

Pointers For Parents

What To Do About The Anxious Parent, Angry Child Syndrome

by Dr. Thomas Phelan

(NAPSA)—Recently I was in a grocery store standing in front of the dairy case. As I was trying to decide what to buy, I noticed a mother and daughter walking toward me. The girl, about nine, was pushing the grocery cart. As they came closer, the mother said anxiously, “Now watch out for that man over there!”

I’m not invisible. There was no way this young lady was not going to see me. Had she been traveling at 40 miles per hour, she would still have had room to stop before crashing into my legs.

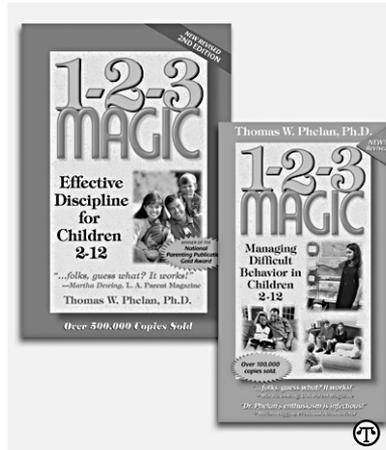
Mom’s comment was an example of what we sometimes call “overparenting.” Overparenting involves needless corrective or disciplinary comments that are uncalled for because (1) the child already has the skill necessary to manage the situation, or (2) even if the child doesn’t have all the necessary skill, it is better for the youngster to learn by direct experience.

The child can manage.

In our dairy case example above, the nine-year-old girl certainly had the ability to (a) see me in her path, (b) know that it would be bad to hit me, and (c) stop the cart in time or turn away. The average nine-year-old does not need parental direction here.

Learning by experience is better.

When our kids were little and after we moved into our first house, I used to watch the children playing out in the yard. About every five minutes an incident would occur which I felt



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needed my intervention, so I would rush outside to mediate some dispute.

One day my wife pointed something out to me. She explained that during the 50 hours I was away at work each week, no child had ever been killed or seriously injured. Not only that, our kids were successfully making friends. The children were learning by experience—without me. I was overparenting.

Though the examples above are not earthshaking, the issue of overparenting itself is important because parents who overparent usually do it repeatedly.

Overparenting has two predictable negative effects on children. Add these effects up over time, and you can have a significant negative impact on a child’s personality and self-esteem.

Anxious parent/angry child.

The first negative reaction kids have to overparenting is anger. This is what we call the Anxious Parent, Angry Child Syndrome. Anxious Moms and Dads who continually verbalize their worries about their kids to their kids inevitably irritate the youngsters. Sometimes, of course, verbalizing a worry is necessary. It’s the needless repetition of worries that aggravates youngsters.

Why do kids find this repetition aggravating? Because it insults them. The parent’s message is this: There’s not much you can do on your own without my supervision. This is a put-down.

Lost self-esteem.

The second negative reaction of children to unnecessary parental interventions is loss of confidence. If you grow up constantly hearing your parents’ thoughts about how you can’t handle this and you can’t handle that, you’re not going to have a very high opinion of your own abilities. “Now don’t get too loud at the party and be sure to take turns and remember to thank Mrs. Johnson and be nice to the other children and...” The real message here: “You’re a social imbecile.”

Overparenting is the opposite of one of a parent’s most fundamental jobs: fostering self-esteem by encouraging independence. Sometimes it’s better to keep quiet, cross your fingers, and watch your child learn and mature. Consider the exercise an investment in your child’s future.

For more information, please call 1-800-442-4453 or visit www.thomasphelan.com.