"CHERISHED MOMENTS" COLUMN
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The "Cherished Moments" column is written by Cathy L. Graham, County Extension Director with the Scotland County Center of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension. The following column will provide information to improve relationships between adults and children. "Cherished Moments" is dedicated to the many adults (parents, teachers, caregivers, volunteers, educators) who strive to grow and to the children who will surely benefit.

Overindulgence is a form of child neglect. It hinders children from doing their developmental tasks, and from learning necessary life lessons.
-- David Bredehoft

OVERINDULGENCE - Prevents Children from Learning Many Skills and is Hard on Self-Esteem

Many of us overindulge our children at times and it does no harm. However, research collected and analyzed by Dr. David Bredehoft indicates that consistent overindulgence not only robs children of the chance to learn necessary skills, but causes deep pain in adult life. Since this is not what parents intend – let’s take a look at overindulge.

Overindulging children is giving them too much of what looks good, too soon, too long. It is giving them things or experiences that are not appropriate for their age or their interests and talents. It is the process of giving things to children to meet the adult's needs, not the child's needs. Each act of overindulgence may look or feel like nurturing, but it is not. Parents who overindulge may have at least an inkling about what they are doing, and they may even feel a bit uncomfortable about it, but they may not have a clue as to why they continue to do it.

Several volumes of books are available discussing the reasons parents overindulge. One book asserts that parents overindulge because they did not have enough as children and they want their children to have what they didn't have. Another author is sure that parents overindulge because they want the children to make the parents look successful. Still another believes that parents overindulge because we live in an overindulging culture and so it seems normal. For parents who overindulge for these reasons, those books are very helpful.

Dr. Bredehoft's research revealed two-thirds of the overindulged people responding to the questionnaire recognized that their overindulgence stemmed from problems of issues in their parent's lives. This means that parent educators, counselors, friends, or family members who notice overindulging cannot assume that they know why the overindulgence is occurring. Often the underlying need or problem is so great that information to parents about the harms of overindulgence will fall on deaf ears. Our approach to overindulging parents can be helpful if
filled with respect and sympathy, not blame, since they are reflecting an unmet need of their own, not a wish to harm their children.

One way to take the sting out of recognizing overindulgence is to help parents see that there are many reasons parents overindulge. Help them recognize their own reason(s), and then support them in getting that need met.

If you don't know if you are overindulging, you can ask yourself this question:

*Does what I am doing for or giving to a child hinder that child's opportunity to grow?*

Overindulgence - hinders children from learning important life skills. One of those skills is learning how and when to follow rules.

Parents often overindulge from a loving heart, from a wish to help children feel good and avoid pain. However, adults who were overindulged as children often identified the outcomes of overindulgence not as joyful but as painful. The three major areas of pain that were reported were:

- Embarrassment or ineffectiveness from not knowing skills they should have learned during childhood.

- 71% reported not knowing what is enough - continuing to overindulge themselves because they don't know when to stop.

- Being ridiculed for having been overindulged.

Since overindulgence causes so much pain, what can parents who care about their children do instead? Here are four ways to avoid overindulging.

- Be in charge of the rules. Do not let children run the family.
- Teach children self-care skills.
- Be sure children do household chores.
- Give children only enough to enhance them.

Following rules or experiencing the consequence of not following rules often causes a discomfort for children. We may have trouble watching our children experience that discomfort, but one necessary life skill is the ability to judge the relevancy of rules and to learn when and how to follow rules. Also, skills ranging from caring for one's clothing to engaging in a sport to playing a musical instrument to behaving in ethical ways all involve practice based on rules.

*Not enforcing rules is one way of overindulging.* Having clear, reasonable rules and living by them is an important part of avoiding overindulgence and of modeling and teaching responsibility.

*Source: Family Information Services*
Fun Things To Do With Your Children

- Make a soup/meal to share with another family.

- Visit a retirement/nursing home - help residents decorate rooms for the holidays.

- Drink hot chocolate and sing Christmas songs.

- Read a holiday story together.

For more information contact the Scotland County Center of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service at 277-2422. Employment and program opportunities are available to all people regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. In addition, North Carolina State University welcomes all persons without regard to sexual orientation.

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