

# Ask an Expert: Three Ways to Avoid Parenting Entitled Children

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There seems to be a shift in recent decades regarding family culture and expectations. According to family researcher William Doherty, the shift has moved toward a, "what's in it for me?" culture, and children are sponges for it. They watch shows where children are disrespectful to parents and see manipulative advertising showing them it's okay to expect their parents to provide the latest and greatest toy or piece of equipment. They often see parents as providers of things



to consume.

These influences can lead children to have unhealthy expectations about the role their parents play in their lives. Unless parents are aware, they can enable these entitled expectations.

Some examples:

- Parents allow their children to regularly interrupt their conversations, even if it is disrespectful.
- Parents defend their child when a teacher reports a problem and don't consider the possibility that their child misbehaved or didn't complete the assignment.
- Parents make separate food for each child because mac and cheese or crackers are "all my kids will eat."

As a parent, it is easy to slip into these traps. We may fear that our relationship with the child will be threatened if we

enforce rules or boundaries in the home. This does not suggest that we should never respond to a request from our children. Rather, when excessive, inappropriate or manipulative requests or demands come, we should not allow our children to call the shots. That is when entitlement is enabled. Consider these tips:

1. Expect your children to respect you, your time and your resources. Focusing on respect is the major key to helping children avoid entitlement problems. They need to learn that you are their parent and not their peer. This can and should be done gently and with love, but the parent-child boundary should be maintained.
2. Children will experience disappointment. However, it will provide a great opportunity for you as a parent to help them learn healthy ways to deal with disappointment. That skill will do far more for them than the immediate benefit of getting what they want.
3. Parenting can be difficult and rewarding. Don't beat yourself up if you struggle with some of these things. Just work toward positive changes and focus on the long-term development of your child. A child who has learned to be respectful and able to manage disappointment will be much better prepared for adulthood when that time comes.

*If you have questions you would like Swinton to confidentially address, email him at [jonathan.swinton@usu.edu](mailto:jonathan.swinton@usu.edu).*

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