

The Need to Buy for Our Children

Recently I have heard numerous discussions between parents regarding what our children need to “have” these days in order to be liked or accepted by friends. It seems the American standard of living continues to rise. I have some concern about raising children who believe they need to “have” things in order to be liked. I pods, computers, cell phones, instant messaging, brand name clothing...

We live in a consumer society where our values are often influenced by the myriad of messages we take in. We receive approximately three thousand advertising messages per day! On an intellectual level we may know that most of its not necessary but when you hear things day after day you begin to believe its true on some level. And for children, when all their friends have something it simply doesn't make sense to them why they shouldn't have it as well.

For example if my child believes that if she doesn't get a cell phone all her friends are going to think she's a geek and we buy a cell phone to meet that need based on that belief **I have set my child up to have a deeper belief which is having certain items/products are what supports her to have friends.** First off, this belief is most likely based on an assumption, and secondly if her friends *do* think she's a geek what kind of friends are they? Think back to your own childhood, with your **true** friends did you need to have certain products or privileges to be in relationship? Do you now? This whole topic is a great opportunity to acknowledge peer pressure and facilitate some growing and learning for both your child and yourself. Most of us don't check out these assumptions by asking our friends or peers: How are you going to feel if I don't have a cell phone? Or I don't feel a need for a cell phone would you be willing to keep in touch by a landline? If we simply buy the cell phone with out any discussion the pressure next time might be to drink that spiked punch at a party, because she doesn't want to look like a geek.

I hope to take these opportunities to talk with my children about these decisions. So they begin to understand not only that having more things doesn't equate to happiness but also to do or buy things for the sake of being in relationship with anyone is something you want to consider very carefully. To offer your kids an opportunity to make choices from a very conscious place is a gift that can't be measured. We can take the time to hear their feelings and needs and in turn share ours. My need for my children is to have friends that like them for the qualities on the inside, kindness, integrity, gentleness, playful, fun loving.

Some of the questions I use when having these conversations are from a model of communication I have spoken of in the past. Compassionate or Nonviolent Communication is a great tool to use any time you want to communicate and particularly when you want to stay connected and understand where each of you are coming from on a deep level.

How is your child feeling? What is the need behind the item? How am I feeling? What needs am I concerned about? When my children ask for something I am uncertain about

I usually begin by asking them where they saw the item, who do they know that has one, what need will be met by having that item ... I want to understand what it means to them and then I want the opportunity to share my feelings and needs. Many times discussing their feelings and needs supports them to see they want something for reasons that don't add up. To be like everyone else, to get something you only like a little but everyone else likes a lot...

It gives us an opportunity to reconnect to what friendship means and how each of us have different needs, feelings and values.

I have a strong need to stay connected as a family and to encourage my kids to learn, grow and interact. My priorities for my family are to do things that support us to have fun as well as grow and learn and, as much as possible, do that together. I have a need for more time spent together and less time with electronics. Those are my particular needs. What are yours? Our children learn so much from what we model and I feel concern for older children going out into the world. With high needs for newer and nicer things and less income to pay for it all there can be a lot of stress. Without the inner resources and understanding on that deep level that who they are is more important than what they have there is less potential to be successful adults.

To buy children products so that friends will accept them may send another message. Maybe we as the parent don't think they are enough and they need these things- be it instant messaging, iPods, cell phones or new jeans. Don't get me wrong here; I am not saying any of these things are wrong, bad or that you shouldn't have them. What I am saying is how important is this? Is what they have already good enough? If it's an electronic item how will it impact your family time?

This generation of children has very little experience with delayed gratification. Peer and societal pressures to have the latest item immediately have seeped into so many areas of our lives we often don't acknowledge or notice that it's there. So many kids I see get what they want instantly and don't see any connection between how much you work and what they have or how all the having impacts the environment... I would like my children to understand that connection.

I wish for children to understand on a deep level that they are whole beings with or without an iPod. I know that it's challenging for a lot of children to fit in. With the advent of more products that challenge still hasn't changed. What helps is fitting in somewhere. You as parents have an incredible opportunity to let your children see that they have a place they will always fit in. That place is your home. I want to say to the mom's I've been listening to, **“your child fits in, right there in the crook of your arm, remember.” Or at your dinner table, in your backyard, with your extended family...**Show them in whatever way you can that they are absolutely whole, beautiful individuals with or without a new product. When our children are asking for more stuff we can listen deeper and perhaps we will find what they really needed was a bit more love and attention from us. Children want to feel needed as well as loved. Remind them of all the wonderful gifts they share with you and their friends. And then if you both understand and feel it is a worthy need or desire go ahead and buy the product.

Maybe your child will become a leader, reaching out to other children who don't have all the latest things but are great kids. When you spent some time sharing and discussing beliefs and influences you are teaching them to look at consumerism from a bigger perspective. I want to broaden my children's definition of friendship and share with them that self-respect and self-esteem can't be bought. By taking the time to discuss my beliefs my children get to know and understand me better. I want my children to be confident that who they are- beautiful, smiling, caring human beings is enough.

“As a child

**I was told and believed
That there was a treasure
buried beneath every rainbow
I believed it so much that
I have been unsuccessfully
chasing rainbows
most of my life.
I wonder why
no one ever told me
that the rainbow
and the treasure
were both
within me.”**

-Gerald G. Jampolsky M.D.

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