

**More is Not Always Better! Overindulgence  
and its Effects Throughout the Lifespan:  
A Review of Theory, Research and Practical Application**

Presented by  
Susan (Sue) E. Murray, M.A., M.S., CFLE, LMFT

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**Learning Objectives:**

Participants will identify three types of overindulgence and their effects on children.  
Participants will identify how overindulgence affects adults who were overindulged as children.

Participants will identify the link between overindulgence and faith development and practice.

Overindulgence is defined as giving children too much of what looks good, too soon, and for too long. It means giving a disproportionate amount of family resources to one or more children in a way that appears to be meeting the children's needs but does not. It is also a form of child neglect in that it hinders children from doing their developmental tasks and from learning necessary life skills.

Done with the best intentions by loving parents and other adults, overindulgence has long-term effects on children and carries over into the adolescent and even adult years. Those who identify themselves as having been indulged as children report a sense of "not knowing how much is enough." They report a negative effect on their self-esteem, not learning how to delay gratification, not knowing what is normal for other people, difficulty trouble taking personal responsibility, not having self-care skills, lacking skills of relating with others, and problems in parenting. All of these effects relate in some way to one's personal sense of connection.

A sense of connection forms a central defining characteristic of spirituality—connections to something greater than oneself, which includes an emotional experience of religious awe and reverence. In his research, Bredenhof (2010) stated, "We hypothesize that childhood overindulgence leads to extrinsic life aspirations and disconnectedness--the antithesis to spirituality."

This session will provide participants with a working definition of overindulgence, a brief review of the research, and approaches to practical application, which will include the integration of faith development and practice.

## References:

Bredehoft, D. J. (2010). *The disconnect between childhood overindulgence and spirituality*. Poster presented at the 2010 National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference, November 5, 2010, Minneapolis, MN.

Clarke, J., Dawson, C. & Bredehoft, D. (2004). *How Much is Enough? Everything You Need to Know to Steer Clear of Overindulgence and Raise Likeable, Responsible and Respectful Children*. NY: Marlowe & Co.

Dawson, C. & Bredehoft, D. (2005). The unwanted and unintended long-term results of overindulging children: Three types of overindulgence and corrective strategies for parents and institutions. In G. R. Walz & R. K. Yep (Eds). *Vistas: Compelling perspectives on counseling 2005* (pp. 87-90). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

Kindlon, D. (2003). *Too Much of a Good Thing: Raising Children of Character in an Indulgent Age*. NY: Hyperion.

Pinquart, M. & Silbereisen, R. K. (2004). Transmission of values from adolescents to their parents: The role of value content and authoritative parenting. *Adolescence*, 39 (153) pp. 83-100.

Pugh, A. (2009). *Longing and belonging: Parents, children, and consumer culture*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Slinger, M. & Bredehoft, D. J. "Relationships between childhood overindulgence and adult attitudes and behavior." Poster presented at the 2010 National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference, November 5, 2010, Minneapolis, MN.

Spirituality (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spirituality>).

## Additional Resources:

[www.Overindulgence.info](http://www.Overindulgence.info)

[www.facebook.com/overindulgence.info](http://www.facebook.com/overindulgence.info)

Free one-hour on-line course: *Parenting in the Age of Overindulgence*. University of Minnesota Extension, Center for Family Development. Available at: <http://www.extension.umn.edu/family/live-healthy-live-well/healthy-children/overindulgence/online-course-for-parents>

YouTube Resources: <http://www.overindulgence.info/resources-for-parents/overindulgence-on-youtube.html>

## The Three Ways of Overindulging Identified in the Overindulgence Research Study

When I was growing up,

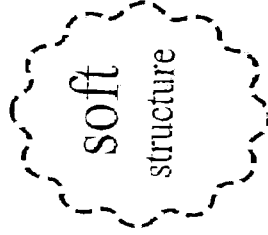
- my parents gave me lots of toys.
- I was allowed to have any clothes I wanted.
- my parents overscheduled me for activities, lessons, sports, camps.

When I was growing up,

- my parents did things for me that I should or could do for myself.
- my parents were over-loving and gave me too much attention.
- I was allowed lots of privileges.
- my parents made sure I was entertained.

When I was growing up,

- my parents did not expect me to do chores.
- I was not expected to learn the same skills as other children.
- my parents didn't have rules or make me follow them.
- my parents allowed me to take the lead or dominate the family
- my parents gave me too much freedom.



## Overindulgence Risk Factors

- Not knowing how much is enough
- Disrespect of things and other people
- Believing one is the center of the universe
- Not knowing how much is enough
- Trained helplessness
- Confusing needs and wants
- Overblown sense of entitlement
- Expecting immediate gratification
- Believing one is the center of the universe
- Not knowing how much is enough
- Having lax boundaries
- Trained irresponsibility
- Uneven competencies
- Overblown sense of entitlement
- Expecting immediate gratification
- Believing one is the center of the universe

## **Risk Factors: Distorted sense of self**

From: *How Much is Enough? Everything You Need to Know to Steer Clear of Overindulgence and Raise Likeable, Responsible, and Respectful Children*,  
by Jean Clarke, Connie Dawson & David Bredehoft, De Capo Press, 2004.

## Why Parents Overindulge

- T F Guilt – a little guilt/a little gift
- T F Parents were overindulged
- T F Came from scarcity
- T F Masking favoritism
- T F To compete with other adults
- T F To control kids
- T F To “make smooths” – fear confrontation or rejection
- T F To project a parent vision of the child
- T F To feel like I am a good parent
- T F No skill to set limits
- T F Trying to be fair
- T F Competition with spouse over control of child
- T F Taking path of least resistance
- T F Quick fix for whining
- T F To cover conflicting parenting goals
- T F Seduction – need to be popular with the child
- T F Compensating for abusive parent
- T F Compensating for absent parent
- T F Buying love by absent parent
- T F Buying favors
- T F Child idolatry
- T F Build parents’ own self-esteem – “What a good parent I am.”
- T F Response to media programming
- T F To make child happy
- T F To set up peer group competition among children
- T F Compete with parent peer group
- T F Afraid of child’s anger
- T F For a child who is “less than”
- T F Giving love without balancing it with rules
- T F Projects parents’ needs onto children – parent didn’t get to do hockey camp
- T F Contrary parenting – to oppose spouse or grandparents
- T F Want child to have what they didn’t have
- T F Don’t know about child development
- T F Yield to pressure of media or children
- T F Habitually codependent with everyone
- T F To keep child quiet because spouse gets violent
- T F To please grandparents or other adults
- T F Illness
- T F To compensate for a child’s disability
- T F Lack of time and energy – fatigue



# Raising Likeable, Responsible, Respectful Children in an Age of Overindulgence

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## 12 Risks of Overindulging

- 1. Center of the universe syndrome:** A child should understand early on that the world will not solely focus on them.
- 2. Disrespectful attitude:** Having disrespect for one's own things easily leads to disrespect for other people's things.
- 3. Helplessness:** Doing for children what they should be learning to do themselves takes away the opportunity for them to learn how to be competent.
- 4. Confusing wants and needs:** Young children can't tell the difference between wants and needs and have to be carefully taught.
- 5. Overblown sense of entitlement:** Adults who were overindulged as children often feel that they are entitled to more of everything and that they deserve more than others.
- 6. Irresponsibility:** Constantly protecting children from experiencing the consequences of their actions and not holding them accountable for completing tasks leads to irresponsibility.
- 7. Ungratefulness:** Soft structure in the home can lead to individuals being less likely to be grateful for things and to others.
- 8. Poor self-control:** Parents need to insist that the child learn self-management skills.
- 9. Relationship problems:** Issues that result from overindulgence—such as poor conflict-resolution skills and expectation of immediate gratification—spill over into all other relationship forms, from friends, to family, to workplace.
- 10. Materialistic values and unhappiness:** Children who were overindulged as children are more likely to develop materialistic values in adulthood (selfish and greedy) and grow up to be more unhappy.
- 11. Personal goals distortion:** Studies show that the more an individual was overindulged as a child, the more likely it is that their personal life goals are externally motivated—fame, fortune, vanity—as opposed to internal aspirations such as developing character and cultivating meaningful relationships.
- 12. Spiritual involvement:** Overindulged children are more likely to become adults who are not interested in spiritual growth, have difficulties finding meaning in times of hardship, and are less apt to develop a personal relationship with a power greater than themselves.

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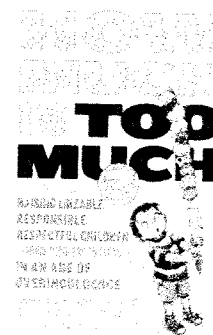


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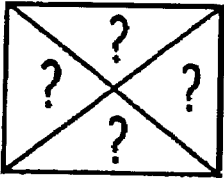
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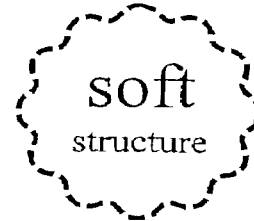
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# ***Test of Four***

## **Clues to Overindulgence**



A yes response to any of the four questions  
is a signal that overindulgence may be occurring.

### **1. Development?**

Does it get in the way of the child learning a **developmental task**?  
If yes, which task?

If the child is two or older, does it reinforce the early belief that  
the child is the center of the world?

### **2. Resources?**

Does it use a disproportionate amount of the **family resources**:  
money, space, time, energy, focus, to meet the wants, not the needs,  
of one or more of the children?

### **3. Whose needs?**

Is this more for the **parent** than for the child?

Does it insist that the child focus on activities that the parent  
likes but that are counter to the child's interests and abilities?

### **4. Possible harm?**

Does it deplete or in some way **harm** others, property, the  
environment, the community?



# The Difference Between Wants and Needs

## Needs

Give children all of what they need.

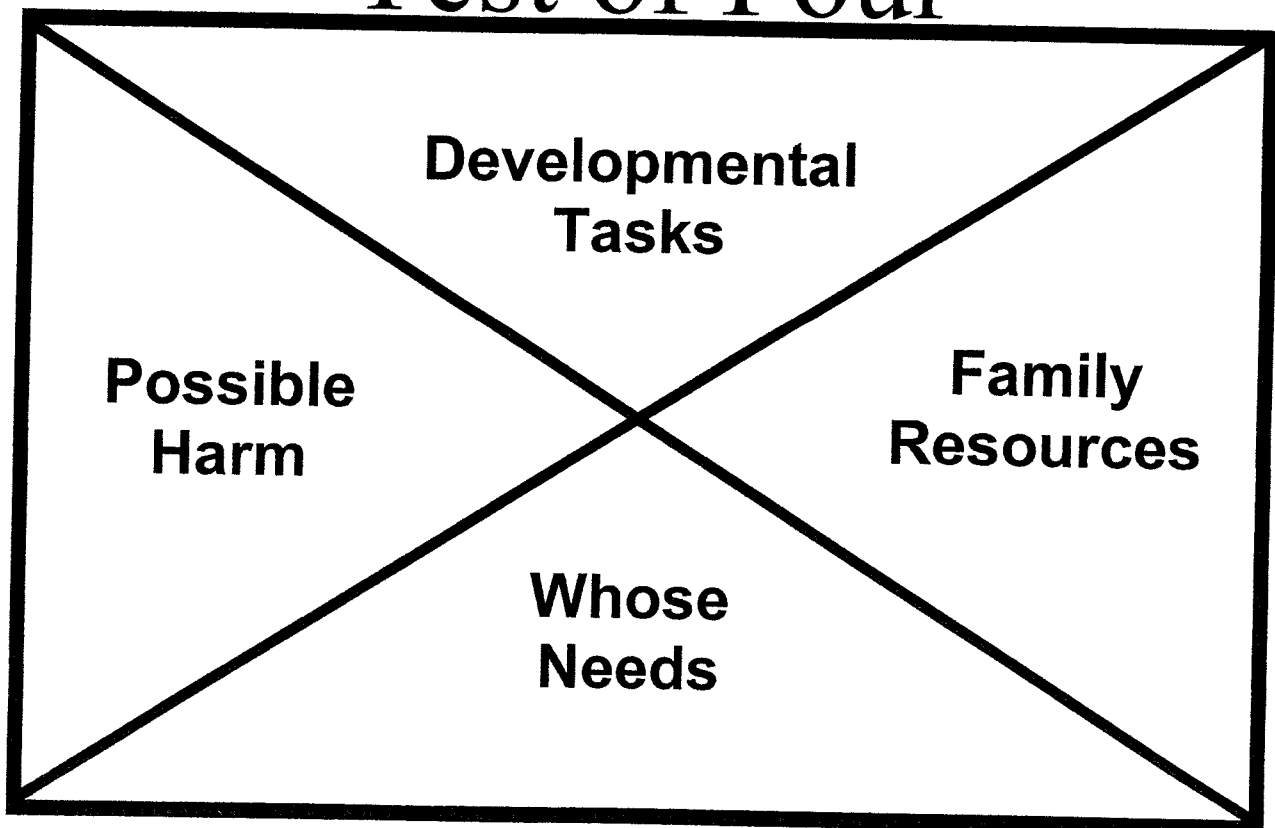
Food	Stimulation	Structure
Shelter	Recognition	Love
Clothing		

He needs food; he wants to live on mac and cheese.  
She needs shelter; she wants a Disney bedroom.  
He needs clothing; he wants expensive brand name shoes.  
She needs stimulation; she wants it only from the tube or the phone.  
He needs recognition; he wants it all from sports.  
She needs structure; she wants to choose her own bedtime.



**Wants** Choose one want or use an example of your own and use the  
Test of Four to determine if it would be appropriate to meet this want.

## Test of Four



# How Much Is Enough?

## Jobs of the Child, pages 275-288

Home Much Is Enough?  
Meeting 2 Handout #11

### Conception to Birth - Becoming

- To grow: to develop all body systems.
- To experience the ultimate in being separate and connected at the same time.
- To accept nourishment, acceptance, reassurance, and love.
- To move starting early, probably by week ten when still under two inches long. (By week twenty the mother can feel the movement.)
- To gain a familiarity with the mother.
- To recognize voices (father and others) and begin to learn language (at least by six months).
- To form some deep decisions about trust.
- To initiate and move through the birth process.

### Birth to 6 Months - Being

- To call for care.
- To cry or otherwise signal to get needs met.
- To accept touch.
- To accept nurture.
- To bond emotionally, to learn to trust caring and safe adults and self.
- To decide to live, to be.

### 6 - 18 Months - Doing

- To explore and experience the environment.
- To develop sensory awareness by using all senses.
- To signal needs; to trust others and self.
- To continue forming secure attachments with parents.
- To get help in times of stress.
- To start to learn that there are options and not all problems are easily solved.
- To develop initiative
- To continue tasks from Stage One.

### 18 Months to 3 Years - Thinking

- To establish ability to think for self.
- To test reality, to push against boundaries and the authority of others.
- To learn to think and solve problems with cause and effect thinking.
- To start to follow simple safety commands: come, wait, stop, go, stay here.
- To express anger and other feelings.
- To separate from parents without losing their love.
- To start to give up beliefs about being the center of the universe.
- To learn to do simple chores.
- To continue tasks from earlier stages.

### 3 to 6 Years - Identity and Power

- To assert an identity separate from others.
- To acquire information about the world, himself, his body, and sex role.
- To learn that behaviors have consequences, both positive and negative.
- To discover effect on others and place in groups.
- To learn to exert power to affect relationships.
- To practice socially appropriate behavior.
- To separate fantasy from reality.
- To learn what he has power over and what he does not have power over.
- To do simple chores.
- To continue learning earlier developmental tasks.

### 6 - 12 Years - Structure

- To learn skills, learn from mistakes, and decide to be adequate.
- To learn to listen and look in order to collect information and think.
- To gradually become skillful at and responsible for complex household chores.
- To practice thinking and doing.
- To reason about wants and needs.
- To check out family rules and learn about structures outside the family.
- To learn the relevancy of rules.
- To experience the consequences of breaking rules.
- To disagree with others and still be loved.
- To test ideas and values and learn value options beyond the family.
- To develop internal controls.
- To learn what is one's own responsibility and what is the responsibility of others.

Continued on page 283 of *How Much Is Enough?* book.

### Adolescence Identity, Sexuality & Separation

- To take more steps toward independence.
- To achieve a clearer, emotional separation from family.
- To emerge gradually, as a separate, independent person with own identity and values within the context of family.
- To be competent and responsible for own needs, feelings and behaviors as one moves out into the world.
- To find and support a healthy peer group.
- To continue to do family chores.
- To continue to participate in family celebrations and rituals.
- To integrate sexuality into sense of identity and earlier developmental tasks.
- To gradually acquire the skill of independent, moral thinking.