



OVERINDULGENCE ONLINE COURSE

Using the Parenting Highway Tool

Parents can use the Developmental Parenting Highway tool to help them decide ways they can parent to avoid overindulging their children.

THE HIGHWAY AS A METAPHOR

Think about parenting like driving down the highway. When you stay in the center lanes of the highway your children thrive and grow. To stay safe on the road you need a good set of front *and* back tires. The front tires are the soft, nurturing side of parenting; the back tires are the firm, structure side.

KEEP TO THE CENTER

The best way to avoid overindulging your children is to stay in the center of the road – avoid the shoulders and ditches. The middle is where true parent power lies.

Nurture

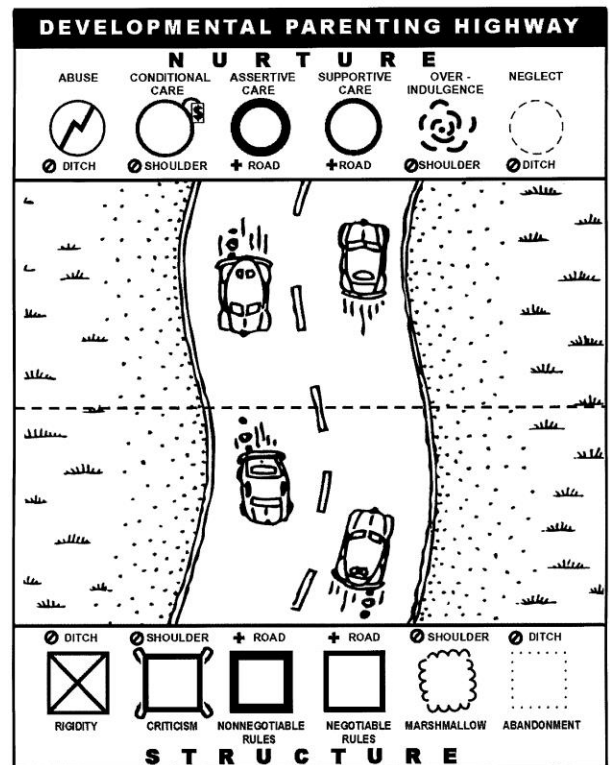
The front *nurture* tires, on the top and center of the road, show the soft love that gives children the support that they need in order to grow and thrive.

- *Assertive care* provides food, shelter, clothing, education, and love.
- *Supportive care* offers help when it is OK for the child to say no.

Structure

The back *structure* tires, at the bottom and center of the road, set rules and provide structure so children can learn to care for themselves, develop responsible relationships, and contribute to their communities.

- *Non-Negotiable rules* are set by the parents based on their values and the child is expected to adapt and follow them.
- *Negotiable rules* are negotiated between parent and child, with the parent having final say. This love from firm structure helps children learn how to think critically about choices and actions they take.





THE SHOULDERS AND THE DITCHES

Parents should avoid the shoulders and ditches of the highway as much as possible.

- *Avoid soft structure.* Insist that your child does chores. Set boundaries and encourage your child to follow rules. When rules are broken or a child uses poor judgment, allow the child to experience natural consequences if they are safe. Otherwise do the necessary teaching or follow through with safe consequences. Soft structure can lead to irresponsibility.
- *Avoid doing too much.* Doing things for your child that they should be doing for themselves creates helplessness and encourages an over-blown sense of entitlement.
- *Avoid harsh critical or hurtful words.* Be aware of tone of voice, body language and word choice. Be a supportive member of your child's team.
- *Avoid the ditches.* If you think your parenting style may fall into the abuse, neglect, rigidity, or abandonment categories, please consult with a doctor or parenting professional for assistance to get back onto the center of the parenting road.

IF YOU HIT A BUMPY SHOULDER OR A SLIPPERY DITCH

Forgive yourself and try again. Just like when you were young and learning to drive, parenting in the center lane takes practice and support. Find resources, friends and family who are willing to tow you back onto the road if needed.

Consider reasons for slipping. All parents slide off the center of the highway from time to time. Here are some possible reasons why:

- *A good heart.* Parents want the best for their children and they sometimes give too much.
- *Overcorrecting.* A parent may become too soft or too firm. When they try to correct, they turn the steering wheel too hard, and they overcorrect onto the shoulder or into heart ditch on the other side of the road.
- *Not knowing.* Sometimes parents slide on to the shoulders because they don't know how to parent a child at a certain age or in a certain situation. We all need help at times. As author and motivational speaker Michael Levine says, "Having children makes you no more a parent than having a piano makes you a pianist." It is never too late to keep learning, seek help, take a class, read books, or try tips from this course.

REFERENCES

Clarke, J. I., Dawson, C., & Bredehoft, D. (2014). *How much is too much? Raising likeable, responsible, respectful children from toddlers to teens in an age of overindulgence* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Da Capo Press.

Levine, M. (1995). *Lessons at the halfway point: Lessons at midlife*. Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts.

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

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