

Myths and Facts About Spoiling Your Children

Parents worry a lot about spoiling children by giving them what they need or by paying attention to them, or by providing them with certain privileges. Parents who feed their baby on demand worry that their child will grow up being a demanding person. Parents who let their child crawl into their bed worry that the child will never get out. Parents fear that if they change their mind, their child will walk all over them. Parents fear if they negotiate and request cooperation rather than obedience, their child will be disrespectful. So many of these worries are not grounded on anything but old wives tales, myths and stories - many of which originated generations ago.

Needy and Spoiled Children

All young children are needy. The goal of nurturing parenting is to promote growth and autonomy by helping children get their needs met. Children who don't live in homes where basic needs are met face serious consequences to their development. Needy children generally feel insecure and unsure of their own abilities to get some of their needs met. Therefore, they cling to their parents or other adults, believing that only by staying close can they be assured their needs will get met.



Excessive neediness in children develops in one of two ways:

1. Needy children generally have had everything done for them by their parents, and therefore have not been encouraged to do things for themselves. In a sense, they have been treated as infants or “infantalized,” that is, not allowed to grow in independence and autonomy.
2. Needy children can also be a product of a home where needs don't get met as a result of too many children in the family, children spaced too closely in age, single parenting, special needs that require added attention, non-empathic parents, or parents who are as needy as their young children.

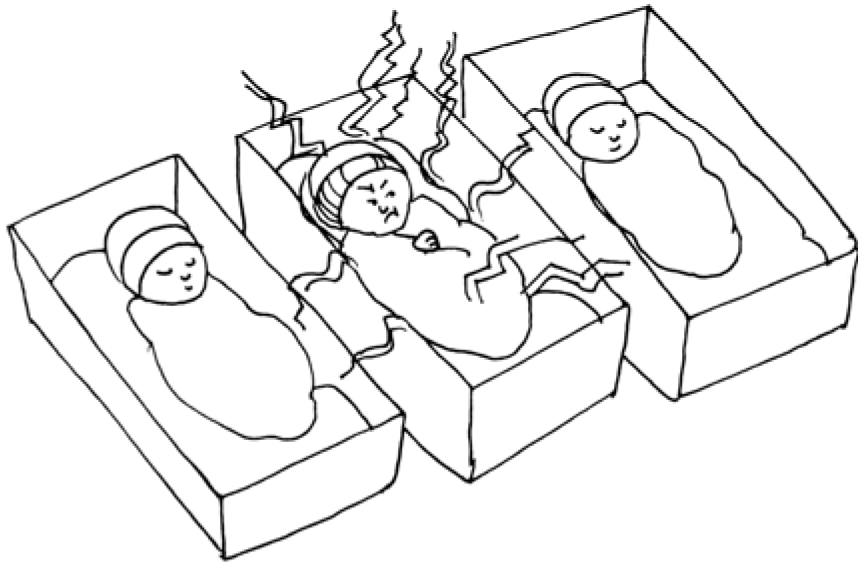
Generally, spoiled children don't trust that their needs will be met, develop an infantile personality, whine, hoard their belongings, have difficulty sharing, and generally make life miserable for everyone around. Children displaying such “spoiled behaviors” don't have positive feelings of self-worth; therefore they have difficulty understanding how their behavior makes life for others miserable.

For both the needy and the spoiled child, a systematic plan to develop their positive self-worth through success in being able to do things for themselves, and in learning how to make meaningful contributions, will go a long way in helping them develop more appropriate behavior.

How Do Children Become Spoiled?

Spoiling children is not an easy task. It takes a lot of time, effort, and attentiveness on the part of a parent to spoil a child. Spoiling a child requires that a parent perform the following behaviors:

- Do everything for a child so he does nothing for himself.
- Anticipate a child's request so she never has to ask for anything.
- Spend all your waking hours with your child.
- Prohibit any type of short separation from your child; even having a babysitter.
- Only pick up a child when he cries.
- Be inconsistent in the limits and rules you set down so a child never knows what to expect.



Babies Can Never Be Spoiled!

Here is one truth that you can be absolutely certain about: *You cannot spoil a baby.* Babies are needy, dependent children who require the constant care and concern of adults they are with. Holding them, feeding them, changing them, comforting them when they're upset, and playing with them to stimulate their growth are required of a parent. Performing these tasks with nurturing will help in the growth of independence and autonomy that will be evident as your child grows into a curious and playful toddler.

Some Myths and Facts About Spoiling Children

Myth: I will spoil my child if I pick him up when he cries.

Fact: If the only time you hold your child is when he cries, the child soon learns he has to cry to be held. Picking him up only when he cries is a good way to spoil your child. Make sure you spend twice as much time holding your child when he's not crying. The child will at least learn he doesn't have to cry to be held.

Myth: Children who throw temper tantrums are spoiled.

Fact: Temper tantrums are a way young children express their frustration towards a situation or person. Young children are essentially very needy people; they want what they want now, not later. Setting reasonable limits helps children develop patience and delays in their need for gratification. Expect a few temper tantrums along the way and don't become too alarmed.

Myth: A spoiled child is one who has not been spanked.

Fact: Spanking a child never prevented one from becoming spoiled. The absence of reasonable limits and consequences for inappropriate behavior contributes to spoiling a child, not the absence of spanking. *Spanking is a type of hitting; hitting is a type of hurting touch; hurting touch is a type of abuse.* A nurturing parent uses other, more effective, means of discipline and punishment than hitting.

Myth: A young child is incapable of doing anything for himself.

Fact: Children can learn very early in life to participate in getting their own needs met. They can help in getting dressed, wiping their mouths after eating, feeding themselves, and brushing their teeth. Children enjoy doing things for themselves because they feel more powerful and more in control of their environment.

Myth: My child acts "spoiled." To cure him I have to become strict and harsh.

Fact: Strict and harsh responses will never cure anyone of anything - spoiled children included. Sometimes parents confuse setting limits with being harsh. All children need to have a set of limits that are consistent and founded on the morals and values of the family. Family rules are the obvious vehicle to accomplish setting limits. All of this can be accomplished with love and compassion. Being harsh and rigid only sets the stage for rejection, power struggles and more tantrums.

Recognizing and Understanding Feelings

Helping Children Learn to Handle Their Feelings

Emotional competence is the ability for parents and children to be able to recognize and express their feelings in appropriate ways.

Ways to Build Emotional Competence

- 1. Let children know all feelings are okay.** Children have to believe that all feelings are good and are quite useful in communicating. However, it's *how the feelings are communicated* that can either be okay or not okay.
- 2. Label the feeling you see or think you see.** This will give the child a feeling of being believed and respected. (Ex: "You look angry." "You look proud." "You look happy.")
- 3. Don't dominate the conversation.** Let the child do the talking. Encourage sharing by looking interested in what your child is saying. Children can think better when someone is not advising, blaming or criticizing.
- 4. Promote the rational behind the feeling.**
 - a. Ask the question, "Why?" (Ex: "Why do you suppose he's feeling that way?")
 - b. It's a wonderful way to teach the "If-Then" formula for cause and effect. (Ex: "If children get hit, then they feel bad.")
 - c. Understanding why others feel a certain way is another sure way of building empathy. (Ex: "If a baby cries, then she needs something.")
- 5. Brainstorm with your child what, if anything, needs to be done.** Sometimes comforting a child, or just simply listening, is all that needs to be done.
- 6. When a child wants something, honor their desire.** If you are in the store and your child wants a CD, rather than saying, "No" tell him you wish you could get it for him. (Ex: "If I had the money, I would love to buy you that CD." or "Honey, I don't have the money to get you that CD today. Maybe this could be one of your birthday presents.") This has an almost magical effect on a situation because you have joined the child, not forbidden him.
- 7. Teach children to express their emotional energy.** All feelings have energy that needs expression. Feeling energy ranges from mild to moderate to severe. Mild and moderate feeling energy can generally be released through talking. It's the high moderate and severe energy levels that get children into trouble. At this level, children often need a physical outlet for their energy. Brainstorm a list of physical things children can do to release their energy. Remember; do not condone actions that can hurt the child, others, or the environment.
- 8. Praise, praise praise!** When children are expressing their feelings appropriately, let them know you like what you hear. Remember, the behaviors you pay attention to are the behaviors that are being reinforced. Catch your children behaving.

