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Resources for Families

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Ten tips on how to unspoil your child

Nearly 95 per cent of parents feel like they are overindulging their children, but feel powerless to stop themselves. Harvard Medical School psychologist Richard Bromfield advises parents to keep in mind that overindulging is a sign of the times, not bad parenting.

Bromfield says, "The forces of consumerism and media are like tidal waves that children and their parents swim against. While it is not parents' fault that these influences swamp them, they can do something about it. It is never too late to unspoil a child, and can be done rather quickly." Bromfield's 10 quick tips for taking back control:

1. **Commit to unspoil.** The surer your lead is, the quicker your children will follow. They will see through tepid and weak gestures to unspoil. Unspoiling can go quickly, but requires fortitude.
2. **State your case clearly.** Tell your children what you expect in no uncertain terms and follow through. Speak in specifics, as teachers do in the classroom.
3. **Create a bribe-free home.** Bribes work in the moment, but parents (and children) pay a high price for bribery in the long run. You may have to pay for every ounce of co-operation in the future.
4. **Avoid deal-making.** Negotiations have their place, especially in the courtroom, car dealership and so on. Show your child first-hand that not every aspect of life and its demands is a deal to be fought and wrangled about till midnight.
5. **Be the boss.** I don't mean a cruel, tyrannical Marine boot-camp-officer kind of boss. I mean a boss who understands and is comfortable with the

leadership and authoritative role of a parent. Because I say so would not be an especially good mantra for all of parenting and home life, but it sure has its place at times.

6. **Buy less for the kids.** Obvious, but as true as it can be difficult. For one week tally how much you spend on the children, including toys, books, school supplies, clothing, snacks, treats, sports equipment, entertainment, learning enrichment, music lessons, and so forth. You may be surprised.
7. **Buy less for you, too.** Some parents roll their eyes at their children's indulgence, even as they spend much of their days buying, shopping and lamenting that they do not have bigger homes, better cars and such.
8. **Reward effort not product.** The self-esteem movement was a bust. Children do not gain self-confidence by shallow flattery and trophies for doing little. True competence comes through learning real skills and lessons that teach the child he or she can handle things and life.
9. **Invest time in your children.** Seek experiences and activities that, rather than cost money, involve time: bike riding, hiking, gardening, building a birdhouse, helping do projects around the home or for others, and so forth. Maybe spend less time at the mall and more in the woods or at the park.
10. **Take pride in the new you.** Your children are obliged to protest and throw wrenches in your unspoiling efforts. But you know better than to surrender to their tears and tantrums. Your parenting will become more as you wish it to be, and will give your children a different kind of gift that lasts a lifetime.

Richard Bromfield, PhD, is author of "How to Unspoil Your Child Fast: A Speedy, Complete Guide to Contented Children and Happy Parents". Tips used with permission of author.



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Protecting your child in an online environment

When it comes to communication technology and social media such as cellphones, Facebook, YouTube, blogs, and websites, you might feel you are less knowledgeable than your child. If that's true, you are not alone. Many parents experience that gap.

Yet, helping your child stay safe online is extremely important, so becoming aware of your child's activities is something parents should do. Samantha Wilson, President of Kidproof Canada, shares some tips.

Think about the Internet as a place

Wilson says, "The Internet shouldn't be considered as a thing. It should be thought of as a place." Wilson says parents are good at checking out places their kids physically go such as a friend's house or a playground. Equally, parents should be checking out where their kids go on the Internet. "This is a new playground where kids hang out, and as parents, we need to be familiar with the playground to help our children make safe choices," says Wilson.

Talk with your kids

Open lines of communication are good for many reasons, including becoming and staying aware of what your children are doing online. Wilson recommends looking for teachable moments to talk with your kids about Internet safety, as well as your expectations for their behaviour online.

"I am often asked how early you should start talking with your kids. I answer – as soon as your child can understand language," says Wilson. Wilson says statistics show that a growing segment of Internet users are preschool aged. If they are online, says Wilson, then early childhood a good time to start conversations.

With frequent communication, children also have an avenue for discussing any challenges that might occur including falling victim to online bullying. Wilson encourages parents to be vigilant in asking good questions about how their kids feel about their experiences.

Strengthen your child's understanding

Having your children learn about online dangers is important as they become more Internet savvy. "Don't use scare tactics," says Wilson. "Just help your children understand boundaries." For example, Wilson helps teens think critically about chat rooms by asking, "Would you get in a car with a total stranger and share personal information with him?" When they answer no, she helps teens see why they shouldn't be revealing personal information online.

Also, children who may not be bullies in person may be involved in cyber-bullying. "Playground bullies need a crowd behind them," says Wilson, "but you don't need a crowd when you're online." Wilson says as a result, bullying behaviours are more frequent. Parents can help their kids avoid this behaviour by reminding them that if a behaviour isn't okay in person, it is not okay online.

An aspect of online communication that surprises some children is that there is always a record of where they've been. Even if they erase a history, or delete a file from their Facebook page or e-mail account, there is a record of the original somewhere. "It's like footprints in the sand," says Wilson, "so kids need to be careful with their online comments."

Give kids notice that you'll be looking

If you want to see what your kids are up to on Facebook or other electronic media, give them 24 hours notice before you check their accounts. Wilson says while this might mean you won't get to see everything kids were doing before the warning, what it does is "force your child to think critically about their behaviour," says Wilson. "It helps them to think for themselves."

Be aware of the dangers

Wilson says there are three significant online dangers for anyone on the Internet. They are: predators, virus and privacy issues, and access to undesirable/inappropriate content. According to Wilson, the one parents should be most concerned about is inappropriate content. Material that is pornographic, violent, and hateful is readily available, as is access to groups that promote negative behaviour such as anorexia or bulimia. Says Wilson,



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“I have seen children experience severe emotional damage,” from what they’ve found online. Wilson recommends parents take the following steps:

1. Determine what privacy settings are appropriate, balancing what is too restrictive against the risks and your child’s abilities.
2. Put your computer in a place that is more public, such as the kitchen or living room. Your physical presence creates a barrier that may deter access to something you wouldn’t want your child to be exposed to.
3. Set boundaries and give consequences. Wilson’s rule of thumb is behaviour that is not appropriate in person is also not appropriate online.

Try something new

Although it might feel a bit uncomfortable for some parents to try texting or setting up a Facebook account, Wilson recommends parents consider at least trying something new. “It helps you be more aware of what your kids are doing,” says Wilson, “and it lets them know you care about their interests.”

Recognize that good parenting is most important

Perhaps one of the most important tips for parents is to remember that you don’t need to know everything about technology to effectively help your child. Wilson says, “This is not a technology issue. This is a parenting issue. Good parenting skills are what is paramount.”

Kidproof Canada was founded in 2000 by former police officer Samantha Wilson, an internationally recognized child and family safety expert. For more information:
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How to Set up a Google Safe Search

Google is a powerful search engine that lets us access information on any topic we want. However, a child can type in a few words and bring up thousands of pages of inappropriate content in a matter of seconds. Here are five tips from Kidproof Canada, on setting Google’s Safe Search feature, which allows you to block explicit text, images and videos from ever being presented in the search results.

1. Open your browser (i.e., Internet Explorer, Firefox) and type in www.google.com in the address bar.
2. Find the “Settings” link in the top right corner of the Google webpage and click on it.
3. You will be taken to the Preferences page. Scroll down to the “Safe Search Filtering” category. This is where you’ll choose the type of filtering you want, but “strict filtering” is the most popular choice for families.
4. Make sure you choose to “Lock Safe Search.” Otherwise, Internet-savvy kids can change the setting. You will be taken to a page to enable the lock, but you need a Google email account. Follow the steps to create one if you don’t already have one (it’s very easy and only takes a few minutes).
5. If you want to disable Safe Search again, simply repeat steps 1 – 4 to change your filtering options and settings.

Once you’ve clicked on the “Lock SafeSearch” button, Safe Search will be enabled on your computer.

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How to use YouTube Safety Settings

1. Go to YouTube.com
2. Scroll down to the bottom of the main page and look for the link that says “Safety Mode is off.” Click the link, then ON radio button to turn Safety Mode on.
3. Lock Safety Mode by logging into your account.

If you don't have a YouTube account, take a few minutes to create one. Once it's locked under your login name, only you can turn Safety Mode on or off. Videos and comments will be filtered unless you turn Safety Mode off.

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