

5 Reasons Modern-Day Parenting Is in Crisis, According to a British Nanny

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I generally am quite an optimistic person. I tend to believe that everything will work out for the best unless the evidence is overwhelmingly to the contrary, and anyone who knows me will tell you that I am not prone to drama. That's why when I say that modern parenting is in serious trouble -- crisis, even -- I hope you'll listen, and listen carefully. I've worked with children and their parents across two continents and two decades, and what I've seen in recent years alarms me. Here are the greatest problems, as I see them:

1. A fear of our children.

I have what I think of as "the sippy cup test," wherein I will observe a parent getting her toddler a cup of milk in the morning. If the child says, "I want the pink sippy cup, not the blue!" yet the mum has already poured the milk into the blue sippy cup, I watch carefully to see how the parent reacts. More often than not, the mum's face whitens and she rushes to get the preferred sippy cup before the child has a tantrum. *Fail!* What are you afraid of, mum? Who is in charge here? Let her have a tantrum, and remove yourself so you don't have to hear it. But for goodness' sake, don't make extra work for yourself just to please her -- and even more importantly, think about the lesson it teaches if you give her what she wants because she's thrown a fit.

2. A lowered bar.

When children misbehave, whether it's by way of public outburst or private surliness, parents are apt to shrug their shoulders as if to say, "That's just the way it is with kids." I assure you, it doesn't have to be. Children are capable of much more than parents typically expect from them, whether it's in the form of proper manners, respect for elders, chores, generosity or self-control. You don't think a child can sit through dinner at a restaurant? Rubbish. You don't think a child can clear the table without being asked? Rubbish again! The *only* reason they don't behave is because you haven't shown them how and you haven't expected it! It's that simple. Raise the bar and your child shall rise to the occasion.

3. We've lost the village.

It used to be that bus drivers, teachers, shopkeepers and other parents had *carte blanche* to correct an unruly child. They would act as the mum and dad's eyes and ears when their children were out of sight, and everyone worked towards the same shared interest: raising proper boys and girls. This village was one of support. Now, when someone who is not the child's parent dares to correct him, the mum and dad get upset. They want their child to appear perfect, and so they often don't accept teachers' and others' reports that he is not. They'll storm in and have a go at a teacher rather than discipline their child for acting out in class. They feel the need to project a perfect picture to the world and unfortunately, their insecurity is

reinforced because many parents *do* judge one another. If a child is having a tantrum, all eyes turn on the mum disapprovingly. Instead she should be supported, because chances are the tantrum occurred because she's not giving in to one of her child's demands. Those observers should instead be saying, "Hey, good work -- I know setting limits is hard."

4. A reliance on shortcuts.

I think it's wonderful that parents have all sorts of electronics to help them through airline flights and long waits at the doctor's office. It's equally fabulous that we can order our groceries online for delivery, and heat up healthy-ish food at the touch of a button on the microwave. Parents are busier than ever, and I'm all for taking the easy way when you need it. But shortcuts can be a slippery slope. When you see how wonderful it is that *Caillou* can entertain your child on a flight, don't be tempted to put it on when you are at a restaurant. Children must still learn patience. They must still learn to entertain themselves. They must still learn that not all food comes out steaming hot and ready in three minutes or less, and ideally they will also learn to help prepare it. Babies must learn to self-soothe instead of sitting in a vibrating chair each time they're fussy. Toddlers need to pick themselves up when they fall down instead of just raising their arms to mum and dad. Show children that shortcuts can be helpful, but that there is great satisfaction in doing things the slow way too.

5. Parents put their children's needs ahead of their own.

Naturally, parents are wired to take care of their children first, and this is a good thing for evolution! I am an advocate of adhering to a schedule that suits your child's needs, and of practices like feeding and clothing your children first. But parents today have taken it too far, completely subsuming their own needs and mental health for the sake of their children. So often I see mums get up from bed again and again to fulfill the whims of their child. Or dads drop everything to run across the zoo to get their daughter a drink because she's thirsty. There is nothing wrong with not going to your child when she wants yet another glass of water at night. There's nothing wrong with that dad at the zoo saying, "Absolutely you can have something to drink, but you must wait until we pass the next drinking fountain." There is nothing wrong with using the word "No" on occasion, nothing wrong with asking your child to entertain herself for a few minutes because mummy would like to use the toilet in private or flick through a magazine for that matter.

I fear that if we don't start to correct these five grave parenting mistakes, and soon, the children we are raising will grow up to be entitled, selfish, impatient and rude adults. It won't be their fault -- it will be ours. We never taught them any differently, we never expected any more of them. We never wanted them to feel any discomfort, and so when they inevitably do, they are woefully unprepared for it. So please, parents and caregivers from London to Los Angeles, and all over the world, ask more. Expect more. Share your struggles. Give less. And let's straighten these children out, together, and prepare them for what they need to be successful in the real world and not the sheltered one we've made for them.