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 depletes or in some way harms others, property, the environment, the community.

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

**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

**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

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 – Why Parents Overindulge

1. Because they feel guilty or: 4%
2. Because they didn’t have it as children: 11%
3. Never too much: 34%
4. Sometimes more than enough: 2. 34%

Study I – Who Overindulged?

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

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.

For More on Overindulgence Research

See posters 312-7 and 312-9

Visit us at www.overindulgence.info