

SECRETS OF PARENTING

Responsibility, Confidence, Independence

After a long day at work, you walk into the house to find your daughter's toys scattered everywhere. Her shoes are in the middle of the floor, and her juice cup is tipped over beside her.

You can either ask your child to clean up her things, or you can clean them up yourself. It will probably take her about 45 minutes to clean up, but you could do it in less than 15. What should you do?

As a parent, you know you need to teach your children. But sometimes children get frustrated when a task seems too big.

*The **secret of parenting** is to give your children manageable tasks to help them feel a sense of responsibility.*

Growing up means learning about responsibilities. Overindulging children or doing too much for them does not give them a chance to develop a real sense of responsibility and independence. When you give your children opportunities to develop their sense of responsibility, they learn to feel good about themselves. Children who feel good about themselves become confident and independent teens and adults.

You Can Help Your Children Learn about Responsibilities

Overindulgence is not love. Overindulging is often referred to as “spoiling” a child. It can occur when a parent does things for a child that the child is capable of doing or when a parent says “yes” every time a child asks for something. Overindulgence can also occur when parents don’t set enough limits for their children and let them do whatever they want.

Overindulgence can take many forms. Some parents feel guilty about not spending enough time with their children, so they buy them things to make up for it. This kind of overindulgence often happens with divorced parents or parents who work long hours away from home. Some parents are with their child physically but not emotionally. And some parents are so stressed that they don’t have the energy to handle conflicts, so they give in to a whining child’s whims to keep the peace. Although this stops the whining, it creates a bigger problem: Overindulged children don’t learn to do things themselves or to control themselves, so they grow up without confidence in what they can do.

Distributed in furtherance of the acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914. North Carolina State University and North Carolina A&T State University commit themselves to positive action to secure equal opportunity regardless of race, color, creed, national origin, religion, sex, age, or disability. In addition, the two Universities welcome all persons without regard to sexual orientation. North Carolina State University, North Carolina A&T State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments cooperating.

Parents teach responsibility by being clear. Don't be afraid to say "no," but do it with love and consistency. Children do not need every toy or video game they want. When children get everything they want, they always expect to get their way. Teaching them to handle small disappointments now will help them handle larger disappointments in the future.

Give children manageable chores and tasks to do at home. For example, it is reasonable to expect a 7-year-old to keep her or his room clean. It might seem easier for you to clean it. But if you do everything for your children, they cannot develop their sense of responsibility and independence. If each child has a chance to do this chore, she or he will develop a sense of competence and responsibility for the task. Giving children responsibilities around the house helps them feel like valuable members of the family who contribute to the family's well-being.

Remind children over and over, or help them.

It helps to show children what you expect. Meeting your expectations helps them develop a sense of accomplishment. This will help them become responsible, competent, and independent adults. You must give them guidance now while they are under the safety of your family's care. Allow them to make mistakes now and right their wrongs with your guidance. Later, when authority figures are not around, they will know what to do because they have had practice.

Reference

Clarke, J. I., C. Dawson, and D. Bredehoft. (2004). *How Much Is Enough? Everything You Need to Know to Steer Clear of Overindulgence and Raise Likeable, Responsible, and Respectful Children.* New York: Marlowe & Co.

Gottman, J. (1997). *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

When your child comes to you feeling angry, sad, or frustrated, how do you respond?

1. Don't worry about it. You'll be fine.
2. What do you have to be sad about? There are bigger problems in the world! What did you do to cause this?
3. I know how you feel. I have felt that way, too. That feels terrible. You will feel better if you cry.
4. Wow—it sounds as if you are sad about that. Situations like this are tough, but we can probably figure out a way to handle this.

These responses represent these types of parents:

1. The Dismissive parent plays down feelings. This parent faces a scraped knee or a social

- snubbing with, "You're all right." This kind of parent feels uncomfortable with a child's display of emotions and feels uncertain about what to do.
2. The Disapproving parent criticizes or punishes the child for expressions and believes emotions make people weak or that negative emotions must be stopped.
3. The Laissez-faire parent accepts emotions and offers comfort, but doesn't teach problem-solving techniques.
4. The Emotion Coach accepts a child's feelings without belittling or denying them. This parent doesn't try to control the child's emotions. Instead, the emotion coach sees each expression as an opportunity to build a bond and teach problem-solving.

Prepared by

Karen DeBord, Ph.D.

State Extension Specialist, Child Development

Lisa Shannon, Ph.D.

State Extension Specialist, Children, Youth, and Families

3,000 copies of this public document were printed at a cost of \$281.53 or \$.09 per copy.