

Raising Likeable, Responsible, Respectful Children in an Age of Overindulgence

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Do What You Have To Do - So That You Can Do What You Want To Do! by David Bredehoft

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I was listening to a TV interview recently and heard some very wise parenting advice from a well known Hollywood actor, Denzel Washington. *[“Do what you’ve got to do so that you can do what you want to do.”](#)* (Click here to download a free PDF copy of this blog)

He continued, *[“Because it’s not the other way around. I was just talking about homework that day. They wanted to go out and play, I said, ‘Do what you’ve got to do, then you can do what you want to do. And then you’re free to do what you want to do - to a degree,’”](#)* Washington explained.



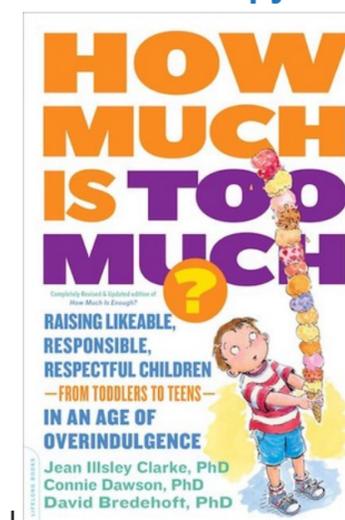
Positive Reinforcement

Denzel may not have realized it, but he was using the time tested [psychological principle of positive reinforcement](#). When something positive follows a behavior, it strengthens that behavior. In this case, the completion of homework was reinforced with the activity of play. *[“Do what you have to do, so that you can do what you want to do.”](#)*

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A word of caution. Some parents do it wrong, They give their children the positive reinforcement first and then expect them to do what they are suppose to do. They say, *“That positive reinforcement suff doesn’t work!”* **Wrong!** They got it backwards. The behavior first, then the reward. When the reward follows the behavior, the behavior is strengthened. It goes up! It is as simple as that.

Related: [When to Parent Like a Vending Machine - When to Parent like a Slot Machine by David Bredehoff](#)

Another thing I often hear from parents is, *“I don’t want to reward my kids with candy or money.”* Well, Denzel got it right again! Use activities instead, things that your children want to do. Make a list of all of the activities your children like to do. Use them. You can also expand your list by going to the [Child Development Institute](#) where you will find lists of age appropriate activities for preschoolers, elementary school children, and teenagers.

Parent Tapes

“Do what you have to do, so that you can do what you want to do.” reminds me of a second psychological principle called [Parent Tapes](#). We all have parent tapes. It’s like a recorder plays in our head. The voice over the recorder is usually of one or both of our parents. For me it is John’s voice (my dad), or Elsie’s voice (my mom). The tapes can be positive or negative. for example, “Look both ways before you cross the street.” “Remember who you are.” or “Work before pleasure.” “You are a loser.” A message like *“Do what you have to do, so that you can do what you want to do”* becomes a good parent tape when you say it over and over to your children. The plan is that they will replay this tape indefinitely in their head and it will teach them good habits.

Teaching Good Habits

How do your teach your children the good habit of doing what they have to do before getting to do what they want to do? Unfortunately, we often con ourselves into believing that if we say it one time, or if we show our children how to do it one time, they have learned it! Not so. As the saying goes, repetition is the mother of all learning. So, just like any other important lesson you want your children to learn, *“Do what you have to do, so that you can do what you want to do”* has to be repeated over and over again! (see [Reinventing the Habit Loop](#) by Jenni and Jody for a quick primer on how to teach a habit to your child)

Second, I like the idea of assigning age appropriate chores to your children. As time passes and younger children are ready to assume a new job, have the older child teach the younger child how to do the chore and monitor it. This builds a team with everyone contributing to the family with a sense of pride and purpose.

Third, teach delayed gratification. A few examples:

- 1. CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH SELF-CONTROL IS CONSISTENTLY REWARDED.**
- 2. MODEL SELF-CONTROL FOR YOUR CHILDREN.**
- 3. TEACH CHILDREN TO USE DISTRACTIONS.**

Related: [10 Stratigies To Teach Delayed gratification By David Bredehoff](#)

The Connection to Overindulgence

Participants in our research who **were not** overindulged as children were more likely to be “**Patient Postponers**” rather than “**Instant Gratifiers**”.

WHAT ARE PATIENT POSTPONERS LIKE?

- Patient postponers are very task oriented.
- They plan ahead and complete their work before they allow themselves to have fun.
- They are never impulsive shoppers.
- They almost always save for things they want *rather* than buy them on credit and pay for them later.
- Patient postponers rarely get frustrated or angry when they have to wait for things or when others interfere with their plans.

WHAT ARE INSTANT GRATIFIERS LIKE?

- Instant gratifiers are not task oriented.
- They rarely plan ahead and routinely procrastinate. They put off the things they should do for the things that they really like doing.
- They are impulsive shoppers. They want things now.
- They never save for things they want; instead they buy them on credit and pay for them later.
- Instant gratifiers routinely get frustrated and angry when they have to wait for things or when things do not go their way.

Related: [Is Your Child An “Instant Gratifier” or A “Patient Postponer”](#) By David Bredehoft

“Do what you have to do, so that you can do what you want to do” is a very powerful message that you will want to teach your children. Thank you Denzel Washington for sharing this important message with us!

There is more help about avoiding overindulgence in [How Much is Too Much? Raising Likable, Responsible, Respectful Children – From Toddlers To Teens – In An Age of Overindulgence](#) (2014, DaCapo Press Lifelong Books).

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