

Spoiled Children - Prevention

Definition

A spoiled child insists on having his own way. If demanding doesn't work, he escalates. He uses tantrums and whining to get his way. Most spoiled children are 3 years or older. Their normal testing behavior has become deliberate. If you see this happening in your child, take charge. You can prevent raising a spoiled child.

Common Behaviors of Spoiled Children

- Doesn't follow rules or cooperate with suggestions.
- Doesn't respond to "no," "stop," or other commands.
- Protests everything.
- Makes unfair or excessive demands on others.
- Doesn't respect other people's rights.
- Tries to manipulate people.
- Has a low tolerance for frustration.
- Has frequent, deliberate whining and tantrums.
- Constantly complains about being bored.

Health Information

Causes

- The main cause of spoiled children is a lenient, permissive parenting style. Permissive parents at the extreme may not set any limits or boundaries. If parents give a child too much power, the child will become spoiled. Such parents also rescue the child from normal frustrations. Sometimes a child is cared for by a nanny or sitter who spoils the child by providing constant entertainment and by giving in to unrealistic demands.
- The reason some parents are too lenient is that they don't want to hurt their child's feelings or hear him cry. They may choose the short-term solution of doing whatever stops the crying, which in the long run, causes more protest crying. Keep in mind that enforcing normal rules often triggers some crying.
- The difference between giving children the attention they need and spoiling them may be unclear. In general, attention is good for children. However, it can become harmful if it is excessive, given at the wrong time, or always given immediately. Attention from a parent is excessive if it interferes with a child's learning to do things for himself and dealing with life's normal frustrations. Giving attention when you are busy because your child demands it is an example of giving attention at the wrong time. Another example is giving attention when a child is throwing a tantrum and needs to be ignored. Finally, if attention is always given immediately, your child won't learn to wait.

What to Expect

- Spoiled children run into trouble by the time they reach school age. Other children do not like them because they are too bossy and selfish. Adults do not like them because they are rude and make excessive demands. Eventually, spoiled children become hard for even their parents to love because of their behavior.
- Because they don't get along well with other children and adults, spoiled children eventually become unhappy. They may show decreased motivation and perseverance in their school work. There is also an association with increased risk-taking behaviors during adolescence, such as substance abuse.
- In summary, spoiling a child prepares a child poorly for life in the real world. Don't let this happen to your child.

Preventing a Spoiled Child

1. **Provide Age-Appropriate Limits and Rules for Your Child:**
 - Parents have the responsibility to take charge and make rules.
 - Age-appropriate discipline can begin at the age of crawling. Hearing "no" occasionally is good for children.
 - Children need external controls until they develop self-control and self-discipline.
 - Your child will still love you if you say "no" to him. If your kids like you all the time, you're not being a good parent.
2. **Require Cooperation with Important Rules:**
 - Your child must learn to cooperate with your directions long before he starts school.
 - First, rules are needed for safety, such as staying in the car seat.
 - Second, rules are needed to prevent aggressive behaviors, such as "no hitting".
 - Then other important rules are needed for normal family functioning. Examples are being ready to leave on time in the morning and going to bed on time.
 - These adult decisions are not open to negotiation. Do not give your child a choice when there is none.
3. **Expect Your Child to Cry:**
 - Crying can have many causes. Important crying can relate to pain, hunger and fear. Respond to painful crying immediately. Feed for hunger. Comfort for fears.
 - Crying is also a normal response to change or frustration. This common type of protest crying is harmless.
 - When crying is part of a tantrum, ignore it. There are times when you will have to withhold comforting temporarily to help your child learn something that is important. For example, he can't pull on your earrings.
 - Don't punish your child for crying or tell him he shouldn't cry. Avoid denying him his feelings, but don't be moved by his normal protest crying.
 - Offset this unhappy crying when you are tightening up on the rules by providing extra cuddling and hugs when he is not crying or having a tantrum.
4. **Do Not Allow Tantrums to Work:**
 - Children throw temper tantrums to get your attention, to wear you down, to get you to change your mind, and to get their own way. Tantrums are an attempt to change your "no" to a "yes".
 - Tantrums may include whining, complaining, crying, breath-holding, pounding the floor, shouting, or slamming a door.
 - As long as your child stays in one place and is not at risk for harming himself, you can safely ignore him during a tantrum.
 - By all means, don't give in to tantrums.
5. **Don't Overlook Discipline During Quality Time:**
 - If you are a working parent, you will want to spend part of your free time each day with your child.
 - This time needs to be enjoyable, but also reality-based.
 - Don't ease up on the house rules. If your child misbehaves, remind him of the rules and follow-through.
 - Even during fun activities, you need to enforce your rules.

6. **Don't Try to Reason or Negotiate with Young Children:**
 - Don't give away your power as a parent. Children need rules and structure to develop self-discipline.
 - Toddlers don't play by the rules. Young children respond to action much more than words. By age 4, your child will begin to understand the reason behind your rules. But not until age 6 are they likely to be able to discuss and contribute to the rules.
 - The more democratic a parent is during a child's early years, the more demanding the child tends to become. In general, young children don't know what to do with power. Left to their own devices, they usually spoil themselves. If they are testing everything at age 3, it is not normal and needs help.
 - If you have given away your power, take it back. Set new limits and enforce them. You don't have to give a reason for every rule. Sometimes it is just because "that's the rule."
7. **Teach Your Child to Cope with Boredom:**
 - Your job is to provide toys, books, and art supplies. Your child's job is to use them. Assuming you talk and play with your young child a few hours each day, you do not need to be his constant playmate. Nor do you need to always provide him with an outside friend.
 - When you're busy, expect your child to amuse himself. Even 1-year-olds can keep themselves occupied for 15 minutes at a time. By age 3, most children can entertain themselves about half of the time.
 - Sending your child off to "find something to do" is doing him a favor. Much creative play, thinking, and daydreaming come from coping with boredom.
 - If you can't seem to resign as social director, consider enrolling your child in a play group or preschool.
8. **Teach Your Child to Wait:**
 - Waiting helps children learn to deal with normal frustration. All adult work carries some degree of frustration.
 - Delaying immediate gratification is something your child must learn slowly. It also takes practice.
 - Don't feel guilty if you have to make your child wait a few minutes now and then. For example, when you are talking with others in person or on the telephone, they need to find something else to do.
 - Waiting doesn't hurt a child as long as it isn't excessive. His emotional fitness will benefit.
9. **Don't Rescue Your Child from Normal life Challenges:**
 - Changes such as moving and starting school are normal life stressors. These are opportunities for learning and problem solving.
 - Always be available and supportive, but don't help your child with situations he can handle by himself.
 - Overall, make your child's life as realistic as he can tolerate for his age, rather than going out of your way to make it as pleasant as possible. His coping skills and self-confidence will benefit.
10. **Don't Overpraise Your Child:**
 - Children need praise, but it can be overdone.
 - Praise your child for specific behavior ("good job"), not for "being good". Also praise for effort ("See what you can do when you try hard.") Encourage him to try new things and do his best.
 - Praise him for completing tasks, not every step of the way. Praise him especially for projects he started on his own. Self-confidence and real self-esteem come from personal accomplishments.
 - Giving your child constant attention can make him praise-dependent and more demanding.
 - Resist the tendency (especially common with the first-born) to overpraise your child's normal development.

11. Teach Your Child That Adults Also Have Rights:

- A child's needs for love, food, clothing, safety, and security obviously come first. However, your needs (such as for sleep and partner time) are also important. Your child's wants (for example, for more play or an extra bedtime story) should come after your needs are met and as time allows. This is especially important for working parents where family time is limited.
- Quality time is time that is enjoyable, interactive, and focused on your child. Children need some quality time with their parents every day. But spending every free moment of your evenings and weekends with your child is not good for you or your child. You need a balance to preserve your mental health.
- Scheduled nights out with your partner or friends will not only nurture your adult relationships, but also help you to return to parenting with more to give.
- Your child needs to learn to accept separations from his parent.
- If he isn't taught to respect your rights, he may not learn to respect the rights of other adults.

Call Your Doctor If

- You feel your child is spoiled or out of control
- You and your partner often disagree on discipline
- Following rules is not improved after tightening up on your discipline plan for 8 weeks
- You have other questions or concerns

Pediatric Care Advice

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