

SPOILER ALERT! RAISE YOUR KIDS WELL

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WHO LIKES SPOILT BRATS?

Ever so often one comes across a child who displays such brashness and disregard for others' feelings that one cannot but help think, "That kid is a spoilt brat!" The number of such spoilt children are steadily on the rise. Parents are unsure of how to raise their kids and end up leaving them so free that they grow wild like weeds.

Usually, parents will not take responsibility for their child's brash behaviour but I'm going to recount a story of a mother who complained with a sense of guilt, "I think I may have spoiled him". Her son was the third child in a family of four children. His parents were not very well-to-do, but they were well-off by most people's standards. They lived in a big house and took a family vacation every year. However, the boy often complained loudly, that he got less than his siblings. He sometimes borrowed their possessions without asking permission. He violated curfew frequently and would not accept punishment. He could not be counted on to do things he said he would do. He seemed inconsiderate and not concerned about the opinion of others. He would get bored often and would engage in all kinds of activities in an attempt to escape boredom. He was irritable and snobbish and could hardly get through a conversation without disgusting the other person. He valued nothing; neither other people's

time, money nor possessions. Once he spilled a drink over his friend's computer and when he got upset, he laughed and told them to purchase a new one!

A spoiled child may be recognized by an unwillingness to conform to the ordinary demands of living in a family: for example, a refusal to come for dinner on time, a demand for attention or for a privilege denied to others, a strategy for getting his or her way by creating a fuss publicly. The spoiled child is likely to be irritable and unsympathetic to others. He/she seems comfortable ignoring his/her parents' wishes. "They want what they want when they want it."

The spoiled person is discontented. It is not enough for him/her to have a horse for a pet, they insist on riding it to school every day! It is not enough to be rich, he/she has to pretend to be even richer, it is not enough to be good-looking, he/she has to be constantly told so by everyone. They do not need to be polite, because they can get away with being rude. They push themselves to the front of the line. Small frustrations become intolerable. Mostly, however, since they cannot ever get enough, they will seem to others to be self-centered and insecure. Such people are constantly unhappy, and it falls to parents to prevent their child from growing up this way. I'm certain that no parent would like to hear someone comment about their

children that "He/she is such a spoilt brat." In that case, getting upset and throwing a tantrum won't do much good, it will only reveal the source of the child's spoilt behaviour.

INDICATORS OF SPOILING

No parent intentionally sets out to spoil their kids. Some may want to provide them the financial comforts they themselves never enjoyed. Others may try and make-up for not spending time with their children by showering them with gifts. It does seem like a better option to give in to your kids demands after returning home from a tiring day at work. No one would like to be welcomed home with the sound of whining!

There is nothing wrong with loving your child and wanting whats best for him/her but doing so at the cost of all etiquette and common sense is wrong. Giving a child gifts does not spoil him/her but giving in to their every demand does. Fulfilling a child's desires isn't wrong in itself but doing it every time the child demands is. The list can go on. Basically, balance is the key.

Below are mentioned a few telltale signs that are sure indicators that you are raising a spoilt child:

1) Giving in to the child's every request - This goes against putting the child's best interests first. Some parents are foolish to think that giving the child whatever he/she wants is desirable and healthy. It is in fact extremely counter-productive since it teaches the child that he/she can get anything he/she wants even

if it is unrealistic. Worse still, this only begins at home but is gradually carried out into the world and we know how embarrassing it can be.

The child unconsciously forms a pattern. He/she realizes that he/she only needs to whine or he/she only needs to tantrum and make the other person uncomfortable enough to satisfy his/her desires. This is not a healthy behaviour in any relationship and such a person will find people fleeing away rather than drawing near to them. This in turn can make them even more narcissistic, egocentric and lonely.

2) Delivering empty threats -

This is a common reaction. What happens is that one feels exasperated and reacts impulsively instead of pausing to see whether what is being said is effective; or one feels threatened when the children don't listen and try to up the ante by saying something extreme because it seems like nothing else will get through to them. A father coming home from work and finding his kids glued to the television scolds, "I will disconnect the cable if I find you watching television again", even though he has no intention of doing so since it means that he won't be able to watch the football game on the weekend.

Parents must realize however, that empty threats are exactly what their name suggests - empty. They have no value. They usually come out when one has reached the end of one's rope or when one is too tired to think properly. In such a state of mind, one is not in a position to consider the child's point of view or foresee how what one says will con-

tribute to aggravating the situation rather than alleviating it.

3) Being Inconsistent with Expectations and Consequences - Despite their demands, children desire consistency especially when it comes to enforcing consequences and establishing expectations. It is difficult to tell one's kids to avoid junk food when one brings home burgers every other day. Also one must correct the kids regularly for not becoming behaviours and not postpone that for when one is better disposed or 'in the mood'.

It is unfair to expect a child to know what to do when the parent is inconsistent. He/she gets confused when his/her responsibilities aren't clear, or if you don't always follow through with the consequences. Being too lenient can also encourage the child to develop the idea that rules are meant to be broken. With no expectations in place, he/she finds it difficult to develop an idea of what is expected of him/her and act accordingly. Being consistent is of utmost importance, even if it means upsetting the child. But one must beware of becoming overly-demanding. This is equally counter-productive.

4) Shielding the child from difficult emotions - As parents it is natural to feel protective of your child but one must beware of becoming over-protective as it can harm the child's growth. Some parents try their level best to please their kids to the extent of shielding them from anything unpleasant or challenging. They fail to realize that there can be no gain without some amount of

pain. A caterpillar that desires to be a butterfly must undergo a painful and stressful experience - breaking out of the cocoon in which it has been growing as a butterfly for so many weeks. If the butterfly doesn't break out of the cocoon by its own strength, that is, if it receives any external help, it ends up weaker than its counterparts who struggled to break free and gradually dies prematurely. A similar principle works in the case of children.

If a child grows in such a cushioned environment, it will not develop the coping skills required to face the world. He/she will instead suffer trauma at the slightest provocation or obstacle and will find it extremely difficult to deal with emotional issues. Worse still, he/she will fail to build up a healthy self-image and will suffer from persistent self-doubt and anxiety.

5) Tolerating everything the child does - Children are innocent and ignorant of social norms and manners. They are curious about everything and want to try it all, even the things they are warned to avoid. One of the primary duties of a parent is to teach the child how to live like a human being. One of the first and most important things children must learn is manners and this goes beyond the magic words. Manners are the style of living. One can be rich but have no manners and he/she would behave in particular ways. On the other hand, one could encounter a rich person who is well-groomed and immediately the difference is noticeable. Manners are what people remember about you long

after they have forgotten what you look like or said.

Children can be quite insolent when young. They have the tendency to disrespect authority and display wanton rudeness. Such behaviour mustn't be tolerated since the child will neither learn what is good nor understand why his/her behaviour is wrong. Parents sometimes appear to shy away from correcting their children. With the increasing awareness about child abuse, it is rather risky to correct your child but correction doesn't necessarily mean corporal punishment. Correction is vital for growth. The child needs to understand that some behaviours are not to be engaged in since they neither do good to others nor to oneself. Tolerating everything for the sake of pleasing the child is disastrous and ought to be avoided.

DON'T SPOIL YOUR CHILD

No parent likes listening to a tantrum, whether it's from a child who refuses to go to school or an 8-year-old who slams her door over your refusal to buy her a cell phone. But giving in is far worse. The main reason a kid will continue to have meltdowns is that they're successful. Don't engage the behavior and it will stop ... eventually. Another useful way of tackling tantrums is ignoring the child temporarily. While you need to keep an eye on your tantruming child in a public place, giving the behavior too much attention virtually guarantees a repeat performance. Instead, calmly take your child to the car where he/she can finish. When kids realize that you won't be manipulated when they make

a scene, they're less likely to try that tactic in the future.

Spoilt kids feel entitled not only to get the things they want but to get them immediately. Refusing or at least holding off on indulgences will help your child develop self-discipline and allow him to place a higher value on the things he receives. One parent recalls that, after his then 5-year-old daughter began getting an allowance, he didn't buy her a balloon at the street fair that year. He told her that if she really wanted a balloon, she could use her own money. She wound up using her cash for something else. Besides teaching kids to wait verbally, one can do so in practice. One way of doing this is looking for opportunities for them to see you waiting for the things you want. If you see a pair of jeans at the mall that you decide not to buy, for instance, let your child know why ("They fit well, but my old jeans still look good" or "I'll wait until they go on sale").

In the book of Proverbs (22:6) one reads, "Teach a child the way he should go, he will not stray from it while he lives." This is one of the most important things parents ought to keep in mind. In fact, it could very well serve as the foundational maxim of all parenting. Since the aim of parenting is to raise good, well-mannered and responsible adults, careful attention ought to be given to the progress and growth of a child. A spoilt child today will be a sorry adult tomorrow. The power to nurture kids well or to spoil them lies with parents and therefore the responsibility is tremendous as it is vital. □