



Some Frustration is Necessary!

When the infant cries, the infant is fed. Almost immediate gratification. However, when the child is a preschooler and tells us he or she is hungry, we may ask the child to wait until supper, or offer a small snack to tide them over. Hence gratification is delayed or only partially appeased. Thus children learn they can wait to achieve desired goals and learn to endure frustration as when efforts towards gratification are thwarted. Together, these life skills are referred to as the ability to delay gratification and tolerate frustration.

Children who can delay gratification and tolerate frustration learn the world does not revolve around them and that their needs and wants may be met in the context of other people and competing demands.

Things go awry when for some children their whining or tantrumming gains them the desired outcome on an ongoing basis or when caregivers are so attentive to their needs they are met too frequently and without delay. These children don't quite learn to delay gratification or tolerate frustration. These children grow to become self-centred and demanding. They believe the world revolves around them and other persons are there to serve them.

When children who are self-centred age, the problem intensifies. As adults entering into intimate relationships, they are at risk of undermining their relationships by an uncompromising belief that they should still always have their own way. Such persons do not learn to compromise or set priorities that take into account the needs and wants of others. Their strategies for achieving their own ends can vary from demanding or manipulative behaviour to outright abusive behaviour.

Vocationally these adults may believe they should receive special treatment or not have to work as hard or believe that job advancement should come without being earned. There is a sense of entitlement that also can undermine work life when those beliefs bring them into conflict with employers whose expectations differ.

Children who continually get their own way and whine or tantrum are generally referred to as spoiled. Adults who continually seek to get their own way and who put their needs frequently ahead of others, are referred to as egocentric or worse, narcissistic.

Such adults may not only place their needs and wants above others and have a sense of entitlement, but also have difficulty appreciating the position, needs and wants of others. In other words, they lack empathy; an ability to connect emotionally to the concerns of others with the view that the other's needs and wants should be taken into consideration.

Reversing these traits can be difficult and in some cases near impossible once an adult. Hence it is vital for parents to appreciate the need for children to develop frustration tolerance and learn to delay gratification. That means we do not spoil children nor give in to whining and tantrumming behaviour.

It is OK for children to learn the world does not revolve around them, that they must take turns, share, wait for dinner and do things for others. This of course does not mean to say we neglect or indiscriminately withhold meeting our children's needs. Rather, parents must meet their children's needs with sensitivity to others and with the view that no harm comes from not always getting one's way. Children who learn to delay gratification and tolerate frustration tend to be more patient, are able to set longer-term goals and are more in tune to the needs of others. All necessary skills for success in school, work, love and life.

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