

read, you can make a poster that shows rules with pictures cut from magazines.

Monitoring. The older kids get, the more they want independence. It's important to know where everyone is at any time, however, Clarke points out. If everyone—adults as well as children and teenagers—reports where they're going and when they'll be home, kids won't feel as if this is punitive.

Negotiate to avoid overindulgence

Nonnegotiable rules teach the obedience necessary for safety and for living with others, but they do not teach children how to think and make responsible decisions. That is the role of negotiable rules. It is important to recognize, however, that negotiating only makes sense if it's about how a need is to be met. We do not negotiate if wants are inappropriate.

Needs and wants. All of us, adults as well as children, need food, shelter, clothing, stimulation, recognition and structure. "Wants" are how we prefer to have our needs met: mac and cheese for meals, for example, and designer jeans for clothing. To determine if a "want" is appropriate, use The Test of Four.

Why teach negotiating? Because it provides contact with adults, and attention from them, strengthens the parent-child connections, and teaches family values. It also:

- Helps kids develop thinking and problem solving skills
- Encourages a sense of personal responsibility, including standards of quality
- Teaches concern for others
- Helps kids learn to delay gratification

What should adults negotiate with children? Depending on the child's age and maturity, parents might negotiate allowances, activities, chores, social manners and family convenience. For example, a larger allowance might be negotiated when a child is paying a larger share of school fees, or a teenager might trade two occasional chores for a daily task. Here are examples of how you can start teaching these skills with controlled choices:

- *With very young children:* "We're going in the car. Do you want to take your teddy bear or your clown?"
- *With preschoolers:* "I'll help you pick up the toys. Which of us should pick up the blocks and who does the cars?"
- *With primary-age children:* "Which dress do you want to wear to Grandma's birthday party?"

Negotiating only occurs when parents are in charge, and if the conversation dissolves into begging, whining or wheedling, the parents should immediately stop it. However, kids who hassle you about rules *are* staying connected with you, and they are learning to distinguish between negotiating and begging.

Summary

Overindulgence isn't the same as spoiling. Overindulgence is too much, too many, too fast: too much help, too many things, too much of the family resources, too many experiences too early. Overindulgence is when you don't recognize how much is enough, and you don't let your children experience enough. Overindulgence is serious, because kids need to be able to determine what is enough, need to be able to delay and work for gratification, need to be able to do for themselves. It's also a serious problem in our culture because some people don't recognize how many ways you can overindulgence, and because some believe that "nothing is too much" for children.

If you would like more information about overindulgence, you'll find practical, authoritative help in *How Much Is Enough*,

which describes:

- How to recognize overindulgence and change your parenting style
- How to break the cycle if you were overindulged as a child
- How to establish firm rules and structure for your children
- How to instill responsibility in children
- What to do when friends and family overindulge your kids

Other Resources

Clarke, Jean Illsley, Connie Dawson and David Bredehoft, *How Much Is Enough?* (Da Capo)

"How Much Is Enough," overindulgence.net

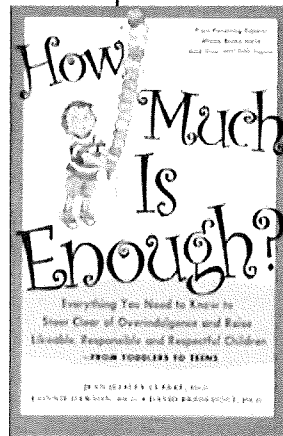
Neville, Helen F., *Is This a Phase? Child Development & Parent Strategies, Birth to 6 Years* (Parenting Press)

Heath, Harriet, *Using Your Values to Raise Your Child to Be an Adult You Admire* (Parenting Press)

Neville, Helen F., and Diane Clark Johnson, *Temperament Tools: Working with Your Child's Inborn Traits* (Parenting Press)

Shick, Lyndall, *Understanding Temperament: Strategies for Creating Family Harmony* (Parenting Press)

Crary, Elizabeth, *Without Spanking or Spoiling, 2nd ed.* (Parenting Press)



Adapted from *How Much Is Enough* by Jean Illsley Clarke, Connie Dawson and David Bredehoft (Da Capo Press), and from the *How Much Is Enough Leader's Guide* by Jean Illsley Clarke, a Parenting Press publication. Qwik Sheet © ParentingPress 2009

Are My Kids Overindulged?

Overindulgence is something that can happen in any family, poor or wealthy, large or small, struggling or happy. It's unintentional, and it's caused by people who love their children and want the best for them.

Perhaps most surprisingly, it can cause lifelong problems:

- **Difficulty learning to delay gratification**
- **Desire to always be the center of attention**
- **Difficulty learning everyday, self-care and interpersonal skills**
- **Difficulty taking personal responsibility**
- **Difficulty perceiving what is enough**

What is overindulgence?

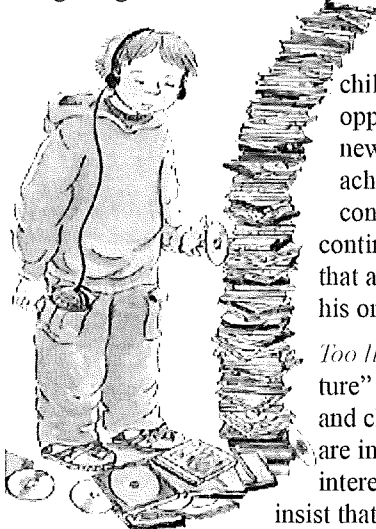
In the research they did for *How Much Is Enough? Everything You Need to Know to Steer Clear of Overindulgence and Raise Likeable, Responsible and Respectful Children—from Toddlers to Teens*, Jean Illsley Clarke, Connie Dawson and David Bredehoft determined that there are three types of overindulgence:

Giving too much: "Too much" means too much of anything that costs money—toys, clothing, entertainment, vacations, junk food, alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs—and a disproportionately high share of the family resources, be those money, time or energy. "With a constant barrage of too many and too much, children...fail to learn the vital skill of ascertaining what is enough," write the authors.

Over-nurturing: When children are over-nurtured, they are smothered with too much care, too much attention. It means doing things for them that they could do for themselves or should be learning to do.

If you truly love your children, you allow them the opportunity to reach out, to learn new skills, to feel the thrill of achievement, or to experience consequences. "Love does not continue to do things for a child that are no longer appropriate for his or her age."

Too little structure: "Soft structure" means too much freedom, and choices and experiences that are inappropriate for their age, interests or talents. If you don't insist that your children learn life skills



The Test of Four

For each of the following examples (or similar situations in your family), ask yourself the four questions that follow.

Toys: My 4-year-old has toys in every room of the house but he is always begging for new ones.

Clothes: My 10-year-old's closet is bulging with garments but she can't find anything to wear to school in the morning.

Scheduling: My 15-year-old has a heavy after-school activity schedule every day and on Saturday. We want to keep him occupied so he won't get into drugs.

Ask yourself:

1. Could this delay the the learning of developmental tasks?
2. Does this use too much of the family's resources?
3. Is this more for the adult's needs than the child's?
4. Could this possibly harm others or the environment?

A "yes" answer to any of the above signals that you may be overindulging.

and do chores, and if you allow them to make decisions that are appropriately made by adults, you also are providing too little structure.

Are you over-indulging?

The overindulgence research that resulted in *How Much Is Enough?* revealed that adults who were overindulged as children and grew up with too much resentment having been raised that way. Seventy-one percent of them said they have difficulty knowing what is enough. So one question parents need to ask themselves is: when to give and when to say no? What's helpful is "The Test of Four," of which you'll find many examples in *How Much Is Enough*.

Learning to avoid overindulgence

If your answers to the sample questions and examples from your own family life suggest that your children are being over-indulged, here are some suggested strategies:

Learning chores. Children as young as 3 can learn simple household and self-care jobs. You'll have to teach them the skills involved, and you may have to help them, or remind them, for a long time.

Learning rules. Children feel more secure and they learn about boundaries when they know what the family rules are and that the rules are consistently enforced. If your children cannot yet