

Their children might be entertained and educated, writes Christie Mellor, but modern parents are creating self-centred, demanding brats to whom “no” is a dirty word.



And another thing



They're at restaurants, stomping around and making loud demands. They're at the supermarket, having tantrums in the cereal aisle. They're running roughshod over feckless mothers and fathers, who pick up their mess, fetch them treats and ferry them to ballet and football practice. Today's unpleasant children are tomorrow's annoying adults but, as much as I'd like to blame the kids, it's their parents who need a good spanking.

I was under the impression that when we became grown-ups, we would be leading smart lives replete with chilled cocktails and witty banter. If children were going to be involved at all, they'd be well-behaved, know how to mix a decent martini and recognise when to make themselves scarce. Instead, I find the world has become an unbearably cuddly, politically correct place where parents coddle and cater to their children every minute of every day.

"Tommy, honey, don't hit Melvin over the head with a shovel. It's inappropriate." This is only a slight embellishment of something I heard a father say to his demon seed. Excuse me but bashing a friend over the head isn't "inappropriate", it is very, very naughty and might do serious damage. "Don't you *dare* raise that shovel. Put it down *right now!*" would be the thing to say, in a firm, possibly strident tone of voice.

Sadly, some modern parents use the word "no" only on very special occasions, such as when their young one is running into the path of a semitrailer. Then there are the parents who have a vague understanding of that "no" thing but using the word makes them, well, uncomfortable as it generally elicits

a negative response from their sensitive offspring. Some parents inexplicably follow a particular brand of child rearing that believes saying "no" to their children – or teaching them to say "I'm sorry" – will damage the child's fragile self-esteem. Do not become friends with this type of parent as they are slowly rounding the bend of parental lunacy and no good can come from your child fraternising with their spawn.

Saying "no" to children should be done on a regular basis. If you're out of practice, rehearse in front of the mirror, coupling it with a stern look, much like the one that was perfected by that scary woman down the street when she was chasing "you kids" out of her rose garden. You'll find that frightening children can be as fun as it is gratifying.

There are other times when the word "no" comes in handy, too. I'm afraid I was not having auditory hallucinations when I heard, "We're going to excavate the front yard and turn it into a construction site for Jackson's birthday!" Those people did turn their front yard into a construction site because their three-year-old just dotes on earth-moving equipment. Those people have clearly gone insane and the whole family needs a forced march to a refugee camp for a hefty dose of reality.

Toddlers are generally thrilled with a bit of shiny tinfoil and some string on their special day and there is no need to hire a petting zoo, three adults dressed up as action figures and a DJ. Save your hard-earned pennies, give your birthday girl or boy a piece of cake and take your spouse out for dinner. Heaven knows, you could both use a break.

Parents are not only guilty of over-indulging their children, they're also guilty of over-conversing about them. If Brynn's mummy tells you one more time that "Brynn's preschool teacher told us she is six months ahead in her hand-eye co-ordination," I think it is acceptable to test Brynn's mummy's ability to deflect a quick upper-left to the jaw. Just to see if Brynn takes after Mum or Dad. Far too many parents are apparently incapable of conversing about anything but their children. Avoid becoming one of those stultifying creatures by developing some hobbies.

Even worse is the passive-aggressive type who says quietly, "I'm a little worried about Dashiell. After he wrote a small treatise on thermal energy over the weekend, he read books for five hours. I just don't know if he's getting enough fibre." If Dashiell is your seven-year-old, you've become extremely boring and no one wants to invite you over any more. Actually, the only people who may still invite you over are those insufferable people who can talk of nothing but their children. Do you really want to be friends with them?

When I was pregnant with my first child, a friend of mine with a difficult nine-year-old bitterly advised me to enjoy the time I had because I would have none for the next 18 years. I took that as a challenge and I wholeheartedly suggest that you do, too. Of course, you'll love and nurture your children but they'll be better people when your world does not revolve around them and you'll be far less annoying. So, go chill the glasses. It's grown-up time.

Christie Mellor is the author of *We Were Here First, Kid! A Practical Guide To Happy Parenting* and the mother of two boys.