



Am I Spoiling My Child?

Many parents worry about spoiling their children. It is common to believe that children can be spoiled by too much love or by lack of hard experiences. Spoiling children is often misunderstood.

Love doesn't spoil children. Children need love to develop. They need caring adults to spend time with them, play with them, teach them, protect them, and enjoy life with them. Don't worry about loving your child too much. That is simply not possible.

You don't need to create hard experiences for your child. The process of growing up provides children with lots of challenges. Children need the adults in their lives to support, love, and teach them. Especially when children have difficulties and disappointments, children need parents who listen and try to understand their pain. They need parents who provide comfort, safety, and encouragement.

Children can be spoiled by a lack of limits. Children need limits. They need to know that some behaviors are not safe or acceptable. For example, a young child must not be allowed to play with fire. A school aged child should be home for dinner. A teenager should be home in the evenings at a specified time.

Sometimes parents do not set limits because they don't want to fight with their children. They don't want to cause bad feelings. They may beg a child to comply. Or they may make a rule and fail to enforce it. They may nag without ever enforcing the rules. None of these helps children.

The way we prevent or respond to unacceptable behavior is very important. **The best way to set limits is with both firmness and kindness.** Firmness lets a child know that we are serious about the rule. Kindness assures them that we are committed to helping them and loving them. There are times when children will be mad with even the best of parents. That is okay.

Parents must be wise and sensitive to **find the ways that work best with each child.** One child may be motivated by a simple statement: "You must be home at 6 o'clock for dinner." Another child may lose track of time and may need us to go to the playground and invite her home: "I hope you've had fun. It is time now to come home for dinner." Another child may need to experience consequences: "When you were not home at 6 o'clock we put your dinner in the fridge. You are welcome to get it out and warm it up if you would like."

Firmness and kindness means that we are not afraid to make reasonable rules and enforce them. At the same time, we try to always be gracious and caring. We are not afraid of our children. Nor are we cruel. We know that learning limits is a difficult but essential part of growing up.

Applications:

There are many situations where parents find it hard to set limits for children while also being kind. One of them is when they take children with them to the grocery store.

What can you do to prevent problems with children in the grocery store? You know your children best. Pick which of the following work for you and add others that work with your children.

- Set rules ahead of time.
- Give them an idea of how long you will be there.
- Make your rule ahead of time about snacks in the store.
- Maybe you allow no snacks.
- Maybe you allow the child to eat crackers.
- Maybe you allow a single, small candy bar.
- Enforce your rule consistently.
- Provide the child something to do while in the store.
- Take a toy to play with or let them play with carrots, etc.
- Talk with the child.
- Let them help you with decisions: "Which vegetable shall we buy?"
- Let them help you with the shopping. As children get older they may be able to get things for you.
- Show respect for the child's needs.
- Be aware of the child and any boredom, tiredness, restlessness, etc.
- Be positive and happy.
- Honor your commitments. If you said you would be only 30 minutes, leave after 30 minutes.
- Balance confining activities like shopping with fun activities like active play on a playground or playing ball.