



Raising Considerate Children in a Me-First World

EACH day presents people with numerous opportunities to do kind things for others. It may appear, though, that many think only of themselves. You see evidence of that nearly everywhere—from the shameless way people defraud others to the aggressive way they drive, from their crude language to their explosive tempers.

A me-first mentality also exists in many homes. For example, some spouses divorce simply because one partner feels that he or she “deserves better.” Even some parents may unwittingly sow the seeds of a me-first spirit. How? By indulging their child’s every whim, while hesitating to administer any kind of discipline.

By contrast, many other parents are training their children to put others before self, and with great benefits. Children who are considerate are more likely to make friends and to enjoy stable relationships. They are also more likely to be content. Why? Because, as the Bible says, “there is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving.”—Acts 20:35.

If you are a parent, how can you help your children to reap the benefits of being kind and to avoid being contaminated by the self-absorbed culture that surrounds them? Consider three traps that could foster a me-first spirit in your children, and see how you can avoid those traps.

1 Overpraising

The problem. Researchers have noted a disturbing trend: Many young adults are entering the workforce with a marked sense of entitlement—an attitude in which they expect success, even if they have done little or nothing to earn it. Some just assume that they will be promoted quickly, even without mastering their trade. Others are convinced that they are special and deserve to be treated that way—and then they become dejected when they realize that the world does not share their view.

What is behind it. Sometimes a sense of entitlement can be traced back to how a person was raised. For example, some parents have been unduly influenced by the self-esteem movement that has become popular in recent decades. Its tenets seemed plausible: If a little praise is good for kids, a lot of praise is better. On the other hand, the thinking was that showing any type of disapproval will only discourage a child. And in a world on a mission to build self-esteem, *that* was considered the epitome of irresponsible parenting. Children must never be made to feel bad about themselves—or so parents were told.

Many fathers and mothers thus began lavishing a constant flow of praise upon their children, even when those children did nothing particularly praiseworthy. Each accomplishment, no matter how small, was celebrated; each indiscretion, no matter how large, was overlooked. Those parents believed that the secret to building self-esteem was to ignore the bad and praise everything else. Making children feel good about themselves became more important than teaching them to accomplish things that they could actually feel good *about*.



What the Bible says. The Bible acknowledges that praise is appropriate *when it is deserved*. (Matthew 25:19-21) But praising children simply to make them feel good may cause them to develop a distorted view of themselves. The Bible aptly states: “If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he is deceiving his own mind.” (Galatians 6:3) For good reason, the Bible tells parents: “Don’t fail to correct your children. You won’t kill them by being firm.”*—Proverbs 23:13, *Contemporary English Version*.

What you can do. Make it your goal to give correction when it is needed and commendation when it is genuinely deserved. Do not dole out praise just to make your children feel good about themselves. Likely, it will not work. “True self-confidence comes from honing your talents and learning things,” says the book *Generation Me*, “not from being told you’re great just because you exist.”

* The Bible does not advocate physical or emotional abuse of children. (Ephesians 4:29, 31; 6:4) The goal of correction is to teach, not to provide an outlet for a parent’s anger.

“Do not think of yourself more highly than you should. Instead, be modest.”

—Romans 12:3, *Good News Translation*



2 Overprotecting

The problem. Many young adults entering the workforce seem ill-prepared to cope with adversity. Some are devastated by the slightest criticism. Others are finicky and will accept only work that meets their highest expectations. For example, in the book *Escaping the Endless Adolescence*, Dr. Joseph Allen tells of a young man who said to him during a job interview: “I get the sense that sometimes parts of the work can be a little boring, and I don’t want to be bored.” Dr. Allen writes: “He didn’t seem to understand that *all* jobs have some boring elements. How did one make it to age twenty-three without knowing that?”

What is behind it. In recent decades, many parents have felt compelled to protect their children from any type of adversity. Your daughter failed a test? Intervene and demand that the teacher raise the grade. Your son received a traffic ticket? Pay the fine for him. A failed romance? Lay all the blame on the other person.

While it is natural to want to protect your children, overprotecting them can send the wrong message—that they do not need to take responsibility for their actions. “Instead of learning that they can survive pain and disappointment, and even learn from it,” says the book *Positive Discipline for Teenagers*, “[such] children grow up extremely self-centered, convinced that the world and their parents owe them something.”

What the Bible says. Adversity is a part of life. In fact, the Bible says: “Bad things happen to everyone!” (Ecclesiastes 9:11, *Easy-to-Read Version*) That includes good people. The Christian apostle Paul, for example, endured all manner of hardship during the course of his ministry. Yet, facing up to adversity benefited him! He wrote: “I have learned, in whatever circumstances I am, to be self-sufficient. . . . I have learned the secret of both how to be full and how to hunger, both how to have an abundance and how to suffer want.”—Philippians 4:11, 12.

What you can do. Taking into account the maturity level of your children, strive to follow the Bible principle: “We each must carry our own load.” (Galatians 6:5, CEV) If your son receives a traffic ticket, it might be best to let him pay the fine out of his allowance or salary. If your daughter fails a test, perhaps that should be a wake-up call to her so that next time she will be better prepared. If your son experiences the breakup of a romance, comfort him—but at the appropriate time help him to reflect on questions such as, ‘In hindsight, has this experience revealed any ways in which I need to grow?’ Children who work through their problems build resilience and self-confidence—assets they might lack if someone was constantly rescuing them.

“Let each one prove what his own work is, and then he will have cause for exultation.”

—Galatians 6:4



3 Overproviding

The problem. In a survey of young adults, 81 percent said that the most important goal of their generation is ‘to become rich’—rating it far above helping others. But striving for wealth does not bring contentment. In fact, research indicates that people who focus on material things are less happy and more depressed. They also have a higher rate of physical and mental problems.

What is behind it. In some cases, children are being raised in materialistic families. “Parents want to make their children happy, and children want stuff,” says the book *The Narcissism Epidemic*. “Thus parents buy them stuff. And children are happy, but only for a short period of time. Then they want even more stuff.”

Of course, the advertising industry has been all too eager to exploit this hungry consumer market. It promotes such ideas as ‘You deserve the best’ and ‘Because you’re worth it.’ Many young adults have devoured the message and are now in debt, unable to pay for the things they “deserve.”

What the Bible says. The Bible acknowledges the need for money. (Ecclesiastes 7:12) At the same time, it warns that “the love of money is a root of all sorts of injurious things.” It adds: “By reaching out for this love some . . . have stabbed themselves all over with many pains.” (1 Timothy 6:10) The Bible encourages us, not to pursue material riches, but to be content with the basic necessities of life.—1 Timothy 6:7, 8.

What you can do. As a parent, examine your own attitude toward money and the things it can buy. Keep your priorities straight, and help your children to do the same. *The Narcissism Epidemic*, quot-

“Those who are determined to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many senseless and hurtful desires.”—1 Timothy 6:9

ed earlier, suggests: “Parents and children can start discussions on such topics as ‘When is buying things on sale a good idea? When is it a bad idea?’ ‘What’s an interest rate?’ ‘When have you bought something because someone else thought you should?’ ”

Be careful not to use “stuff” as a drug to cover over family issues that need to be addressed. “Throwing material goods at problems is a notoriously unsuccessful solution,” says the book *The Price of Privilege*. “Problems need to be addressed with thought, insight, and empathy, not shoes and purses.” ■

