

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

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Is It Wrong To Ask a Child, “What Do You Want To Be When You Grow Up?” by Lisa Krause

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“What do you want to be when you grow up” is an innocent question adults love to ask children. It tickles us to listen to as our young ones talk about being police officers, ballerinas, a favorite sports hero, a nurse, a doctor, a mommy or a daddy. It is enchanting being invited into the imagination of a young child as they dream about being a grown up.

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It is why, when my niece Haleigh was about 5 years old, I innocently asked her, **“What do you want to be when you grow up?”** At that moment my brother, Haleigh’s dad, came around the corner and firmly said, **“She wants to grow up to be a kind, loving person.”**

In the moment, I felt a little shamed and embarrassed but also very impressed. I thought, “Wow what a lucky girl to have a dad like that.” My brother, in that simple statement said my nieces character is more important than the job she does.

Wealth, Fame and Image vs. Relationships, Growth and Community

Wealth, Fame and Image have been identified in the overindulgence research as some of the potential [risky gifts](#) of the *New Normal* of overindulgence. The goals of wealth, fame and image have become the mark of success in

American culture. Bad goals? No not at all. Jean Illsley Clarke often remarks in her workshops, **“Who wouldn’t like to have plenty of money and be famous? I would.”**

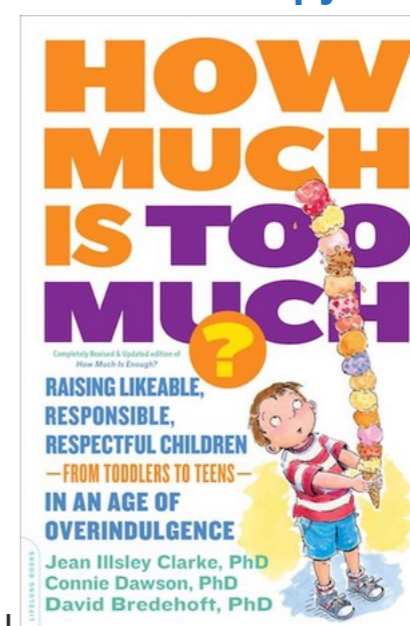
[The overindulgence research](#) suggests that The goals of wealth, fame and image become a problem when they come at the expense of meaningful relationships, personal growth, and community contributions.



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How Do You Build Character?

So how do good hearted parents' guide our children to be the best adults they can be and protect them from the potential [risky gifts of the new normal](#) of overindulgence?

1. We help youth focus less on the goal of being the best, and focus more on the **character skills and process of doing** their best. And,
2. We focus on the positive gifts of strong character.

Brett Ledbetter, in his TEDx [Building Your Inner Coach](#), discusses how having goals can be helpful, but what great college coaches have learned is that focusing on character development and process/skills produces winning teams and successful adults. Here is a list of Character skills Ledbetter identifies in his talk.

Top 10 Character Skills	
Performance Internal motivators that govern our relationship with ourselves.	Moral Skills that govern our relationship with others.
Hard Working	Unselfish
Competitive	Honest
Positive	Respectful
Focused	Appreciative
Accountable	Humble
Resilient	Loyal
Confident	Trustworthy
Energetic	Encouraging
Disciplined	Socially Aware
Motivated	Caring

Graphic by Lisa Krause, Source Information: Building your inner coach | Brett Ledbetter <https://youtu.be/q7a5TlzOmeQ>

So, if we are focusing on character - Does it mean that I was a bad auntie for asking the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Absolutely not, a little daydreaming is good for the soul.

As adults who care about children, we want to balance daydreaming with fostering positive character strengths.

5 Simple Ways to Focus on Character

✓ When your niece responds that she wants to be a ballerina, you can mention that you see her practicing a lot, which is what good ballerina's do. Then ask her to teach you some of her awesome ballerina moves.

- ✓ The next day when she tells you she is going to be a fairy princess. You can ask her what makes a good princess, and then dress up and pretend you are fairy princesses that care and help others.
- ✓ Instead of celebrating good grades- celebrate the hard work it took to get good grades.
- ✓ Instead of saying, “Did you have fun today?” ask, “What did you do that was kind today?”
- ✓ When a child makes a mistake ask, “What do you think you can do differently next time?”

My niece is 11 now and with positive guidance towards character development, we are all watching her grow in a kind and loving girl that can do anything she puts her mind to.

[Lisa Krause](#) MA., Certified Family Life Educator, parent coach and adjunct professor at Concordia University. Lisa is passionate about helping professionals and parents grow strong and healthy families. [Click here to learn more about Lisa and Parent Coaching.](#)

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).

Photo courtesy of her mother and Lisa Krause, Graphic by Lisa Krause.

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