

Are You Raising Cornucopia Kids?

Parents today have a pervasive, uneasy feeling about their children, something they have difficulty pinning down. It is easy to spot, but extremely difficult to explain. This phenomenon has far-reaching and long lasting effect on our children and yet seems to elude parents and families. This concern is focused on their children's expectations. These are children from every walk of life; urban to wealthy suburbs. We're talking about good families who want to do the right thing - raise "good" kids.

Today's children want it all - want the best, and want it now, and don't particularly want to wait for it, or work for it. Children's expectations are, without a doubt, what rules. Parents willingly and easily submit to the latest fad item, fashion trend, and indiscriminate spending on the wants and "must haves" of their children. These are the children called "Cornucopia Kids" and the parents who raise them usually do so with the best of intentions.

According to Dr. Bruce Baldwin, a psychologist and specialist in promoting quality of life and achievement in children, we are raising a generation of cornucopia kids, children who are indulged from an early age. How can this happen? Children obtain this immature and misguided life-style through persuasion, manipulation and simply because it's the prevailing cultural norm. Parents have created an artificial world for their children built on seemingly innocent actions and the best of intentions. After all, shouldn't my child have the best? But in reality, these parents are naive and compliant and don't seem to realize the far reaching impact of their actions. In addition, so many parents are just worn down from all the peer pressure and just give up trying to do what their conscience tells them is right.

Yes, life is easy for cornucopia kids. They never have to struggle, seldom have to wait for more than a week for a desired toy or special item. They have what it takes to be part of the in-crowd, with popularity that goes along with it. And if parents can't deliver on demand, there is an eager grandparent waiting in the wings to provide every whim for them.

Lucky children? Far from it! These kids have everything, ***except what they really need.*** What they need is a sound value system and associated achievement oriented skills that will enable them to face the real world and succeed there. Only parents can provide these necessities.

It takes a great deal of character to be a good parent today. Several decades ago, if kids wanted something, they had to work for it, or wait until a holiday or birthday for it to come their way. It is well known that struggle builds confidence, patience, appreciation and many other positive character traits. But the life-styles of indulged children make for a most difficult transition into the teen years and adult life. In fact, cornucopia kids are at a distinct disadvantage for making it successfully in life.

Let's examine several ***myths*** about material possessions that permeate our society today that must be confronted and resolved by every parent.

A child who has everything is advantaged and more likely to succeed. Quite the opposite often happens. A child who gets everything he wants for nothing learns to expect everything for very little effort. These children become marginal workers and lean heavily on others to provide for them, because that's how life has been for them growing up.

Having everything helps a child feel loved and secure. Indulging a child actually robs her of self esteem and personal security. Confidence rarely develops and, in fact, these children have feelings of hopelessness and helplessness when everything is not being provided for them or things do not go their way.

The child is who given everything is protected from the pain of peer rejection...and getting kids to do chores today is impossible. In reality, it is the child who learns accountability and responsibility at home who wins! Teaching behaviors that require persistence, effort, and work-related values are important life-long skills.

Want to avoid raising Cornucopia Kids?

Here are some guidelines to practice:

- Teach your children (and perhaps yourself) to strive for personal goals and working hard to reach them. Reap the benefits of struggle.
- Develop a clear perception of reality. Help your child understand that growing up to be rich and famous is not likely for his or her future.
- Define personal limits and strengths. It is through confrontation with adversity that self-awareness develops during the healthy striving to meet challenges. Supportive feedback from parents is essential throughout childhood, maximizing strengths. “Soft” kids are sheltered, pampered and have parents that “fix” everything for them. Not a good thing!
- Help children accept failure as part of learning, facing mistakes with resiliency.
- Learn to delay gratification. Help kids wait for things; it really pays off later in how kids care for their belongings and value what they have.
- Develop the capacity for self-discipline. Help kids understand how to choose what is right, not what is pleasurable or self-serving. Kids need to develop internal restraints on their own behavior and not look to parents and teachers to help them control themselves. Impulsivity is not a good thing for children.
- Understand the effort reward relationship. If a child is given something just because he asks for it he learns that everything in life comes easy- an attitude of entitlement follows him through life.
- Build a reservoir of confidence. This does not come from outside support and boosts from external sources. Confidence develops when kids are given a wide range of personal experiences where they can confront challenges successfully.
- Experience the internal rewards of accomplishment. A feeling of pride and satisfaction of accomplishment can only be experienced when effort has been expended toward attaining a personal goal.
- Create an appreciation for personal property. Kids take care of things they’ve had to work for or wait for. They also will benefit from seeing you take care and respect for things you own in the home. Be careful what you throw away in front of your children! Giving items no longer needed to others is a practice well worth the effort in building life long positive values.
- Slow down the pressure to “teenify”. Children who are given opportunities and experiences once reserved for teen-agers are at a distinct disadvantage in life. Make-up, fancy jewelry, teen-style clothing, even early sports can all steal the joy of these experiences when introduced and permitted too early. Rushing kids into a commercial and indulgent life-style undermines the opportunity kids need to play and enjoy age-appropriate activities.

It takes a strong parent with character and clear values to see through all of the pressure and do what is BEST, not what is easiest. And, many parents are doing just that! Will you be one of them?