

## 5 Ways Your Kids Are Messing Up Your Grandkids

From being over-involved to having high expectations, today's parents should be mindful of these destructive parenting don'ts.

By Sally Stich



### Parenting Dos and Dont's

It's the most challenging job, one that requires a minimum of 18 years hard labor. "Parenting is front-loaded work," says Michele Borba, Ed.D., parenting expert and author of *The Big Book of Parenting Solutions* (<http://amzn.to/HVLzsq>), "because if parents do their job diligently the first 18 years, chances are they can enjoy the fruits of their labor thereafter." If they don't, their children—and they—will pay a heavy, sometimes heartbreaking, price.

While there are no guarantees, there are ways to push the results in the right direction, upping the chances of raising a happy, self-reliant, responsible kid. Conversely, there are definite no-nos that are almost guaranteed to raise a troubled child. Here's where parents goof up:

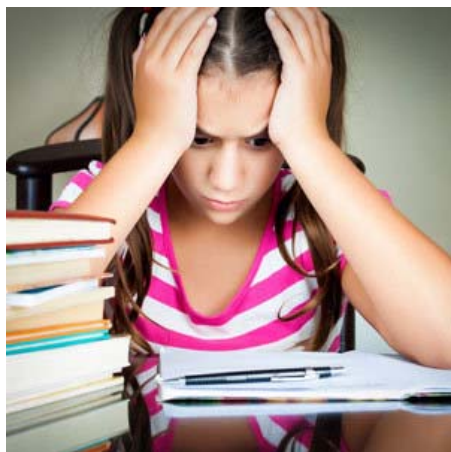


### Mistake #1: Assuming a child knows life skills intuitively

**Why:** Children don't come out of the womb knowing how to behave in situations. "We ask kids to do things they haven't been taught," says Borba, "so saying, 'You have to apologize' when a child has no idea how or why to apologize, is a set up for failure." Parents and grandparents have to be in teacher (and role model) mode for things like social skills, money skills, de-stressing skills, and friendship skills. This is the only way children learn to function capably in the world.

### Possible lifelong

**consequences:** If a child isn't taught what is acceptable behavior, he may not be able to handle emotional challenges, manage money, has limited problem-solving skills and relationship issues.



### Mistake #2: Having unrealistic expectations

**Why:** Much as we'd all like to raise a Mini-Me, nature just doesn't work that way. Athletic parent; musical child. Extroverted parent; painfully shy child. "Trying to fit a square peg in a round hole will not work in the long run," says Borba. "And it's the ultimate self-esteem killer."

A parent's job is to nurture the unique qualities of each child by tuning into his feelings, interests, and strengths. (No, it's not easy.) And as a grandparent, sometime it's easier for you to assess a situation and help foster that confidence than it is for your grown child.

**Possible lifelong consequences:** A child who feels like a big disappointment and spends his life doing what's "expected" could have self-esteem and other emotional issues as he matures. These kids can also flounder, have trouble finding a job or being happy because no matter what they do, it won't measure up to their parents' expectations.

### Mistake #3: Being a child's BFF

**Why:** A parent's job is to set appropriate limits and guidelines so that development takes place in a system that models how the world works. (You want money, you work. You tell a lie, you suffer the consequences.) This involves saying "no" when it's appropriate and being temporarily disliked for



it. A parent is not a peer; a friend is. If parents play their cards right by parenting well early on, they will probably have a friend for life.

**Possible lifelong consequences:** A child unable to deal with not getting her way, suffers from what is otherwise known as arrested development. These kids tend to be self-centered, spoiled and difficult.



#### Mistake #4: Hovering Unnecessarily

**Why:** Of course parents must protect kids from potentially harmful situations. (You don't let a three-year-old cross the street alone do you?) But children are incredibly resilient, and given the right education at the appropriate time, they learn to navigate the world. If they fail a test, it's a great time to discuss what went wrong, not call the teacher. If your grandchild is a tween and wants to walk to a friend's house alone, the parents can do a few test runs, not make it terrifying and automatically say no. (And FYI: for parents who worry that no one—even grandparents—can take care of their child as well as they: insurance studies showed that children were twice as safe when their grandparents were driving as when their parents were.) Parents need to deal with their own fears, and be role models, not fearmongers.

**Possible lifelong consequences:** Too much hovering can lead to a child who is anxious (because she reads her parents' and grandparents' anxiety) and lacks confidence. The unintended message that comes with hovering: The child isn't capable of handling anything by herself, so a parent has to do it for her. Overprotection diminishes the chance for the child to experience pain, fear, failure and disappointment—all frequent

components of everyday life.



### Mistake #5: Seeing Life as a To-Do List

**Why:** No question parents in today's culture try hard to make their kids happy—activities around the clock, the latest technology, driving them here and there. But is that the key to children's happiness—having parents who plan every aspect of their lives? "No," says Borba. "Kids' best memories are of the rituals and routines they had with their parents, not the endless merry-go-round of activities." What they want is time with parents that is unstressed, where they feel truly listened to and not just a passenger on the way to the next stop.

#### **Possible lifelong**

**consequences:** Too much structure can signal to the child that the only worthwhile life is a booked life, even if stress is a major companion. Or kids run the risk of burning out early—maybe dropping out of college, taking jobs way under skill level, or never really settling down, because achievement is equated with an endless check list.

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