

# 5 parenting styles that cause entitlement in kids — and how to change them

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We all have them: the “What were we thinking?” parenting moments. We let our kids sneak in after curfew because we don’t want another battle. Or we stock our purse with candy to make it through errands. Or maybe we’ve been cleaning the forgotten guinea pig’s cage — every Saturday for two years!

Guilty as charged? In fact, most of us have probably gone to similar extremes rather than trying to actually change our kids’ behavior.

There’s nothing wrong with helping our kids out every so often — but when our “helping” and “allowing” become a way of life, we’re walking the slippery slope of the entitlement epidemic.

In fact, more and more parents are recognizing the signs of entitlement in their kids. We see kids who won’t lift a finger to help out, who think the world revolves around them, who rarely show gratitude and empathy and who demand more...more...more!

But the seeds of entitlement are sown over the years in a million little parenting decisions — all made in the name of love. Sometimes a few tweaks in parenting style can make all the difference. Below are some of the most common entitlement-prone parenting styles, as well as a few proven fixes:

## 1. The “Keep Em Happy at All Costs” Parent

This might be you if: You’d rather let your kids dominate your phone during errands or pull strings with teachers and coaches than face a tantrum.

When we drop everything to help our kids avoid unhappiness or disappointment, we teach them that their happiness is a top priority. Kids develop the entitled “What’s in it for me?” attitude whenever they’re asked to behave or show kindness. And when they face life’s setbacks, like not making the team, they’re unable to cope. Make a clean break by telling your kids, “You’re really growing up, and I’m confident you can make it through the grocery store without my phone.” Then, help your kids develop some strategies for overcoming difficulties large and small from having to sit quietly through Aunt Ellie’s wedding to raising their history grade.

The fix: Give kids what they are entitled to: your love and undivided attention every day. I call it Mind, Body and Soul Time, and parents tell me all the time how this tool works

wonders in their homes. Simply spend at least 10 minutes a day individually with each child, on their terms, doing whatever they want to do during that time. Commit to it on a daily basis, and you can watch entitled behaviors melt away. Your kids will stop trying to get your attention in negative ways (like tantrums and negotiating) when they know they'll get it in positive ways.

## **2. The Enabler**

This might be you if: your 16-year-old still expects to grab a fully prepared bag lunch on her way out the door every morning, or your 7-year-old somehow always gets you to clean up his Legos.

Enabling starts small, but can soon get out of control as you fix multiple meals for dinner or you continually gather up dirty clothes from your 13-year-old's room because it's easier than dealing with the complaining and negotiating. When is it time to say when? If you feel annoyed or put out when your kids expect you to go out of your way for them, or if they seem to feel entitled to a free ride, that's a big clue you need a change.

The fix: Tell your kids, "You're really growing up, and you're old enough now to remember to put your dirty clothes in the laundry room." Then, employ a tool I call Decide What YOU Will Do. Say, "I'll do laundry on Tuesdays and Fridays. I'll wash the clothes that are in the laundry baskets and already sorted by darks and lights. Anything that's not ready and waiting in the basket can wait until the next laundry day, or you are welcome to wash it yourself." Set your kids up for success by asking, "Now, what can you do to remember?" Then follow through. After having to wear a smelly tennis uniform once or twice, your teen will soon be stepping up and taking personal responsibility.

## **3. The Rescuer**

This might be you if: Your child can't remember his homework, permission slips, gym shoes and lunch unless you remind him every single morning.

You've had the sense for a long time that your kids could remember their soccer cleats by themselves, but they never seem to — and then they feel entitled to your personal delivery service when they forget. The truth is, whether you're frantically helping your child finish a science project the night before it's due or negotiating grades and football starting positions, you might need to back off and let your child face the music when it comes to his own effort (or lack thereof) and forgetfulness.

The fix: Institute The No-Rescue Policy for repeated forgetfulness (anyone can make a mistake from time to time). Tell your kids in advance that you'll no longer be rescuing them. Be clear about your expectations, and help them brainstorm strategies to keep track of their responsibilities. Let the situation play out — even though it's tough — and soon your kids will make a giant leap in following through.

#### **4. The Indulger**

This might be you if: Your 12-year-old demands to see the PG-13 movie with friends — and wins — or your 6-year-old insists on drinking soda with every meal — and wins.

We've all been busted on this one. It's not wrong to let our kids experience life's little pleasures, but it's our job to set the appropriate limits we know are best. Entitled kids are known for thinking of themselves as above the rules, and deserving the best of what life has to offer. We can change this mindset by sticking with the limits we set, and ignoring the protests and negotiations.

The fix: We can provide plenty of opportunities for kids to wield age-appropriate control over their own lives by offering them a Decision-Rich Environment. With this tool, we allow our kids a sense of power over positive things, such as what kind of healthy snacks to buy, whether to do their homework in their room or at the table, and input into vacation activities within a set budget. When kids have more control over some aspects of their lives, they are less likely to pitch a fit when we have to say no or enforce limits in other areas, like bedtime or curfew.

#### **5. The "Over-the-Top" Parent**

This might be you if: You go far out of your way to make sure your kids have the best childhoods possible.

Lavish holidays, designer bedrooms, picture-perfect outfits — these are all great things, but kids don't need them. If they always experience the best of what life has to offer when they're young, they'll feel entitled to it, and better, as they grow older. Cutting back our over-the-top tendencies will make for happier, more contented children down the road.

The fix: Take pleasure in the little things by expressing gratitude for what you do have instead of focusing on what you want. In fact, research shows that grateful people are happier overall. Involve your kids, and create daily or weekly gratitude rituals to help them appreciate what's most important in their lives.

Whatever your parenting style, you can put an end to the entitlement epidemic at your house by putting these positive tools to work. Your kids will be happier for it — and so will you!

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