in cognitive distortions which underlie depression and make them emotionally vulnerable.

Overindulgence and ineffective parenting beliefs go hand in hand. Our data show that the more parents were overindulged as children, the more strongly they agreed with the following ineffective parenting beliefs. "I feel like what happens in my life is mostly determined by my child." "My child influences the number of friends I have." "Neither my child nor myself is responsible for his/her behavior." "I allow my child to get away with things."

Overindulgence can happen in any family regardless of income, education, or type of family system. Prior to these studies we thought that overindulgence might only occur in certain types of families like "affluent" ones. We were very surprised to find that this is not true. Our data suggests that it can happen in any family regardless of income, education, or how a family looks from the outside.

If you would like to learn more about our findings along with their applications to parenting, please access the following articles on the internet: *Too Little, Enough, Abundance, Too Much?* at <http://www.educarer.com/crayons.htm>, *OVERINDULGENCE: When Receiving HURT Instead of Helps* at <http://www.educarer.com/overindulgence.htm>, and *Grasping a Slippery Concept: OVERINDULGENCE* at <http://www.educarer.com/oi-intro.htm>, *Too Much of a Good Thing? When Does Helping Stop Being Helpful?* at <http://www.educarer.com>; or 3) look for our upcoming book titled *Indulging Them Less and Enjoying Them More*.

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