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Thyra McKelvie

PHONE: 206-517-1130

EMAIL: press@parentmap.com

ONLINE: www.parentmap.com/books/gettingtocalm

Free ParentMap Award-Winning Feature "Entitle-Mania"

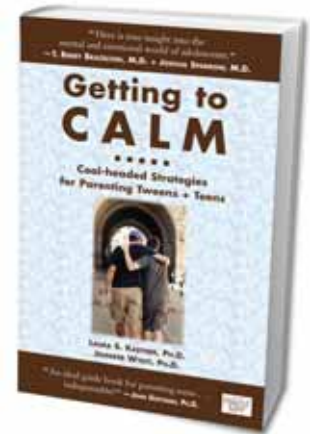


Dear colleague,

ParentMap is launching a book division, and our first title is already creating a buzz! T. Berry Brazelton calls *Getting to Calm* "Required reading for parents who struggle with their teen," and Daniel Siegel says, "This is a smart book ... bravo!" When ParentMap ran an excerpt of this book last August, it generated more reader feedback than

anything else we published in 2008. The excerpt, "Entitle-mania: Why overindulgence is hurting your child," offers practical tips for parents who want to tame the teen 'tude and create a spirit of thankfulness in their child. As your readers cope with difficult economic realities, this information has never been more relevant.

Getting to Calm is a terrific read, and the first book ever to address the crucial issue of emotional regulation for parents dealing with difficult tween and teen issues. Teen expert Dr. Laura Kastner and co-author Dr. Jenny Wyatt give parents real tools for grappling with 14 of the most common teen issues.



We'd love you to consider reviewing *Getting to Calm* in your publication, and will send a copy upon request. Additionally, we offer "Entitle-mania" free of charge, one-time print rights, market exclusivity honored, with a short blurb about the upcoming book in the author's bio.

Please contact me if I can provide the electronic version of "Entitle-mania" and/or your review copy of *Getting to Calm: Cool-headed Strategies for Parenting Tweens & Teens*. I look forward to hearing from you!

Best,

Alayne Sulkin
Publisher, ParentMap newsmagazine



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Entitle-mania!

How to break the cycle of overindulgence and instill a work ethic in your child

By Dr. Laura Kastner and Jenny Wyatt

Call it “entitle-mania”: The average American kid has more stuff, wants more stuff and gets away with fewer chores around the house than any previous generation. This trend is not limited to the affluent — it cuts across all socio-economic classes.

As parents, most of us haven’t made it a priority to train our children to roll up their sleeves and dig into daily household drudgery. The fallout? Many children today feel entitled to all the benefits of family life — without giving much back.

This is a pickle we’ve created. Many parents feel that their children are spoiled to some degree, from “somewhat” to “excessively.” Most are in the “somewhat” category. These children pout and drag their heels, but eventually do some chores. They collect goodies such as clothes, electronics and athletic gear. Once they reach the teen years, the average kid spends \$100 a week, regardless of family income level (Teen Research Unlimited, October 2003).

Kids being kids, they’ll use their verbal and emotional talents to try to persuade parents they have to have something and, likewise, to get off the hook with family jobs. Compared to parents of the 1950s and 1960s, we place more of a value on our children’s feelings than on strict obedience.

When we insist that they pitch in or we deprive them of their wants, they tell us we’re meaner than other parents, that “everybody else has one” or the big show-stopper: “My friends feel sorry for me.”

Highly indulged kids are not happy kids. They typically have a false, inflated sense of importance, which is inversely related to genuine self-esteem. Happy kids work toward achieving goals. Research shows that a strong sense of self develops when kids buckle down and master challenges.

Indulging children is too easy. What’s hard is sticking to our guns and making it a priority to teach children the skills they need to delay gratification, to budget resources, and to be contributing members of the family.

Chores: a way of life

When parents build chores into the family routine, they are helping their kids build character. This character development instills a sense of responsibility, an expectation to give back to the community of home and a work ethic. These behaviors — desired by all parents — are the opposite of “spoiled rotten.”

But here’s the reality: Most children don’t do chores with smiles on their faces. Getting kids to help out around the house takes years of training, starting when they are toddlers picking up their toys, progressing to youngsters clearing dinner dishes, and leading to teens who feel obliged (albeit begrudgingly) to participate in household tasks.

The more that families make household duties a way of life for children, the more easily kids comply. But even then, children might show some attitude; parents might have to ask more than once; siblings might argue over whose turn it is; and there might be some tiffs and theatrics and a hard lesson or two. We may feel the urge to call our kid a “spoiled brat,” but losing our cool is counterproductive, so it’s best to stay calm and firm — and keep nagging to a minimum.



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With small children, parents can work side by side and offer other support. With tweens, parents can say, “You don’t like being badgered, and I don’t like your heel-dragging. Let’s make a deal and figure out when this will be done.” Link privileges to responsibilities: “After you clean your room, we’ll pick up Jason and go to the park.” Later, that can translate to access to car keys.

While parents should expect 100 percent compliance on family responsibilities, they shouldn’t expect a joyful response — or a perfect job. When, what and how the chores get done is negotiable; whether they will is not.

Creating new habits

What can parents do when they find themselves with a child who does zilch and expects a lot? For parents needing to initiate new and better habits for defiant kids, here are some tips:

Avoid threats and ultimatums. “Do it or else” statements are like red flags in front of a bull and are more likely to arouse defiance instead of cooperation. A negotiated deal and an ongoing, working alliance will always be more effective.

When children have a pattern of not doing as asked, parents can announce a new policy. Let them know that you’ll remind them once and if they don’t comply, they’ll owe you “payback of time plus additional interest time” with another chore.

If the child protests the task of emptying the dishwasher, you can say, “I expect you to do it in the next 20 minutes. You’re right, I can’t make you. It’s your choice, but you’ll owe me the time so it’s in your best interest to play by the rules.” Then leave the room, because it’s hard for kids to buckle in a battle.

Positive strategies work better than punishment. Once in a while, we may have to punish kids, but a steady stream of negative threats doesn’t inspire cooperation. If we’ve already consented to something, even tacitly, it’s dirty pool and coercive to yank permission at the last minute. Often, we pull the big guns out of anger, not because they work.

Flip the language and set up incentives. Giving the child plenty of notice, we can make an upbeat offer like, “After you make your bed, we can get out the Legos.” Think of it as translating from Greek to Italian. Instead of “Do X or you don’t get to do Y,” it’s “First you do X, and then you get to do Y.”

Steer clear of enticing a child with something highly desirable and out of the ordinary, such as a special birthday celebration, a car or a new puppy. This is almost always a bad idea, since parents as well as children buy into special things emotionally. Parents then have grave misgivings about withdrawing the offer if the child isn’t successful. Parents should never create situations (promises or threats) they’re not willing to follow through on, since it erodes their credibility. And they shouldn’t shoot for a goal beyond the child’s reach, since it sets the child up for failure.

The best way to kick-start a new habit or a new regime is to break it into chunks and use small rewards. Determine your “new program,” preferably with input from the child. Then, supply small rewards for small steps in the right direction, which are easily earned and easily taken away.

For example, for every day’s completion of chores, the child might earn TV or cell phone privileges. Third, adapt the program as needed, since we rarely get it exactly right from the get-go. A new habit takes time, repetition and rewards along the way in order for it to take root. Emphasize the positive, cheer your kids’ success, and say little — no threats, no finger wagging — when they fail.



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Tell children that you expect them to do chores, no ifs, ands or buts. Part of a parent's job is to prepare children for the world, and the way of the world is: First you do your work, then you get your reward or privilege. However, terms are negotiable. Kids can be allowed some say on which chores, which deadlines and which rewards. This input can mean the difference of night and day in their attitude, because the kids buy in to the task through their participation.

Although it's hard to give more goodies to an indulged child, it may be necessary. The child's new regime, whether it's sleeping in their own bed, doing dishes or walking the dog, is burdensome and bad news to them. That's why we override their resistance (and ours to fighting) with the goody. If necessary, parents may need to revoke privileges previously given and make them contingent on task completion, and they should expect protest.

If it becomes clear in a few weeks that the plan isn't working, call it off and come up with something else. If the child isn't going to succeed, there's no reason to keep going. Consistency is desirable once you have the new routine under way. Good parenting involves consistency and stability, but it also requires adaptability and innovation. In this instance, it's perfectly OK to say to the child, "Look, what we're doing isn't working. We need to adjust the plan to get back on track."

Don't be discouraged if things get worse before they get better. Most indulged kids are very good at wearing parents down. Because tantrums have worked before, kids will not only keep at it, they'll double their intensity — following parents into the bathroom, telling parents they hate them, threatening to go live with Aunt Betty.

This is called "extinction surge." Their freak-out is an honest outburst, as if to say, "How dare you change the program on me like this!" The surge is their last-ditch effort to weaken the parents' resolve and express their strong emotion or frustration. Withstanding their wrath can be awful the first time, but behaviors will improve once the child knows parents mean business.

The later we take action, the more inconvenient it will be, but it's never too late! In the same way that brushing teeth is not up for debate, kids can acquire new habits and be trained, for example, to get up from the table and do the dishes. Routine is a beautiful thing.

*Clinical psychologist Laura Kastner, Ph.D., and writer Jennifer Wyatt, Ph.D., are co-authors of **The Launching Years: Strategies for Parenting from Senior Year to College Life** (Three Rivers Press, 2002) and **The Seven-Year Stretch: How Families Work Together to Grow Through Adolescence** (Houghton Mifflin, 1997). This article is adapted from their upcoming book on adolescence, to be published by ParentMap Press in 2009.*



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Pathways to indulgence

Many parents know better than to indulge their children, yet it still happens. Here are some of the main reasons why:

- **Generational.** Parents today have more disposable income to put toward children's wish lists.
- **Demographics.** Parents are having fewer children and having them later, which means less divvying up of resources.
- **Slippery slope.** Kids love stuff, parents love their kids, so they fall into bad habit of giving them stuff because they love to see those faces shine.
- **Weak boundaries.** Without firm interpersonal boundaries, parents absorb too many of their kids' feelings and can't tolerate having their kids mad at them.
- **Romanticizing the past.** Clinging to unrealistic illusions about home and hearth, parents want everything to be perfect and are unable to work through unpleasant hardships.
- **Guilt.** Parents give kids stuff instead of time.
- **The "busy" excuse.** Kids are too busy and so are their parents, and they never get around to making chores a priority.
- **Overidentification.** Parents want their children to have what they didn't have in their own childhoods.
- **Pure oops.** Parents got into the habit of giving their kids stuff and didn't realize where all those "gimmies" would end up.
- **Path of least resistance.** It's easier for parents to do shlock themselves or hire it out than to make kids do it.
- **Retail therapy.** Parents are having a bad day, so they give themselves a boost by treating their kids and enjoying making them happy.
- **Misguided self-esteem.** Parents feel more successful when they provide their kids with more.
- **Hitting a rough patch in life.** Any tough time — divorce, illness, difficult circumstances — can lower a parent's resistance to kid's demands.
- **Our material world.** Almost everyone is tempted to keep up with the Jones.
- **Exhaustion.** Parents are on a treadmill, too tired to summon up strength to hold the line.