

Overindulgence

Definition of Overindulgence

Overindulging children means giving them too much of what looks good, too soon, too long; giving them things or experiences that are not appropriate for their age or their interests and talents. Overindulging is the process of giving things to children to meet the adult's needs, not the child's needs.

Parents who overindulge give a disproportionate amount of family resources to one or more children in a way that appears to meet the children's needs but does not. Over indulged children experience scarcity in the midst of plenty. They have so much of something that it does active harm or at least stagnates them and deprives them of achieving their full potential.

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

Cultural Myths about Overindulgence

A research study on overindulgence asked adults who had experienced overindulgence during childhood about their experiences. The study revealed a number of myths regarding overindulgence.

Myth 1: The typical overindulged child is an only child.

Reality: Most had two or more siblings

Myth 2: Parents who overindulge are well-off economically.

Reality: More than half were no better off economically or were worse off than most people they knew.

Myth 3: Grandparents are the most notorious overindulgers.

Reality: In fact, parents were the indulgers 96 percent of the time. Only 4 percent of respondents named Grandma as the overindulger, and Grandpa didn't even make the list. As parents, we have to stop blaming others for overindulging and look at our own behaviors.

Myth 4: Overindulgence occurs mainly with young children.

Reality: Overindulgence happens during childhood, adolescence, and even continues into adulthood.

Myth 5: Parents who overindulge just want their children to be happy and go to extremes to avoid abuse.

Reality: Overindulged people reported being abused at these rates:

19 percent	physical abuse
70 percent	psychological abuse
14 percent	sexual abuse

A dilemma for the child is having too much freedom or too many things and too little love. Almost half reported addiction (alcohol, drug, and workaholism).

This situation created a double bind for children--the parent overindulges yet is unavailable; the parent overindulges and yet the child must care for the parent.

Myth 6: Parents overindulge mainly by showering their children with gifts, expensive clothes and toys, vacations, and educational opportunities.

Reality: Over half of those who were overindulged said they had things done for them. They did not learn life skills such as organizing, budgeting, carrying projects through to completion, cleaning and social skills. The main area of overindulgence was the lack of teaching life skills.

To summarize the survey, parents were the main overindulgers and the major area of overindulgence was not requiring the child to be a contributing family member: being done for and not having to learn skills and follow rules, having too much freedom and too many privileges.

Hazards of Overindulgence

Effects of overindulgence are long lasting and include the following:

Mistaken decisions that results in a person

- not learning to accept responsibility for their actions or
- becoming totally irresponsible workers who make poor team players or
- venting anger from resentment of the overindulgence

Missing skills of everyday living such as socialization and self-management skills.

Not knowing what is enough and being able to delay gratification.

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Boundary difficulties where there are no family rules or where rules are enforced inconsistently or not at all.

Pain from ridicule, envy, and shame of not being the competent person you want to be.

Can We Do Something About Overindulgence?

Here are some strategies to avoid overindulging your child:

- Take care of yourself. Recognize your own needs and get them met directly, not through your children.
- Learn what children need at each stage and meet those needs.
- Use positive and supportive parenting strategies that replace overindulgence.
- Stop saying, "It doesn't matter. You didn't mean it. I'll take care of it. Don't worry about it." Instead say, "It does matter. Even if you didn't mean it, you need to make amends. How are you going to take care of it? Do you need help?"
- Be vigilant about teaching children what is enough.
- Realize that the lines between love and overindulgence can be thin. Develop clear and consistent rules that help your child develop competence in social and self-management skills.
- Rather than "doing for" your child, teach your children how to be responsible for themselves. Encourage your child to be a contributing member of the family.
- Remember that our current culture urges us to overindulge and good parenting has become a counterculture activity.

Source:

Jean Illsley Clarke and Connie Dawson. *Growing Up Again: Parenting Ourselves, Parenting Our Children*. 1998.

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