

## ARE WE OVERINDULGING OUR CHILDREN?

asks Sarah Kennard

I often wonder if other mothers feel the way I do about parenting: confuzzled, simultaneously bewildered and bemused, and pretty much flummoxed and floored at every turn. The eye popping amount of advice out there often overwhelms and confuses me. My latest internal war, one which recurs every so often, is when does encouraging children's dreams and desires cross the line and become the development of a spoilt brat? Will I permanently damage my child's confidence if I don't indulge him at every milestone? Should I encourage applause and gifts before following the great achievement of a healthy meal eaten or a dry happy? Where is the limit and what's the damage?

The reality is that indulging the little people doesn't necessarily have to mean giving them free rein in a toy shop or splilling preciously at a blood curdling tantrum. Over time I've come to realise that the easiest and most rewarding way to indulge my son is to give him my time and sole attention. He deserves it after all and so do I, in between school, errands and fanatically strict bedtimes we probably get to spend three to four hours in each other's company in a day and more often than not my attention is elsewhere, as is his. But he is still at an age where he thinks I'm great company and fun to be around. And I know that that's not going to last much longer so while his notion of fun differs to mine I am learning to go with his flow and try and get swept up in the moment.

I find that indulging him becomes a pleasure when I take the time to actually listen to what he would like to do or what really makes him happy. At best his ideas or whims make me laugh and at worst there's a mess to be cleaned up. Our latest 'thing' is

to put on wellies and old trackpants and walk down to the beach near our house and jump into as many puddles as possible getting wet in the process. Admittedly getting wet in this weather isn't my idea of fun but the pure joy on his face and the laughter we share are so worth it. On the rare occasion that I bake a cake, I let up of my upright and hypocritical attitude towards his intake of sugar and watch as the mixing bowl and slowly spins 360 degrees around his head. That self-taught technique ensures he doesn't miss an inch of the chocolate cake goo. Maybe it was instinctive maybe it was the fact that he was aware this was not a daily occurrence so he had to learn fast how to maximise on it. I'm going with option two.

And then there are the larger scale indulgences, more like rewards and treats. While I stop short of buying into every toy fad out there, I try and encourage his imagination and sense of his own world. So at the moment we repeatedly shiver our timbers and attempt to teach a stuffed life size parrot how to say 'pieces of eight' as my son goes through life as a pirate. This phase ensures that I wear a pirate's hat and moustache and only walk on furniture when in the living room – the floor is interested with crocodiles. This Jack Sparrow phase has also

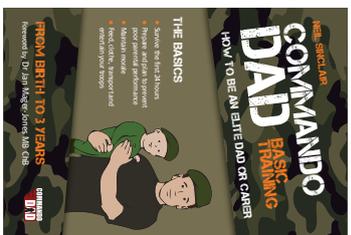
meant the purchase of swords, hooks, gold doubloons and various other paraphernalia that is an ABSOLUTE must for this game.

Travelling and exposing children to other cultures is both an indulgence and a well deserved treat and little people deserve them as much - from boarding the plane to all the wonders that travel reveals to all of us, going away with our son and accepting that this is his holiday too means that my husband and I get to do stuff we wouldn't normally do on holiday like going to bed early and sitting down to dinner at 7.00pm. But it also means that we get to enjoy a quiet beach or experience the sights and sounds of a city just waking up.

I am finally learning that the line between over indulgence and giving children the instruments to think and see for themselves is fine indeed and I undoubtedly cross it repeatedly as I find my way in this new role of mothering. My only hope is over time these indulgences show him that the world is so much bigger than our little corner and that there is tremendous value in being indulgent if it means he can find awareness in knowledge, courage to pursue his passions, and above all experience the joy of trying something new. And while he hopefully learns to absorb all that, I rediscover the freedom of being a kid through him. ☺



Children find technology intuitive and fun and this game, designed by JustSomeCoding, is an iPhone app aimed at age 2 years and upwards. Teachers shape games in a fun way, [www.justsomecoding.com](http://www.justsomecoding.com)



## Commando Dad

Commando Dad is an indispensable training manual for new recruits to fatherhood. Written by ex-Royal Engineer Commando and dad of three, Neil Sitchain, this manual will teach men, in no-nonsense terms, all the basic skills they need to survive – and thrive – as new dads. Commando Dad's stripped down, straightforward style is based on the Army Basic Training Manual and is small enough to be carried around in a dad's pocket for use 'in the field'. It is very much based on what you need to do, not what you feel. As Neil puts it: "A 0-silly-hundred-hour, with a screaming baby tooper in your arms, 700 pages of someone telling you about their emotions isn't the answer."

**Chapters include:**  
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Entertaining the toopers

Commando Dad also features military terminology throughout, for example 'flash to bang time' (the time it takes dads to react to a situation), 'squared away' (everything organised and in the right place), 'compassion fatigue' (when tiredness makes you feel you have no compassion left, Dig deep). Commando Dad is also supported by a fully interactive website including forums and how to videos about to hold, feed, burp, change and bath baby toopers. [www.commandodad.com](http://www.commandodad.com)

Commando Dad is published on May 8, 2012, and you can buy it on [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk)



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