

## Confident Children - Avoid Overparenting

Michael Grose

---

For many years underparenting was perhaps the biggest problem facing children.

Recently there has emerged another type of parenting that, whilst never as harmful as underparenting, can be detrimental to children's healthy development – that is, the trend by many of the current generation of parents to overparent their children.

Overparenting occurs when parents solve children's problems rather than give them the chance to overcome problems themselves. It occurs when parents allow children to avoid legitimately challenging situations so they won't be inconvenienced. It also occurs when too much control or too much order is imposed on children.

Overparenting is predominantly a mindset. It is a belief that children can't overcome difficulties themselves and they can't cope with discomfort or disappointment. It comes with increased affluence but it can occur in any socio-economic group. From my observation, it is more likely to occur in smaller rather than larger families or in families where a death has occurred or tragedy has been a visitor.

An overparented child is a protected, spoiled child. He or she often lacks real confidence and won't take many risks. An overprotected child avoids new situations and looks to hide behind his parents when difficulties or challenges arise.

An overparented child can be any age but often becomes more apparent in middle primary school when the challenges children meet start to multiply. The overparenting may have occurred in the early years but the results only become apparent during this stage.

Some children by their nature place more demands on their parents, which results in overparenting. They receive more attention, more material possessions and more spoiling than they need because they can be so bloody-minded and so insistent that parents give in just for some peace and quiet.

Sometimes circumstances such as family breakdown or a change of circumstances can lead to overparenting or overprotection as a form of compensation for the inconvenience that has been caused. While a child's behaviour may lead to feelings of guilt overparenting in this manner doesn't do the child any favours in the long term.

How can a parent break from a pattern of overparenting? This is hard to do because overparenting can seem so normal. However if a child is so reliant on a parents that they think they can't cope without them then it is time to take some action.

Parental illness is one way to change overparenting, although it is not a recommended course of action. When a parent is incapacitated or sick for a lengthy period of time children generally have no choice but to fend for themselves in a whole range of ways. From my observation of families I am constantly amazed how children rise to a challenge when they have to.

Another way to kick the overparenting habit is to do so by stealth. Little by little parents need to pull back on the over-assistance that they provide children. They can start by insisting children walk to school (provided this is reasonable from the perspective of safety and their well being), get themselves up each morning or other simple forms of self-help as required. When a new behavior becomes the norm rather than the exception then it is best to look for another area to withdraw their assistance from.

Another way to defeat the overparenting habit is to give children ideas, tips and techniques to cope with their challenges rather than allow them to avoid or pull out of challenges. For instance, a child who wants to pull out of an after school class after three weeks because they haven't any friends may need some ideas about either how to make friends or make do without friends until the end of term.

It helps to develop a "Hang tough" attitude rather than a "Let's try something else when things get tough" attitude. Overparenting prevents children from developing a "Hang Tough" attitude.

From my experience those children who do best at school and beyond the school years are those who have parents whose first response is to teach and support rather than protect or compensate when social, physical or intellectual challenges occur. It also helps to have parents who show absolute, unwavering confidence in a child's ability to cope and fend for him or herself, yet be wise enough to know when children need their help and compassionate enough to lend a hand once in while.

It is hard to get the balance right between developing real independence and not placing too much responsibility on children. It is essential for all sorts of reasons that childhood be protected, even prolonged. But that doesn't mean that children be closeted, spoiled or get every material good they want. Effective parenting is a balancing act between the head and the heart, between providing opportunities for resourcefulness and showing compassion, and between being a supportive parent and a protective parent.

.....

Michael Grose is The Parent Coach. For seventeen years he has been helping parents deal with the rigours of raising kids and survive!! For information about Michael's Parent Coaching programs or just some fine advice and ideas to help you raise confident kids and resilient teenagers visit <http://www.parentingideas.com.au>.