

Raising Likeable, Responsible, Respectful Children in an Age of Overindulgence

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WHO IS THE BIRTHDAY PARTY FOR?

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Since I'm old enough to be a grandmother of eight, I'm old enough to hear myself saying, "When I was your age..." As a kid, I rolled my eyes when I heard that. But I find myself saying a lot these days and I don't know if it's because I'm old or because I'm wise.

IN THE OLD DAYS.....

Take birthday parties, for instance. When I was parenting children in the sixties, birthday parties

were very different from those I had experienced as a child.

Going to a birthday party used to involve putting on clean clothes and taking a present for the Birthday Girl or Boy.

You played some games, watched the gifts being opened, and ate some cake and ice cream. You thanked your friend's Mom. You went home.

THE INSUFFICIENT PARTY

However, when it was time to go home from a party I gave for my son Tom's seventh birthday, one little guest asked, "Where is my goody bag?"

Startled, I thought, "Am I supposed to send every boy and girl home with a bag of treats?" A sin of omission.

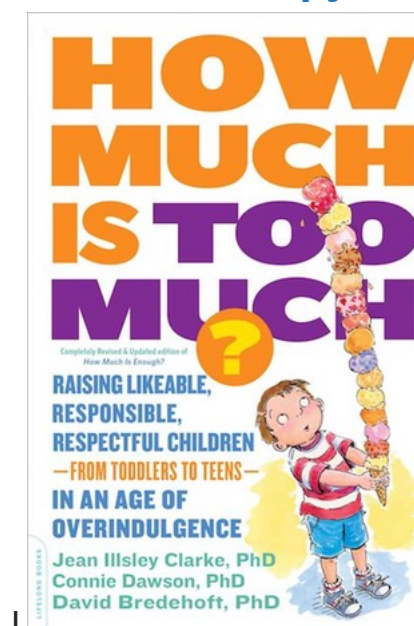
But the next birthday party I threw, I complied with the prevailing norm. After all, what would the other parents say about me when their children returned home sans a goody bag. A respectable goody bag at that!

Lo and behold, my good effort wasn't enough! One little boy, upon opening his creatively decorated sack, exclaimed, "Is this all?" I still remember the look he gave me.

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MORE AND MORE

When our oldest was eight, he regaled us with descriptions of all the wonderful things they had done at his friend's party. The party-goers were treated to a movie, a feast at the pizza parlor, and a stop at the ice cream store where each child could order what he wanted. Or, what about a Red Carpet Kids' Birthday Party costing as much as \$20,000? (click on YouTube below)



The birthday goody bag itself was, to my mind, over the top ([click here for related story](#)) Each one contained at least five dollars worth of stuff. The gift given to the birthday boy hardly cost that much. ([10 Alternatives to Birthday Party Goody Bags](#))

ANOTHER CHANCE

It would soon be time to plan son Tom's birthday party. Our family couldn't afford the kind of party others were giving. I didn't think it was a good idea anyway. "**Too much,**" I thought. And Tom wasn't pushing for an elaborate celebration.

My challenge was making it okay for me not to do a party the way most of our neighborhood kids' moms did parties.

Could I do what I felt was best for my kid and our family and risk being the subject of whispered judgments?

Or would I short the family in some way in order to get the funds for a more lavish party?

WHAT WOULD YOU DECIDE?

Back then, I made my decision intuitively, but now, I'd know to fall back on the [Test of Four](#):

1. Would an elaborate party help my son accomplish his **developmental tasks**? (For an 8-year-old, setting boundaries, developing skills, learning to develop and live with rules and consequences, etc.)
2. Would an elaborate party cause the spending a disproportionate share of **family resources**?
3. Would an elaborate party apt to **benefit me** more than my son?
4. Would an elaborate party cause **harm** to others?

Using the [Test of Four](#), if one of the answers to the four questions is **YES**, it's probably not going to be something I'd want to do.

What do you think I decided even back in the old days.

There is more help about avoiding overindulgence in [How Much is Too Much? Raising Likeable, Responsible, Respectful Children – From Toddlers To Teens – In An Age of Overindulgence](#) (2014, DaCapo Press Lifelong Books).

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