Are Today’s Kids Spoiled?

It seems like every older generation looks at the younger generation and thinks kids are more spoiled today than when they were growing up! Is this just the typical generation gap or are kids today truly being overindulged and spoiled?

With Christmas a mere seven weeks away, overindulging is apparent in many households. In fact, some parents and grandparents find it difficult to decide what to buy their children because they already have everything.

What is overindulgence and how does it actually affect our children? Research by Jean Clarke, Connie Dawson, and David Bredehoft, involved 3,500 participants and looked at that question. Overindulgence comes from good intentions - the desire to provide joy and happiness to a child’s life.

Occasionally, overindulgence is beneficial, however, it can cause problems. The researchers discovered there are strong links between overindulgence in childhood and a lack of important life skills in adulthood.

Clarke, Dawson and Bredehoft found three types of overindulgence:

1) “Too Much”. Giving kids too many toys and clothing, overspending on activities, entertainment, vacations and even junk food. Always giving “too much” means that kids never learn the skill of knowing how much is “enough”. There is a difference. Parents need to model it and teach it so children can learn the difference.

2) “Overnurturing”. This involves doing things for children that they could and should be doing for themselves. It also means sheltering them from learning to handle situations that they are able to master on their own. The result can be a child whose role in life is to only be cute, helpless or manipulative.

3) “Soft Structure”. This has to do with giving kids too much freedom and license. It can also mean giving them choices or experiences that are not appropriate for their age. It may mean that kids are “running the show” rather than the parents!

Knowing what is “enough” supports the goal of raising children to become adults who care about others and the world around them, rather than focusing entirely on meeting their own desires all the time.

So, during this holiday season, consider whether your children “have enough.” And, think about giving to others who may have needs so your children and grandchildren learn that focusing on others can be rewarding.

By: Lisa A. Wallace, Human Development Specialist, Henry County Extension Center, 100 W. Franklin, Room 16, Clinton, MO 64735 (wallace1@missouri.edu and 660-885-5556)