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ARE YOU SPOILING YOUR CHILDREN?

Do you classify children who are unpleasant or annoying as “spoiled”? Don’t jump to conclusions. What you view as bad behavior may simply be normal for a child that age.

For example, when a two-year-old doesn’t get what he or she wants, a temper tantrum may erupt. As unpleasant and irritating as this may be, it does not necessarily mean that this child is spoiled.

Throwing tantrums, ordering people around, and testing limits set by adults are all normal behaviors for young children. A toddler is just beginning to use language and physical skills to meet his or her needs. Understanding adults see these annoying behaviors as part of the toddler’s growth. The tantrum is a sign of a frustrated child, not a sign of a spoiled child. Knowing this does not mean do nothing. Direct the child so he or she learns more acceptable ways to communicate and get his or her needs met.

A parent’s behavior can actually contribute to the poor behavior of a child. When children don’t get enough attention, they may try to get it in ways that irritate their parents – tantrums, whining, and clinging. Young children so desperately need attention, that even the attention of an angry parent is better than none at all.

Focus on the positive. Catch children being good and compliment this behavior. Regularly offering kind words and attention removes the need for children to demand attention in less acceptable ways.

Sometimes children act spoiled when parents do too much for them. Don’t do things for your children that they can do for themselves. For example, most preschoolers should be able to dress themselves, brush their hair, and put away their toys. If these tasks are regularly done for your children, they feel they deserve this service all the time. They become more difficult to satisfy and there is no limit to what they demand.

If you feel exhausted and unappreciated by your children, you may be making your children dependent on you. Start to encourage your children to do more.

First, do the task together with them. Show them how to do the task and explain what is expected. As they develop skill, help less and less until they can do it themselves.

Raising children who are self-reliant, cooperative, and considerate rather than spoiled is challenging but rewarding. To be successful, parents need to:

- Understand what to expect of their children at different ages.
- Respond to each child’s genuine needs for care and comfort.
- Recognize when limits that have been set need to change.
- Provide positive attention.

Parenting is a balancing act requiring several decisions to be made at once. How much attention and how much discipline is needed right now? Whose needs should be met first? How will what happens now affect what happens later?

Sometimes the balance is lost and mistakes are made. No one is perfect. Be patient with you children and with yourself. Steady guidance will help your children grow into responsible, considerate adults.