

# THE ISSUE OF ENTITLEMENT

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I was watching a program on TV the other day where a parent commented that his life revolved entirely around his work and his children. When he wasn't at work, he spent all his time with his kids. I thought about how times have changed over the decades. In the Victorian era it seemed that children were mostly brought up by nannies – at least in wealthy homes. Kids saw their parents only when it was convenient to parents and not necessarily at mealtimes. Children from poor homes were sent out to work instead of going to school. We know that education creates power and independence, so these children with 'no voice' had no control over their own lives and certainly no sense of entitlement.

When my Dad was a child his father worked in the coal mines in Tasmania and the long hours and hard physical work meant very little time for parent-child relationship building. We grew up on the phrase, "Children should be seen and not heard." What did that statement really indicate? On the surface it was probably referring to children being required to display good manners, but there are other underlying implications. It could suggest that children were not considered 'real' people until they were at least shoulder height to their parents; that they had nothing worthwhile to contribute to a conversation; or that they had no value.

In recent times, the focus has swung strongly in the other direction to the extent that many homes are centered totally on their children. It is healthy that children have been liberated and given the value within the family that is rightfully theirs. However, there needs to be a balance. The sense of entitlement is seen in the school classroom every day. Phrases that are heard regularly are: "You can't make me do that!" "My mother doesn't even say that to me!" "My mother says I don't have to listen to anybody but her", or "My parents say that if someone annoys me or threatens me I am to fight them, and I better win."

Children often think school rules do not apply to them or that their parent is going to "come to school and sort the teacher out." (Gone are the days when a child got a double dose of corrective action – one at school and then another when they got home!).

As a parent, my goal should be to prepare my children to become responsible, resourceful mature members of society and to be great parents. For this to be achieved children need a safe, secure and encouraging home environment and they need to feel valued. They also need to learn that they are *part* of family and the wider world. The world does not revolve around them. When our kids were small, we, the parents did not drop our interests and activities. We spent time with them and they spent time with us, doing what we were doing. They learned to fit in, to be part of a team. We taught them that the

whole family had equal value. They also learned to consider others before their own needs and wants. We volunteered our time and stuff and invited people to our home regularly.

Children should be seen, heard and valued. They should also feel entitled but with that entitlement comes the responsibility of allowing others to feel the same. There is a balance between encouraging children to express their opinions and allowing their 'entitlement' to be displayed as disrespect for others. We need to focus on our children, but we also need to remember that as parents, we need time for ourselves and for each other.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at [sally@forefrontfamilies.org](mailto:sally@forefrontfamilies.org). We invite you to also check out our website at [www.forefrontfamilies.org](http://www.forefrontfamilies.org) and our blog site at [www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com](http://www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com) for further assistance.