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# 6 Strategies For Raising Non-Materialistic Kids

By LearnVest, Contributor

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*By Deborah Skolnik*



All parents want their children to grow up understanding that the best things in life are free, and that happiness has zilch to do with accumulating stuff. Getting kids to grasp these concepts, however, is more complicated than ever.

That's because many kids are raised with an expectation of entitlement when it comes to toys, clothes and other physical items, says [Fran Walfish](#), Psy.D., child and family psychotherapist and author of "[The Self-Aware Parent: Resolving Conflict and Building a Better Bond With Your Child](#)."

There is a tsunami of ads on the Internet, TV and other media, says Walfish, that help create this expectation. From video games to tech devices to trendy new clothes, more is being marketed to kids at younger ages than ever before. The message they absorb: Spending and owning boost self-esteem and satisfaction.

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The blame for this "I need it and deserve it" belief may also rest on exhausted parents giving in to their children's desires.



nave with their kids fighting, so when children want things, they often don't say no," says Walfish.

So how do you make sure your kids don't become gimme monsters and instill in them the idea that people and experiences are way more valuable than that latest, hottest app? Whether your child is a toddler, tween or teen, it's never too early or too late to get the point across with these six moves.

## Show Them You Can Have Fun on the Cheap

Playing with your kids as often as you can without shelling out big bucks helps teach little ones that having a blast and spending cash are mutually exclusive, says [Susan Kuczarski](#), author of "[Becoming a Happy Family: Pathways to the Family Soul](#)."

"Dance with each other. Sing loudly with each other," Kuczarski suggests, as ways of having low-key (or on-key!) fun. Try making a painting together, with each family member getting a portion of the canvas to work on, or simply enjoy a game of cards. The possibilities are endless—and so are the benefits: teaching kids that having fun and feeling good have little to do with acquiring items.

## Make Gratitude a Habit

Ask your kids to name something they're grateful for every day, suggests [Nancy Shah](#), a psychologist specializing in



two children. I ask them to tell me three things that happened during the day that they were grateful for,” says Shah.

Focusing on life’s positive experiences builds happiness, Shah explains—a crucial weapon in the battle against covetousness. “Materialism comes from a state of dissatisfaction or unhappiness, and looking outside yourself for happiness and fulfillment,” she says. “If we focus on creating kids who are happy and fulfilled, by definition they won’t be materialistic.”

## Reward Kids With Special One-on-One Time

Did your child behave especially well in a demanding situation, or complete a tricky project or tough chore? Instead of rewarding her with the latest branded toy, Walfish recommends treating her to a shared experience that's more special than regular playtime, say a visit to a museum or a day hike and picnic in an area you've never visited.

Rather than congratulating your child with stuff, you are rewarding her with human contact and new experiences, Walfish notes. She'll feel great getting your undivided attention, and she'll learn to value interactions with loved ones and the excitement of doing something different.

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## Be Careful With What You Say



other swag unless you walk the walk. While it may seem harmless to comment enviously on a neighbor's new Beemer or a friend's designer shoe collection, try to resist—at least when your children are in earshot. You might inadvertently send the message that you crave these high-status items, and they might follow your lead, says Walfish.

## Teach Kids to Pay It Forward

“Doing something kind frees children from living a me-focused life by widening their circles of compassion,” says Kuczarski. Their goodwill gesture can be as simple as helping a younger child study for an exam, or visiting an elderly neighbor who doesn't get out too often. Your child will start spending more time thinking about what others need and how he or she can help, and less time thinking about his own, often fleeting wants.

## Spell Out Family Values

If you want your kids to absorb your core beliefs, carve out some occasional family time and ask them to come up with what they think are the five most important values, Kuczarski says. Then show them how to put those values into practice in the real world. If being generous ranks up there, talk about how to share with others who have less. If empathy is in your top five, have kids suggest ways they can demonstrate this at school or in their community. By being clear about the importance of ethics and putting them into action, you'll teach them that it's the nonmaterialistic things in the world that are most important, and that lesson is priceless.