**Bucking the Entitlement Trend**

By [Juli Slattery](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/teens/bucking-the-entitlement-trend): **entitlement: the belief that one is inherently deserving of privileges or special treatment.**

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My son Michael often asks me for a cell phone, and every time the topic comes up, he emphasizes how he is the only kid in his middle school class without one. I assumed that Michael was exaggerating, until I talked to some of his friends.

I asked, "How many of you have a cell phone?" All the kids raised their hands.

Michael gave me a look that said, *See, Mom?*

Then I asked, "How many of you pay your own bill?" None of them raised their hands.

I looked at Michael as if to say, See, Michael?

The pressures in middle school only get worse in high school as kids no longer simply ask for a cell phone, but for a car, a computer and a $500 prom celebration.

As parents, we fight cultural pressures that include unhealthy messages about sexuality, violence in the media and a general lack of respect for authority. Yet, perhaps the most insidious threat to our teens is that of entitlement.

Sociologists and psychologists are seeing this trend as young people enter the workforce. Kids in their early 20s show up for their first day of work expecting a corner office, a lucrative salary and the respect of a CEO. Why? Because as children and teens they were told they deserve these perks, in word and action. It comes as little surprise that young adults today have been dubbed "the entitlement generation."

Parents don't do their teens any favors when they cultivate an entitlement mentality in the home. In fact, when Mom and Dad lavish teens with unearned praise and luxuries, they become ill equipped to handle the future realities of an unfriendly boss, a bad work review, conflict in marriage and the sacrifice required to raise a family. Recent studies show that this new "entitled generation" is experiencing unprecedented rates of depression and other mental illness, loneliness, isolation and failure in their young marriages.

To ensure that your parenting style bucks this trend, here are a few practical suggestions:

**The value of hard work and money**

Although it's tempting to give your teens whatever they want because providing good things is a positive quality, your generosity can quickly contribute to their attitude of entitlement. Going without teaches contentment and an appreciation for what they already have.

Instead of giving them things, provide opportunities for your teens to work, earn money and save for what they want. Doing extra chores to buy the latest video game or fashion statement teaches delayed gratification, discipline and the value of a dollar.

**Confidence through adversity**

One of our primary parental instincts is to protect our children. Although this instinct is foundationally good, it can easily become warped. Protecting teens from danger is one thing, but too many of today's parents protect their teens from all forms of adversity. There is a big difference between the two.

An old English proverb says, "A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor." Only the storms in their lives can prepare our teens to skillfully weather the sea of adulthood. Life is full of setbacks, struggles and difficulties. Rather than shielding kids from adversity, equip them to persevere.

**An accurate view of self**

One aspect of entitlement is an inflated view of self. Parents believe they are building self-esteem by telling their teens, "You can be anything you want to be." That's a lie that ultimately sets teens up for failure. "American Idol" clearly demonstrates these unrealistic expectations as young adults with no musical ability sing with the confidence of Pavarotti.

By all means, encourage your teens to set goals and reach them. But help them shape their goals based on an honest assessment of their abilities and willingness to work.

**Cultivate the quality of empathy**

Perhaps the character trait that is most absent among the entitlement generation is empathy, or the ability to share in another's pain. When life revolves around me, I am the main character of the show. Everyone else simply plays a supporting role. While this attitude is common among young adolescents, maturation should produce an understanding and concern for others. Forgiveness, sacrifice and the deepest level of communication rely on a foundation of empathy.

You can foster empathy in your teens by volunteering with them or asking them to think about a situation outside of themselves. For example, your teenage son breaks up with his girlfriend via text message. Ask him, "How would you feel if someone broke up with you in that manner?"

As a parent, you have an incredible opportunity to shape how your teens view themselves in relation to the rest of the world. While the media and cultural trends push your teens toward entitlement, push back. Privilege without responsibility ends in unrealistic expectations, not self-worth or self-confidence.

**Questions:**

1. Do you agree/disagree with the fact that many of your peers have a sense of entitlement?

2. What do you think is causing: “Recent studies show that this new "entitled generation" is experiencing

 unprecedented rates of depression and other mental illness, loneliness, isolation and failure in their young

 marriages.

**The article provides advice to parents about how to eliminate or reduce entitlement.**

3. Choose the one that you think is the best piece of advice and explain why that is the best.

4. Choose the one that you think is the piece of advice is the worst and why that is the worst.

5. Is there pressure among your peers to have what everyone else have? Explain why you do or do not feel

 this.