

DEFINITION

A spoiled child is undisciplined, manipulative, and unpleasant to be with much of the time. He has many of the following behaviors by age 2 or 3:

- Doesn't follow rules or cooperate with suggestions
- Doesn't respond to "no," "stop," or other commands
- Protests everything
- Doesn't know difference between his needs and wants
- Insists on having his own way
- Makes unfair or excessive demands on others
- Doesn't respect other people's rights
- Tries to control other people
- Has a low frustration tolerance
- Frequently whines or throws tantrums
- Constantly complains about being bored

Causes

The main cause of spoiled children is a lenient, permissive parent who doesn't set limits and gives in to tantrums and whining. If the parent gives the child too much power, he will become more self-centered. Such parents also rescue the child from normal frustrations (such as waiting and sharing). Occasionally, the child of working parents is left with a nanny or babysitter who spoils the child by providing constant entertainment and giving in to unrealistic demands.

The reason some parents are overly lenient is that they confuse the child's needs (e.g., for demand feeding) with the child's wants or whims (e.g., for demand play). They do not want to hurt their child's feelings or to cause any crying. In the process, they may take the short-term solution of doing whatever prevents crying, which in the long run causes more crying. The child's ability to deliberately cry and fuss to get something usually doesn't begin before 5 or 6 months of age. There may be a small epidemic of spoiling in the United States because some working parents come home feeling guilty about not having enough total time for their children and so spend their free time together trying to avoid any friction or limit setting.

Confusion exists about the differences between giving attention to children and spoiling children. In general, attention is good for children. Indeed, it is essential for normal development. Attention can become harmful if it is excessive, given at the wrong time, or always given immediately. Attention from you is excessive if it interferes with your child's learning to do things for himself and deal with life's frustrations. An example of giving attention at the wrong time is when you are busy and your child is demanding attention. Another wrong time is when a child has just misbehaved and needs to be ignored.

Expected Outcome

Without changes in child rearing, spoiled children run into trouble by 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 on them. Eventually they become hard for even the parent to love because of their behaviors. As a reaction to not getting along well with other children and adults, spoiled children eventually become unhappy. Spoiled children may show reduced motivation and perseverance in schoolwork. Because of poor self-control they may become involved with adolescent risk-taking behaviors, such as drug abuse. Overall, spoiling a child prepares that child poorly for life in the real world.

HOW TO PREVENT A SPOILED CHILD

1. **Provide age-appropriate limits or rules for your child.** Parents have the right and responsibility to take charge and make rules. Adults must keep their child's environment safe. Age-appropriate discipline must begin by the age of crawling. Saying "no" occasionally is good for children. Children need external controls until they develop self-control and self-discipline. Your child will still love you after you say "no." If your children like you all the time, you are not being a good parent.
2. **Require cooperation with your important rules.** It is important that your child be in the habit of responding properly to your directions long before entering school. Important rules include staying in the car seat, not hitting other children, being ready to leave on time in the morning, going to bed, and so forth. These adult decisions are not open to negotiation. Do not give your child a choice when there is none.
Child decisions, however, involve such things as which cereal to eat, book to read, toys to take into the tub, and clothes to wear. Make sure that your child understands the difference between areas in which he has choices (control) and your rules. Try to keep your important rules to no more than 10 or 12 items and be willing to go to the mat about these. Also, be sure that all adult caretakers consistently enforce these rules.
3. **Expect your child to cry.** Distinguish between needs and wants. Needs include crying from pain, hunger, or fear. In these cases, respond immediately. Other crying is harmless. Crying usually relates to your child's wants or whims. Crying is a normal response to change or frustration. When the crying is part of a tantrum, ignore it. Don't punish him for crying, tell him he's a crybaby, or tell him he shouldn't cry. Although not denying your child his feelings, don't be moved by his crying. To compensate for the extra crying your child does during a time when you are tightening up on the rules, provide extra cuddling and enjoyable activities at a time when he is not crying or having a tantrum. There are times when it is necessary to temporarily withhold attention and comforting to help your child learn something