Description

Child psychiatrists Joseph Novello and Stanley Turecki discuss some ways parents can rid bratty children of the pleasure principle and enforce self-discipline in dealing with their manipulative behavior.

Keywords


Citation

MLA

"How to Deal with Bratty Children." Deborah Norville, correspondent. NBC Today Show. NBCUniversal
Bratty children, it’s a growing problem for these fast-paced times. The formula’s familiar. Young parents with more money, and less time, equals overindulged kids. Whining, sulking, obnoxious, manipulative children. Yup, these are boom times for brats. They’re throwing temper tantrums in restaurants, making scenes in supermarkets, and while difficult children may not rank among world hunger and nuclear disarmament as the most pressing problems of our time, it is something you worry about if you’re a parent or if you’re somebody who’s been exposed to these kids. Couple of men who are helping parents cope are Dr. Stanely Turecki and Dr. Joseph Novello, both of whom are child psychologists and with us this morning. First, let’s talk about the definition. When do you tell whether a child is a “spoiled brat”, or kids just having a bad day?

JOSEPH NOVELLO, M.D. (Psychiatrist): It seems to me that all young children operate on what we call the pressure principle, that is, they want what they want, and when they want it. But as they grow older, they should shift over to the reality principle, that is to delay frustration and so forth. So if you have a child who habitually reacts with the manipulative, demanding behavior, then you probably have a pampered, or spoiled, or brat child on your hands.

STANLEY TURECKI, M.D. (Psychiatrist): And by doing that, you’re in fact be perpetuating the behavior, you’ll be playing into it. And I agree certainly with the definition of that kind of behavior as being bratty, but there is another kind of distinction. You used the term, “difficult”, and the term difficult is not the same as bratty. Difficult implies children, who because of their nature, their innate temperament, misbehave, not because they are in a manipulative way trying to get something, but because they can’t help it. The distinction would be like this: if you were to be in a playground and you were to see a child push another child, grab a toy, and then throw a fit. You would say to yourself, “That’s a spoiled brat.” And it might be. It might be an over-gratified, overindulged spoiled child that’s been systematically taught...
that that’s the way to get their own way. But it could also be a highly active, excitable child, who is over stimulated, gets revved up, and loses it.

NORVILLE: So the trick is for a parent to figure out which is which. What do you do?

NOVELLO: And that’s, you know, not always an easy call. It’s difficult work being a parent. But it seems to me, Deborah, that discipline has become a dirty word. And it’s not. You know, it comes from the Latin that means, to teach. And I think as parents we have an obligation to teach our children discipline. Now, the object is not to see how we can coerce a young child, but to teach them self discipline, without which you simply take not take advantage of opportunities.

NORVILLE: So what are doing? Are we saying no to a child, or are we saying give him a little whack or two on the rear end?

TURECKI: We’re saying we need to know what we are doing. I certainly agree with that. I think that discipline’s one of the very important twin principles of raising young children.

NORVILLE: Well is that the thing? We mentioned money and two income families, are parents just so busy with their own lives and work and trying to keep home and hearth together that they don’t have enough time to properly discipline a child?

NOVELLO: I think that is the issue in some cases. And of course, the single parent has a great deal of difficulty, too. I think parents have really been sold this quality time trap, as though quality time can make up for lack of quantity. We’re in the era of the one minute parent. Children are not items you pop into a microwave. They take time, unfortunately, they take skill. And parents bringing children into the world should determine that those kids are their number one priority.

NORVILLE: Time’s not something we have a lot of right now, so give me quickly a few tips for parents who do have difficult, perhaps bratty, children.

TURECKI: Well, alright. First the twin principles. The one principle is that when you’re dealing with bratty, manipulative behavior, be tough, be disciplinary, take your stance, be brief, and be clear. Don’t get involved in a lot of negotiating, especially if you have an expert negotiator as a child.

NORVILLE: For parents who are going to be with their kids this weekend, that may be very good advice. Dr. Turecki, Dr. Novello, are thanks to you both.

NOVELLO: Thank you very much.