

# INDULGENT PARENTING: THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN

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## BAUMRIND'S PARENTING STYLES

### Parenting Types:

1. Authoritarian
2. Authoritative
3. Permissive
4. Neglectful

In the early 1960's, psychologist Diana Baumrind conducted experiments with parents. These experiments were designed to identify and understand how parents differ in their responses to their children. As a result of the Baumrind study as well as further research, four main styles of parenting were delineated. They are Authoritarian, Authoritative, Permissive, and Neglectful. Each style has its own characteristics as well as effects on children's development. This article, the second in a series, will discuss the impact on children of authoritarian parenting.

## INDULGENT PARENTING

For indulgent parents, having a relationship with their children is more important than providing direction or rules for the child. Indulgent parents have few rules for their children. Rather, they tend to be very lenient with their children. Desiring closeness in relationship is a good thing. However, the way they go about achieving the relationship blurs the lines of the relationship. Instead of a parent/child relationship, the relationship is seen more as friend/friend. While they are extremely responsive to the needs and wants of their children, they often do not provide the structure necessary for healthy emotional development. An indulgent parenting style can have long-term effects on the emotional development of the child even into adulthood. In addition, the impact of this style of parenting can also be felt in the child's relationship with God.

## CHILDHOOD CONSEQUENCES

There is a strong element of entitlement that pervades an indulgent household. Children growing up with indulgent parents are given all of what they need and most of what they want. In the desire to have a healthy relationship with their child, the indulgent parent seeks to give the child what they want. Out of guilt or love, they seek to indulge them so that their child will not want for anything. However, this way of dealing with children can create a sense of entitlement in the child. The child has never had to learn to delay gratification. As a result, parents of this style report never leaving a store without buying something for the child.

In addition to entitlement, since the child has not learned to delay gratification, they often display impulsive behavior. Even with older children, money seems to "burn a hole in their pockets". This impulsivity is not only in the area of money. These children tend to display impulsivity in other areas as well. Children with indulgent parents tend to experience impulsive bouts of anger and frustration. One might think that children who are given what they want should not have anything to be angry about. On

### Childhood Consequences:

1. Entitlement
2. Impulsivity
3. Immaturity

the contrary, since they have not learned to delay gratification, they expect that things should go the way they expect at all times. When events do not go according to their expectations, they become quickly angry and frustrated. Remember the children from Willy Wonka? These children, with the exception of Charlie, were over-indulged and spoiled. They certainly displayed impulsivity and low frustration tolerance.

Finally, children raised by indulgent parents often are less mature than their peers. This lack of maturity is evident in their response to not getting what they want. These children are prone to age-inappropriate temper tantrums. In addition, as other children are learning to take responsibility for their own actions, children with indulgent parents do not. As a result, they do what they feel like doing. When they do not feel like doing something, they do not. The problem with this way of thinking is that there is much in life that we need to do whether we feel like it or not. For example, children with indulgent parents tend to procrastinate more than other children in terms of schoolwork. As a result, children with indulgent parents tend to struggle in school more than other children of equal intellectual ability.

## RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Often our view of God, who Jesus taught us to call Father, is similar to our view of our earthly father. Since our earthly father is visible to us and God is not, we project our image of our earthly father onto our heavenly Father. When children grow up with indulgent parents, they often begin to see God the same way. While they may be obedient to God, this obedience is solely out of love for God, but rarely from any sense of obligation or submission. As a result, children who grow up with indulgent parents often have a view of God that is skewed.

Submission is not doing what we want to do. Submission is doing

something that we would prefer not to do, or something that we would at least not like to do at this time. Children with indulgent parents have tremendous difficulty submitting.

“...We project our image of our earthly father onto our heavenly Father.”

## FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

In addition to the impact indulgent parenting has on the current relationship with their parents and their relationship with God, children who grow up in this type of home often experience long-term emotional consequences. The two main long-term issues for these adults are low self-esteem and continued impulsivity.

When children are given things rather than earning them, they grow up with a sense of entitlement, but, often the worse consequence is a loss of self-esteem. As adults, they lack confidence. Once they graduate, they come face to face with the harsh reality that the world will not just give us the things that we want. We need to work for them and earn them. Once this reality sets in, these adults can become anxious and depressed. As life gets more difficult, they do not have a track record of self-determination to fall back on during the struggle. One young woman I met had significant struggles in this area. She had been indulged as a child by her parents. If she did not want to do something or became easily frustrated, her parents would step in and rescue her. They did most of her projects for school. When she got to college, she

struggled badly with balancing her freedom and school work. As a result, she dropped out after only one year.

The second problem these adults struggle with is continued impulsivity. This impulsivity is especially evident in terms of finances. Because they are used to getting what they want, these adults seek to continue the lifestyle they experienced while living with their parents. Even though the job they might get might not provide enough income for them to live the same lifestyle they had when growing up, the ease of getting credit often fills the gap. These adults often buy things on credit without any real understanding of whether they will be able to pay off the debt.

Now in debt, they may find themselves in a situation where they might need to move back in with their parents in order to pay down their debt. That is, of course, assuming that they ever left their parent's home. Many of these adults do not leave their parent's home because they realize that they would not be able to enjoy the same lifestyle if they move out. This failure to launch is becoming a significant problem in our society. In fact, the twenties is being called a second adolescence.

Where the superego is increased with Authoritarian parents, the id, which represents our basic desires, is increased with indulgent parents. While indulgent parents may not force their children to face consequences, at some point all of us face the consequences of our decision and actions. These consequences may be difficult to face for those who have avoided them for most of their lives.

### Future Consequences:

1. Low self-esteem
2. Impulsivity