

The Overindulgence Research Literature: Implications for Family Life Educators - Jean Illsley Clarke CFLE

NCFR Annual Conference, Orlando, FL 11.19.04

What Is Overindulgence?

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 be meeting 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 stagnates a person and deprives that person of achieving his or her full potential.

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

This definition came from adults who were overindulged as children.



Studies I & II - Three Ways of Overindulging and the Results of Each

Too Much – or too many toys, clothes, electronic games, lessons, sports, entertainment, TV
Results:

- Don't know how much is enough
- Disrespect of things and other people
- Expect immediate gratification
- Believe they are the center of the universe

Too Much

Over-Nurture – doing things the child should do for self, smothering
Results:

- Don't know how much is enough?
- Trained helplessness
- Confusion of needs and wants
- Overblown sense of entitlement
- Expect immediate gratification
- Believe they are the center of the universe

Over-Nurture

Soft Structure – no chores, no rules, no boundaries, too much freedom
Results:

- Don't know how much is enough?
- Lax boundaries
- Trained irresponsibility
- Uneven competencies
- Overblown sense of entitlement
- Expect immediate gratification
- Believe they are the center of the universe

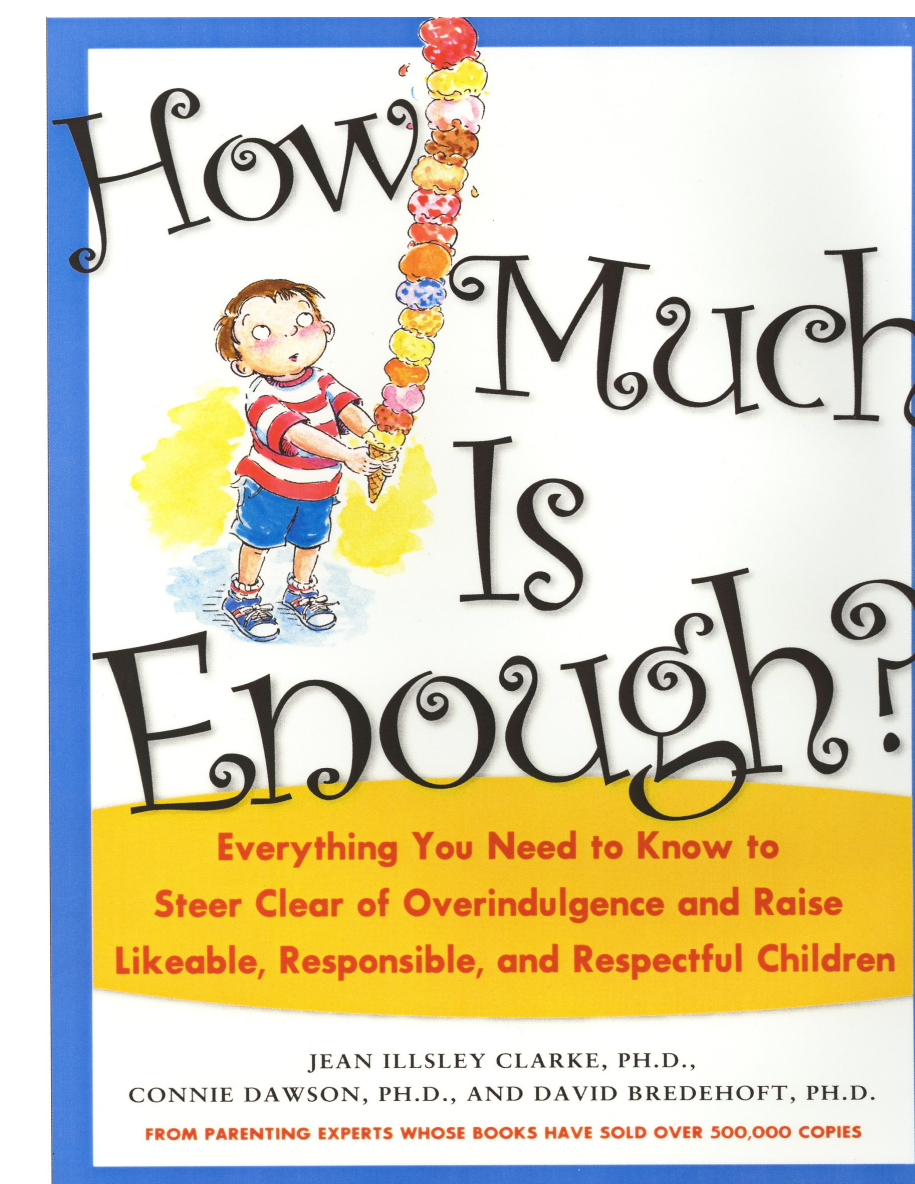
Soft Structure

Study III - Behaviors and Attitudes Toward Parenting

The more parents were overindulged as children, the more they indicated they believe the following Parental Locus of Control statements.

Samples of the 45 items:

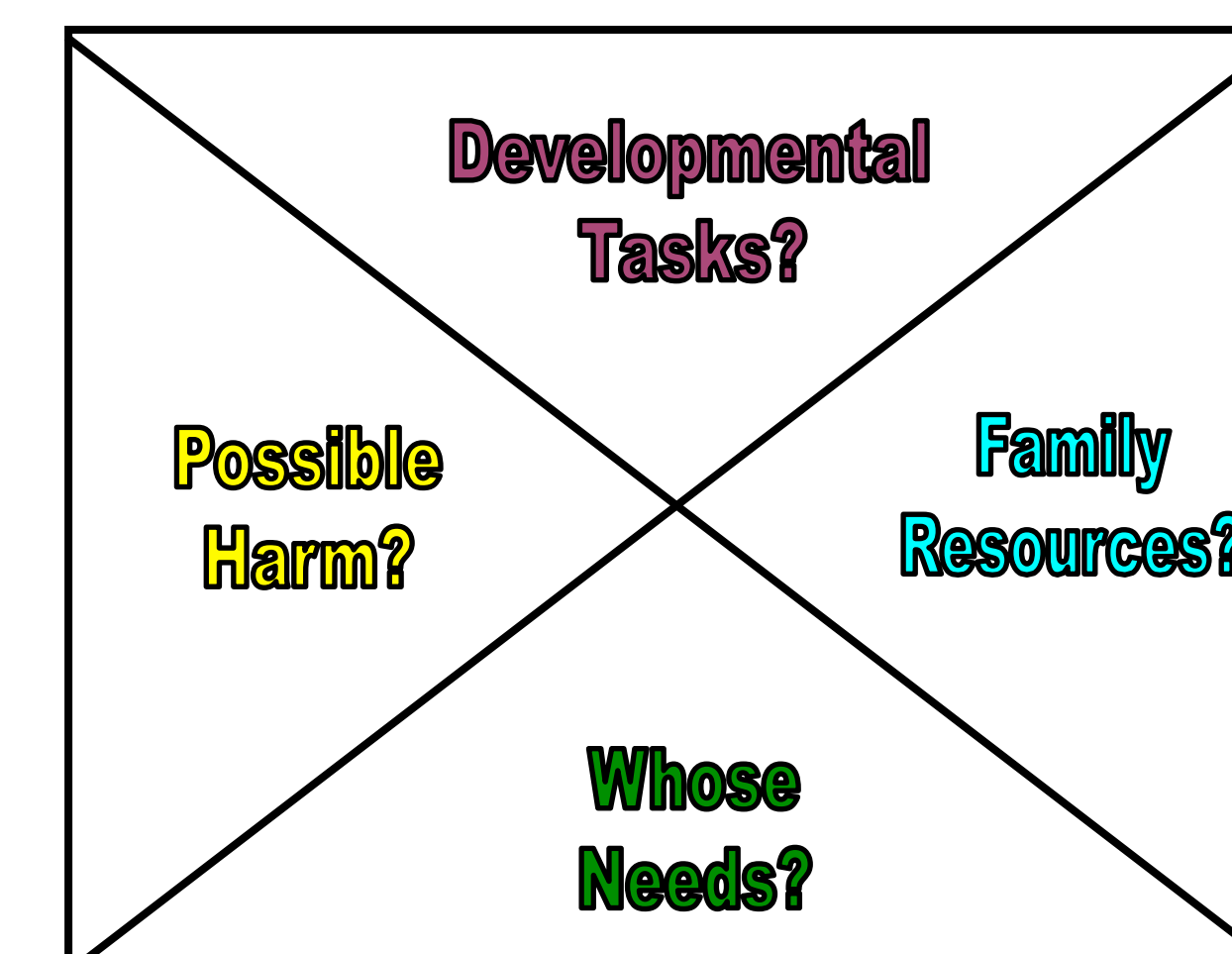
- In order to have my plans work, I make sure they fit in with the desires of my child.
- My child influences the number of friends I have.
- I feel like what happens in my life is mostly determined by my child.
- My child usually gets his or her way so why try.
- Neither my child nor myself is responsible for his/her behavior.



Study I Who Overindulged?

Both Parents	43%
Mom	42%
Dad	11%
Grandmother	4%

Test of Four



Test of Four

Clues to Overindulgence

1. Development? Does it get in the way of the child learning a **developmental task**? If the child is two or older, does it reinforce the early belief that the child is the center of the world?

2. Resources? Does it use a disproportionate amount of the **family resources**: money, time, energy, focus?

3. Whose needs? Is this more for the **parent** than for the child? Does it insist that the child focus on activities that the parent likes but that are counter to the child's interests and abilities?

4. Possible harm? Does it deplete or in some way **harm** others, property, the environment, the community?

A yes answer to any of the above indicates the possibility of overindulgence.

Study I – Why Parents Overindulge

1. Because they feel guilty or
 2. Because they didn't have it -
- are only two of the 34 reasons identified. It is not safe to assume we know why parents overindulge unless they tell us.
- 34.

What to Do Instead of Overindulging

1. Be in charge

Be the parent and run the family. Make fair rules, make them known, enforce them. Teach every child age 3 and up to do chores.

Strong Structure

2. Love

Love always and Hold children accountable. Encourage competence. Be able to tolerate children's discomfort.

Supportive Nurture

3. Enough

Teach about enough. Always give enough. Sometimes more than enough. Never too much.

Enough

4. Intent and Impact

Make your impact match your intent. Get your own needs met and help children get their own needs met.

Parent Power

For More on Overindulgence Research

See posters
312-7

and
312-9

Visit us at www.overindulgence.info

