



# IS YOUR CHILD GETTING ENOUGH VITAMIN N?

JOHN ROSEMOND

I want to tell you about an essential vitamin you've probably never heard of. If you're a parent, or plan to be one, it might be more important to your child's growth than all other vitamins combined. And only you, a parent, can provide it.

I call it Vitamin N. The word "No."

More and more children, I find, are suffering from Vitamin N deficiency. And they, their parents, and our entire culture are paying the price.

Let me illustrate my point with a story that's quite typical. A father, I'll call him Bill, gave his son, age five, pretty much everything the little boy asked for. Like most parents, Bill wanted more than anything for his son to be happy. But he wasn't. Instead he was petulant, moody, and often sullen. He was also having problems getting along with other children. In addition, he was very demanding and rarely if ever expressed any appreciation, let alone gratitude, for all the things Bill and his wife were giving him. Was his son depressed, Bill wanted to know? Did he need therapy? His son, I told him, was suffering the predictable ill effects of being over-indulged. What he needed was a healthy and steady dose of Vitamin N.

Over-indulgence—a deficiency of Vitamin N—leads to its own form of addiction. When the point of diminishing returns is passed (and it's passed fairly early on), the receiving of things begins to generate nothing but want for more things. One terrible effect of this is that our children are becoming accustomed to a material standard that's out of kilter with what they can ever hope to achieve as adults. Consider also that many, if not most, children attain this level of affluence not by working, sacrificing, or doing their best, but by whining, demanding, and manipulating. So in the process of inflating their material expectations, we also teach children that something can be had for next to nothing. Not only is that a falsehood, it's also one of the most dangerous, destructive attitudes a person can acquire.

This may go a long way toward explaining why the mental health of children in the 1950s – when kids got a lot less – was significantly better than the mental health of today's kids. Since the '50s, and especially in the last few decades, as indulgence has become the parenting norm, the rates of child and teen depression have skyrocketed.

Children who grow up believing in the something-for-nothing fairy tale are likely to become emotionally stunted, self-centered adults. Then, when they themselves become parents, they're likely to overdose their children with material things – the piles of toys, plushies, and gadgets one finds scattered around most households. In that way, over indulgence—a deficiency of Vitamin N—becomes an inherited disease, an addiction passed from one generation to the

next.

This also explains why children who get too much of what they want rarely take proper care of anything they have. Why should they? After all, experience tells them that more is always on the way.

Children deserve better. They deserve to have parents attend to their needs for protection, affection, and direction. Beyond that: They deserve to hear their parents say “no” far more often than yes when it comes to their whimsical desires. They deserve to learn the value of constructive, creative effort as opposed to the value of effort expended whining, lying on the floor kicking and screaming, or playing one parent against the other. They deserve to learn that work is the only truly fulfilling way of getting anything of value in life, and that the harder they work, the more ultimately fulfilling the outcome.

In the process of trying to protect children from frustration, parents have turned reality upside down. A child raised in this topsy-turvy fashion may not have the skills needed to stand on his or her own two feet when the time comes to do so.

Here’s a simple rule: Turn your children’s world right-side up by giving them all of what they truly need, but no more than 25 percent of what they simply want. I call this the “Principle of Benign Deprivation.”

When all is said and done, the most character-building two-letter word in the English language is no. Vitamin N.

Dispense it frequently. You’ll be happier in the long run, and so will your child.

I’m John Rosemond, author and family psychologist, for Prager University.