

Entitlement, Money and Families

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Entitlement is a guarantee of access to benefits because of rights. It also refers in a more casual sense, to someone's belief that one is deserving of some particular reward or benefit.

When parents are raising children, they give messages about their values--what is important and why. Because money is a part of everyday life and is required to live, messages are sent about money, the meaning of money, the value of money and who uses it-- when and how.

In some families, money is scarce. Parents may be struggling to pay their bills. They may not give children money because it is simply not an option. Children may be expected to earn their own money and pay for their own clothes and necessities. Money is viewed as a means to put food on the table and a roof over one's head. It may also become the source of great worry.

In other families, money is plentiful. There is enough leftover after providing for necessities, to purchase "wants" not just "needs." Some parents give their children spending money or allowance so they may save and/or purchase items.

In each of these scenarios, children may grow up with a sense of entitlement. Children growing up with few resources can feel deprived and feel others "owe" them things as adolescents and young adults. They may feel the pain of their upbringing justifies their feelings of entitlement. Children growing up with plentiful resources can grow up believing that whatever they want they deserve. Sometimes, this is because they have not had to work for or sacrifice anything, in order to receive material things or money.

A rigid sense of entitlement can feed a strong sense of self-centeredness and narcissism. This rigidity can lead to the closing off of the heart and pride. Pride does not promote care, compassion and connection. Pride leads to isolation and intense loneliness.

Our economic woes as a country give us a great opportunity to reevaluate our own thoughts, feelings and beliefs about money. What do we believe about money? Have we fallen into a trap of overvaluing it (hoarding it) or undervaluing

it (extravagant spending)? Do we believe it brings happiness? Do we equate it with love?

My father grew up poor. He gave to others in need because he grew up in great need for the basics. He worked in construction and would be laid off of work for months at a time. I saw my father remain the same--in feast or famine in our household. His grip was not too tight or too loose on things for which he did not take for granted. His was not a "throw-away" era. All things could be used again or for another purpose.

Gratitude, compassion, generosity, responsibility-- these are the things I saw my father demonstrate about money. If I can live out those values, I believe my heart will be in right relationship with money.

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