

## Living in the Material World- How to Parent in Times of Excess

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At the risk of sounding like a dated Madonna song, we do live in a material world. As adults this effects our daily life but more importantly, it effects how our children are being raised and it is shaping the values of future generations. Our culture inherently supports the value of material items, especially for children. Go to McDonalds, get a toy, go to a birthday party and there is a treat bag full of goodies for you even though it's not your birthday. Play on a game system that costs several hundred dollars using games that start at \$30 each. Don't forget that IPOD to listen to music but pay attention because there will be a newer, cooler model out in just a few months. So why is this a problem? Our children are happy and stimulated and some might say even enriched by these perks. Who wants to deprive their child of the best? Who wants to revisit the childhoods of generations past when there might have been poverty and not enough food? My concern is that the focus on material things creates a sense of entitlement for our children and creates a standard of living that they may not be prepared to perpetuate for themselves. I wonder how this effects the work ethic for children who have been taught that there are immediate rewards for everything that you do. It could send the message that there is little value to old things since there is always something new and little need to recycle. Finally, there is a psychological value to longing, to not getting what you want when you want it. This value includes developing the discipline to set long term goals, using creative thinking and problem solving skills to making the goal happen and finally the gratification of knowing that you accomplished the goal. American culture isn't going to change any time soon but here are some ideas for things you can do at home to create some balance to combat the materialistic messages in society.

**Set an Example** Be aware of the messages you send in your family about the importance of material goods. Are you trying to keep up with the neighbors? Is buying a big tag item a special occurrence or an every day thing? Are you sending the message that how much "stuff" you have is important to you?

**Set Limits** Teach your children the difference between privileges and needs. Have them contribute financially to items that are special so that they know how much they cost and feel like they have earned them. Don't be afraid to say no, even if "everyone" has something.

**Model Gratitude** Show your children that you appreciate what you have. Teach them about other countries or time periods that were less prosperous. Expect that your children be thankful when given something including requiring thank you notes. We are very fortunate to be living in a time and in a country of prosperity. It is important that we both show and teach our appreciation.