

“Spoiling Your Child”

A Different Perspective

Parents want their children to learn responsibility, discipline and an appreciation for what they have. This is actually a life-long task because we all strive to be responsible, disciplined and thankful when faced daily with the temptation to be otherwise. The best we can hope for our children is that we help them establish a path that values these attributes and commits to a life that enjoys more success than failure as they strive to be responsible, disciplined and grateful.

It is commonly believed that if we give a child too much and indulge their desires, we will be “spoiling the child,” and he or she will not be responsible, disciplined and appreciative. However, I do not believe spoiling a child is the result of giving them too much anymore than giving them only what they need makes them neglected. I think it is actually the motivation behind the giving that results in the “spoiling” and not the quantity that is given.

Pampering people does not spoil them. On the contrary, we feel cared for and special when someone pampers and “spoils” us because that is not how we are generally treated in this world. However, if we continually indulge and pamper a child, or anyone else, in order to take care of our **own** feelings or needs, that person does not feel cared for and special. Instead, that person actually feels used and confused because the person thinks, and may even be told, that he or she **should** feel good and be grateful.

If I give my child a beautiful expensive bicycle because I feel guilty that I do not spend enough time with her, then I am taking care of my feelings and not hers. If she senses my motivation, she will not feel loved and pampered. Instead, she will feel confused, used, sad and probably angry. If it happens often in our relationship, I will be frustrated and confused and probably label her as being “spoiled.” She will say, “You just don’t understand,” and, ironically, she probably does not really understand her feelings either. She just knows that I think she is spoiled and ungrateful. She will probably act out in anger, and she may eventually use my guilt to manipulate me to get what she wants when she wants it. She will also probably not be motivated to be responsible and disciplined. In this relational framework, she will not feel loved.

Whenever we indulge a child to take care of our feelings, we are “spoiling the child.”

As parents, we have all done it. If it has become a pattern, then we and our children may have some serious work to do to get on a different path. This “path” is paved by understanding our motivations and communicating our feelings and needs in a more open and effective way than indulging our child. When parents and children can really talk about their feelings, good and bad, it is amazing how the relationship can change from being spoiled to being loved.
