Raising kids wisely in an indulgent age

By Dan Kindlon, Ph.D.

As parents, we do a great job in some areas, but not so great in others. Compared to earlier generations, for example, we are emotionally closer to our kids. They confide in us more, we have more fun with them and we know more about the science of child development. But too often our generation of Baby Boomers blur the line between friend and parent.

We want to talk things out with our children, reason with them rather than take away privileges and impose discipline. We want open and honest communication, not dictatorial rule. But the desire to form a close bond with our kids should not come at the expense of being unable to set much-needed limits.

Friendship with one’s child can be a bright spot in our lives. Enjoying a child’s company is one of the main reasons we have kids in the first place. But if we spoil our children with material goods in order to get a hug or if we fail to set appropriate limits because we don’t want our kids to be upset—and perhaps withdraw their love—we undermine their character development. And, at the same time, we are also giving children the burden of protecting us from unhappiness.

Our children need life skills

We all want our kids to be happy, of course. But their happiness as adults will be largely dependent on the tools we give them. These tools, or skills, will help them develop the emotional maturity they will need to be honest with themselves, to be empathetic, take initiative, delay gratification, learn from failure and move on, accept their shortcomings and—when they’ve done something wrong—to face the consequences.

Caring for kids when they are young is relatively easy in many ways. It’s when they are older that a parent’s job becomes more complicated. On some level, we don’t want to think that our children will have to face divorce, illness, financial setbacks and death—but they will. We need to prepare them for a time when they will be responsible for themselves. We need to help them develop habits of character to equip them to face adult challenges.

Happiness is about being engaged

One of the most consistent findings about happiness—and this is an important area where we can have some influence over our kids—is that people report being happiest when...
they are absorbed or engaged in a challenging activity. It doesn’t matter all that much what the activity is as long as it requires skill and concentration. It can be playing tennis, composing music or reading to a child.

Resisting the urge to quit

We teach children through our own example and by encouraging them to stick with things that they have started—skating lessons, the swim team, math club—and to not give up when things don’t go exactly the way they would like.

To some extent, we can blame our popular culture for the tendency many young people have to quit an activity or to not even give something new a try. There’s a fear that, unless you are very good at whatever you’re doing and you’re going to look like a winner, you are better off not trying. Noone wants to be marginalized or stigmatized, and failure is often defined in our society as not being “the best.” As a result, children tend to look at activities on a continuum of winning and losing.

How to be helpful

What do we need to be doing to help our kids become engaged and competent? Sometimes it just involves supervision and support. At others, it requires getting out of our kids’ way, overcoming our own fears and letting them master a task or an activity on their own.

As parents, we need to find a balance between over- and under-involvement. We need to encourage children to do activities that are challenging—but not so challenging that they will feel immediately discouraged and give up.

Less is often more

Well-meaning parents can end up hurting their kids by giving them too much. Too much money, too many toys, too much help, too much leeway in how they can behave. Even with the best of intentions, we can promote self-centeredness in our children.

Just think of it: we hate it when our kids are upset, and seeing them happy gives us pleasure. So we try to make them feel like they’re the center of the universe, but we don’t want them to act cocky. We want them to be confident, but not so confident that they ignore risks. We want our children to face and overcome challenges, but we don’t want them to be so focused on themselves that they feel self-conscious and anxious.

Encouraging empathy

We want our kids to be aware of their needs and of the needs of others. This requires a healthy self-esteem but not an exclusive focus on oneself.

It can be hard for us to understand that children really do need to have limits set for them. They need to learn the possibly painful lesson that their needs do not always come first and the world does not revolve around them. But this is one of the most important lessons we can teach them.

Developing self-control

One of the hallmarks of emotional maturity is the ability to not be fazed or thrown by setbacks, to roll with the punches and to persevere in the face of difficulties. Having self-control—the ability to tolerate frustration and delay gratification—is vital for a child to excel.

In a number of interesting experiments, psychologists have reported that children who were able to delay gratification not only had higher SAT scores, but were also described by their parents as “better able to cope with stress, effectively pursue goals and resist temptation.”

The most straightforward way to help a child develop self-control is to exhibit it ourselves. If we can patiently wait in a ticket line for 45 minutes or sit in a traffic jam, overcome challenges, but we don’t want them to be so focused on themselves that they feel self-conscious and anxious. We want our children to face and overcome challenges, but we don’t want them to be so focused on themselves that they feel self-conscious and anxious.

Finding a good balance

Some of my advice may seem contradictory. On the one hand, I’ve said we shouldn’t give children too much or overmanage their lives—we should encourage their independence and self-sufficiency. At the same time, if we don’t give our kids enough time, understanding and love, they can become chronically angry or depressed.

Adolescents do want to spend more time with their parents. And, as our research shows, if they don’t get it, they either pass on the pain they feel to others in the form of meanness or turn it against themselves in the form of depression.

The risk of anger and depression is lessened if parent and teen can maintain a good relationship, if they can enjoy the time they spend together and if they feel comfortable talking about things that are important to them.

If this is not happening in your family, try to eat more meals together. Go for walks or watch a favorite TV show together. Spend at least an hour a week with a child, doing something you both enjoy.

“…That hour made all the difference,” said one mom who tried it. “We’d been doing nothing but argue about homework. I’d forgotten we actually like each other.”

We all need limits

Teenagers may say, in all honesty, that they’re not going to smoke pot at a rock concert. But if it gets passed around, it’s not easy to say no. Come to think of it, without laws on driving under the influence and speeding, many of us would be at higher risk for committing vehicular homicide.

When kids ask to do things they’re not ready for, they often say “Don’t you trust me?” And my response is “No, and I wouldn’t have trusted myself at your age either. My job as a parent is to protect you from risky situations.”

We may assume that one day our child will get drunk or try drugs, but later is better that sooner. Research has found that the earlier a child begins these activities, the higher their risk in later life of negative outcomes.

Always remember that we can set limits and still have fun with our kids. We should not be afraid to switch hats or be inconsistent at times. Children know when we’re in “parent mode.”

---Adapted from the author’s book “Too Much of a Good Thing: Raising Children of Character in an Indulgent Age” (see page 8).
It’s a myth that junk food is cheap

O ur readers write: It’s often said that one reason Americans are overweight is that high-fat, high-calorie junk food is cheaper than real food. As a home economics educator and advocate for working families, I must say this is just plain wrong. Here are some ideas I’d like to share with your readers:

A roasted chicken served with a plain salad or vegetable and milk costs about $14 and will feed 4-6 people. A typical order of food and drinks for a family of 4 at McDonald’s runs about twice that much.

Healthier alternatives to junk food include home-cooked rice, grains, pasta, beans, meat, fish, poultry, dairy products and vegetables—fresh, frozen or canned. Despite the myth, potato chips are not cheaper than broccoli. Even a peanut butter sandwich on whole wheat bread is more nutritious than a fast-food burger. And a plain, refreshing glass of water is a thousand times better for us than a can of soda.

The calories in food cooked at home are of a healthier variety, and you don’t have to buy grass-fed beef and pricey organic ingredients. Simply using olive oil purchased at your local supermarket can be a big plus.

We make excuses like “I’m too tired to cook” or “I don’t have the time to go to the supermarket.” But if we can drive to a fast-food place, we can drive to a supermarket as well. And if we’re watching a couple of hours of TV a day, we do have some time available.

Changing a culture that is habituated to fast food may not be easy, but just look at tobacco. At some point, anti-smoking campaigns led to an environmental change that led to a cultural one—and kids started saying to their parents, “I wish you didn’t smoke.”

—Dr. Patricia J. Thompson, New York City

Night-owl teenagers need more sleep

M ost American teenagers fall asleep after 11 pm, yet many of them are up by 6 to get to school on time. New research suggests that their schoolwork may be suffering.

“Those kids may be up and at school, but I’m convinced their brains are back on the pillow at home,” says Brown University sleep specialist Mary A. Carskadon, Ph.D. Her study of 3,000 teens found that high school students who got poor grades slept on average 25 minutes less and went to bed 40 minutes later than those who got A’s and B’s.

Sleep deprivation has an impact on learning. Dr. Carskadon explains that if students are not awake enough to take in new information, their knowledge acquisition will be impaired and their ability to retrieve information reduced—because what’s learned during the day gets consolidated during sleep.

She adds that “catching up on the weekends” may further distort a child’s biological clock and make it even harder to get up on time during the school week.

One study found more than 90 percent of teenagers reported sleeping less than 9 hours a night, and 10 percent slept less than 6 hours. As Cornell University psychologist James B. Maas, a leading sleep researcher, has observed, most teens are “walking zombies” because they get far too little sleep.

Is there anything parents and schools can do to remedy the situation in this hyper-connected era of 24/7 smartphones and iPads? Here are some of Dr. Carskadon’s suggestions:

At school. High schools could start the day later for adolescents and limit school-sponsored late-evening activities. Schools could also include information about sleep and biological rhythms in the curriculum to encourage students to make informed choices about their sleep schedules.

At home. Parents should identify and set an appropriate bedtime and, if possible, observe some bedtime rituals as well. To help establish an acceptable sleep-awake cycle, teens should avoid bright light and stimulating activities in the evening and get outdoor light exposure in the morning.

Cultural activities make us happier, men especially

V isiting museums and art galleries and going to concerts, sporting events and religious activities have been associated with better health and greater happiness. Men, in particular, benefit from cultural experiences, according to a report in the “Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health.”

In a survey of 50,000 men and women, of the respondents who attended five or more events over a six-month period, 91% reported being highly satisfied with their lives, compared to 84% of those who participated in just one event.

Compared to men who didn’t attend cultural events, those who did were 12% less less likely to report feelings of depression, 13% less likely to report feelings of anxiety and 14% more likely to report being satisfied with life. Benefits for women were similar but less pronounced. Researchers suggest that cultural activities may lower stress and positively affect the brain and immune systems.

—Adapted from the “Mind, Mood & Memory” newsletter
If you’re new to long-distance caregiving

W e’re a mobile society. We move from place to place to go to college, start new jobs or retire to a warmer climate. Our families are extended not just by marriage but by our physical distance from each other.

As a result, of the 34 million Americans caring for an older relative these days, 7 million are doing it from afar. If you are in this role now or expect to be in the near future, here are some helpful Q&As:

**What is long-distance caregiving?**
It can be many things, from doing online research on a health problem to contacting the references of a new home-health aide or filling in for a sibling who lives near your older relative. If you live an hour or more away from the person you are helping, you can think of yourself as a long-distance caregiver.

**How will I know if I’m needed?**
You may not have considered the possibility that you will be called on for help one day, or you may have already discussed the matter with your parents. For many people, it takes a visit with your parents or a call from their neighbor or physician alerting you to a new health situation and the need for your assistance. It may be related to the onset of Alzheimer’s disease or a sudden event like a stroke.

In either case, you may feel unprepared and unsure where to begin. While each family’s experience is different, the keys to being a successful long-distance caregiver are planning, organization and flexibility.

As a first step, an assessment of your loved one’s care requirements is essential. It should include the current medical diagnosis and prognosis and a professional evaluation of the person’s need for assistance.

**Realistically what can I do from across the country?** You can do a lot in our increasingly computerized society. For example, many pharmacies and health care organizations prefer to interact online with their customers. You can troubleshoot medical claims problems and stay abreast of new research in areas of interest to your older relatives.

You might also collect and maintain an online directory of email addresses and phone numbers of family members, neighbors, friends, doctors, hospitals and local home health services. And most importantly, you can provide emotional support to your parents and siblings. Simply staying in close touch can take the pressure off a local caregiver.

**Can I help with paperwork?** Yes! Effective caregiving often depends on keeping a great deal of information in order and up-to-date. Gathering and organizing this information can be a lot of work at first, and from far away it may seem challenging. But once you have everything together, many caregiving tasks will be easier.

Make sure that financial matters, including wills and life insurance policies, are in order. If your older relative is unable to handle financial and property issues, it helps if someone has a durable power of attorney to pay bills, taxes, etc.

**Can I call my parent’s doctors?** Developing a relationship with doctors is a smart idea, and it’s best to meet them face to face during an office visit with your older relative. You can ask to be kept informed of any important medical issues that arise. And to avoid future frustration, ask your parents to sign privacy releases giving doctors authorization to speak with you by phone regarding their care.

**Is a geriatric care manager a good idea?** It can be, depending on your older relative’s health status. These professionals are often licensed nurses or social workers who specialize in geriatrics. They can identify problems and help provide solutions that you might not be aware of. They can be helpful in making an initial assessment of care needs.

They can also screen, place and monitor in-home help and arrange for short-term or long-term assistance for long-distance caregivers. For more information, visit www.caremanager.org. An initial consultation may cost anywhere from $80 to $250 an hour.

**What about an alert system?** If your parent lives alone, talk with her or him about an electronic alert system for emergencies. These are typically lightweight devices that can be worn around the wrist or neck and only require a push of a button to generate an automatic call for help. You might also want to arrange a daily check-in call or email message.

**Can I call my parent’s doctors?**

“Hi, just checking to see if Dad talked to the doctor today.”

Resources for long-distance caregivers

W ith so many of us providing elder care from home and far away, there’s a vast and growing body of information that’s available simply for the asking.

You might start with the National Institute on Aging, an agency of the National Institutes of Health. It offers free information in English and Spanish. Call (800) 222-2225. Visit www.nia.nih.gov or www.nia.nih.gov/Espanol.

Here are some other helpful resources:

- Caring from a Distance (202) 895-9465, www.cfad.org
- Family Caregiver Alliance (800) 445-8106, www.caregiver.org
- National Family Caregivers Association (800) 896-3650, www.nfcacares.org
- The NIA’s AD/ER Center offers free information about Alzheimer’s disease, including specific caregiving information. Alzheimer’s Disease Education and Referral (AD/ER) Center. (800) 438-4380, www.alz.org
- The NIA’s AD/ER Center offers free information about Alzheimer’s disease, including specific caregiving information. Alzheimer’s Disease Education and Referral (AD/ER) Center. (800) 438-4380, www.alz.org

www.workandfamilylife.com
Teaching our kids about money

We would all like to teach our children how to manage money, live within their means and appreciate the value of a hard-earned dollar. And we can do it—but not overnight.

“It’s a gradual process that takes experience, trial and error, making mistakes and learning from them,” says educator Sally Tannen. “It’s one of those things a child has to do in order to understand.”

How to get started

A realistic goal for young children is to have them become familiar with units of money and, at the same time, to know that they can’t take something from a store without paying for it.

“Young kids may assume that, if you need more money, you can just go to the bank or ATM and get some,” says child psychologist Matti Feldman. “We have to teach them that there’s a limited amount a family or individual can choose to spend in different ways.”

Look for teachable moments

“We continually send our kids messages about money, especially during teachable moments,” say the authors of Silver Spoon Kids, Eileen Gallo and Jon Gallo. “It could be when your child asks for the same expensive toy his friend just got, or you need to make a major change in your lifestyle, or even when you pass someone on the street asking for a handout.”

Teachable moments can also happen when you ask your kids to help you do research for a major purchase or figure out the budget for a family vacation. Allowances can also be a great way to teach children to budget and deal with the consequences of their decisions.

Allowance is a family choice

Whatever you decide about giving your child an allowance, the choice should be part of an ongoing process of communicating your values about good and bad spending and also about saving.

To help your child understand the concept of saving, you might point out the difference between money you spend on food and shelter, money you save for a major purchase and money you set aside for a college education.

If you can, reward kids for saving money. For example, you might say: “If you can save half of what you need for a new bike, I’ll pay for the other half.”

How much say do you have?

Family rules should apply to spending money just as they do to other things. If Grandma gives your seven year old $50, you might require some portion to be saved. (Make sure your bank doesn’t charge you to maintain a small savings account.)

On the whole, however, kids should be able to spend allowances as they wish, because they need to learn from the experience.

“Older children especially like to buy trendy, costly items, and it doesn’t help to blow a gasket,” says Dr. James Comer of the Yale Child Study Center. “They need the experience of not having money for something they really want because they spent it.”

Should you pay for chores?

Parenting experts caution against treating an allowance as part of a reward system for good behavior or as a payment for doing chores. They see chores such as setting the table, feeding a pet, or sweeping the floor as part of daily life—and children should do these things not for money but because they are contributing members of the family. On the other hand, parents may want to pay kids for extra jobs like yard work or cleaning out the garage (see sidebar tips).

Of course, haggling with a child over chores is unpleasant. As Wendy Mogel writes in The Blessing of a Skinned Knee, “We may fear that because we are working or occupied with activities outside of home, we do too little for our children. We smooth their path by picking up after them and by not requiring them to do tasks they aren’t in the mood to do.”

Or we do chores ourselves because it’s easier than teaching our kids to master them.

“It’s true that many of the tasks young children do won’t really save you any time,” Mogel says, “but if you view them in terms of your child’s future self-reliance, it may help you slow down and encourage their early efforts.”

Money should not mean “I love you” or “I want you to love me.” But sometimes it can feel that way to kids and to parents too. Here are some more tips about handling money with your children:

Avoid giving kids money to compensate for time you spent away from home or a promise you had to break. Kids will learn quickly that your guilt can mean more money for them.

Resist the urge to “forgive” a child for money he or she borrowed. Set a schedule for repayment and follow up on it. Older kids who receive a larger loan might be asked to pay it back with modest interest, for an important lesson in economics.

It’s OK to say no. In our uncertain economy, you may be unable to pay for things your kids want—and feel they absolutely must have. This can be hard to understand, especially if the parents of your children’s friends are in a position to provide the latest in big-ticket items.

Be honest about financial difficulties that you may have. Kids need to be aware of your spending limitations. Take the position that “we’re in this together as a family.”

It’s OK to pay for extra chores. Just give kids a say in setting the rules for when and how the job will be done. Children get satisfaction by earning their own spending money plus a lesson in what it means to be a team player.

Avoid paying for a good report card. Money rewards for A’s can dampen motivation. Celebrate a child’s good grades as a family in some other way.

More tips on money issues with children

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Getting along with a difficult boss

Most of us have suffered under a difficult supervisor at some point in our work lives—and almost all of us have had what we thought of as a “bad boss” experience. This can be a serious issue, because the careers of many able employees have stalled over a personality conflict with their boss, according to a study by the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina. In a stronger economy, people might jump ship to escape a bad manager. But these days workers are more likely to stick it out, hoping that they—or their boss—will move on.

What you can do

While your boss may be at fault, it’s usually the subordinate who has to learn how to cope. This means adjusting your own behavior and not trying to change your boss’s personality—an unlikely prospect in any case.

It also helps to take the initiative before a poor relationship gets even worse. Try to figure out what makes your boss tick. What are her or his strengths, weaknesses, pressures, problems and working style? Ask yourself:

- **Is the problem a personality conflict?** Try to get past irritating behavior. An obnoxious boss can also be fair. A friendly boss may not always give you credit for your work. And a meanie can also be a very smart person from whom you can learn a lot.

- **What is my role?** It’s easy to be hypercritical of a manager while ignoring your own responsibility for any part of the problem.

- **What are my boss’s goals?** Knowing his or her goals, both strong-term and long-term, may help you adjust your priorities.

- **Is my boss struggling with a work or personal issue?** If it’s work-related, offer to help. Try to make yourself an ally, not an antagonist. If there’s something in particular that your boss really hates to do, you might even offer to take over this task. If it’s personal, try to be understanding.

- **Don’t be too critical**

  Second-guessing or complaining about our higher-ups may be a fact of life in the workplace, but it will not repair a poor relationship with a supervisor. Power struggles don’t help much either because, in most cases, subordinates don’t win them.

  If you decide to speak to your boss about what you perceive to be “the problem,” be specific. Say this is what is happening, this is how I feel about it and this is how it affects the way I do my job.

- **If things get really bad**

  If you feel like you’re being bullied at work, it’s important to document the behavior factually and specifically. If you’ve tried to be helpful, understanding and mature, but it’s not improving the situation, you may need to talk to someone in HR.

  The reality is that some bosses truly are impossible and there’s not much we can do to make them easy to work with. But we need to remember that we can only control our response to a particular situation, not the situation itself. And by all means, we should not take out our frustrations with a boss on our families.

- **Resist the urge to mentally make counter arguments while your boss is talking.** To pick up on meaning, try paraphrasing an idea: “Are you saying that...?”

- **Pay attention to your boss’s style.** Is it casual or formal? When does she or he prefer a phone call, email or text message? If you’re not sure, ask: “How would you like to receive information from me?”

Tips for better communication with your boss

Business writer Antonia van der Meer offers these tips for better communication with your supervisor.

- **See the big picture.** It helps to know what your boss wants you to accomplish this week and this year. Learn more about what’s going on in your company and industry.

- **Ask good questions.** But don’t ask too many. Focus on what you need to know to do your job better. Don’t probe into areas unrelated to your job.

- **Be concise.** Don’t waste your boss’s time with overdrawn explanations, complaints or apologies. And, if you’re not “good on your feet,” give some thought to what you need to say beforehand.

- **Be aware of timing.** If your boss is rushing to get something done, don’t distract her or him with your project or problem. Ask quick questions, then say, “Can we meet to talk more about this?”

- **Don’t get defensive.** Your boss may not give you feedback the way you would like to receive it. Focus on the validity of a comment or criticism, not how it was given. See issues that are bothering you as problems to be solved.

- **Listen for meaning as well as words.** Resist the urge to mentally make counter arguments while your boss is talking. To pick up on meaning, try paraphrasing an idea: “Are you saying that...?”

“Most of us have suffered under a difficult supervisor at some point in our work lives—and almost all of us have had what we thought of as a “bad boss” experience.”

“My boss can be a real pain...but she really knows her stuff.”

Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina, according to a study by the Center for Creative Leadership...
Is your weight-loss plan up to date?

We’re told to eat less and exercise more, and some of us have tried every diet under the sun. But many of us are fatter now than ever before—which makes the new research on weight control important.

A recent Harvard University report in The New England Journal of Medicine analyzed factors that influence weight gain. It was based on a study of 120,000 health professionals: nurses, doctors, dentists and veterinarians who completed questionnaires every two years for 12–20 years. Briefly stated, the study found that eating fewer calories and avoiding fatty foods is not the best approach to weight loss, and that increased physical activity will not make up for a bad diet. Here are some of the main findings:

- **WEIGHT GAIN DOESN’T HAPPEN OVERNIGHT.** On average, study participants gained a pound a year, which added up to 20 pounds in 20 years. Some people gained more, some less. And those who were overweight at the start tended to gain the most.

- **WATCH WHAT YOU EAT.** Counting calories will not do the trick unless you look at the kinds of calories you are eating. Dr. Dariush Mazaffarian explains: “There are good foods and bad foods, and the advice should be to eat the good foods more and the bad foods less.”

- **FRENCH FRIES TOP THE “BAD FOODS” LIST.** Increased consumption of this food alone was linked to a weight gain, on average, of 3.4 pounds in each four-year period. Other big contributors were potato chips, sugar-sweetened drinks, red and processed meats, sweets and desserts.

- **YOU CAN’T EAT TOO MUCH BROCCOLI.** Three foods eaten in greater amounts resulted in no weight gain: fruits, vegetables and whole grains. The nurses who lost weight over the course of the study consumed 3.1 more servings of vegetables each day.

- **DAIRY PRODUCTS WERE A SURPRISE.** The study found that eating more dairy products (including full-fat milk and cheese) had no effect on weight. In fact, fats are not the culprit we thought them to be. The omega 3’s, olive and canola oil are good fats—and yogurt, among all foods, was most strongly linked to weight loss.

- **OTHER FACTORS COUNT TOO.** People who slept less than 6 or more than 8 hours a night were among the study’s big gainers. And the more TV people watched, the more weight they gained. Smokers who quit gained for awhile, then leveled off. Drinking one glass of wine a day had no significant effect on weight, but other forms of alcohol added the pounds.

- **FOLLOW A FEW GOOD RULES.** In Time magazine’s recent Special Nutrition issue, Dr. Mehmet Oz offers this advice: “Choose foods that look like they did when they came out of the ground (remember, there are no marshmallow trees). Eat in moderation. Be an omnivore (there are multiple food groups for a reason) and get some exercise.”

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It’s pumpkin season...and not just for Thanksgiving pies

Yes, we love those holiday pies—but don’t sell pumpkin short. It’s a nutritional powerhouse that gets its vivid orange color from beta-carotene, which the body converts to vitamin A, says Weill Cornell Medical Center dietitian Georgia Giannopoulos.

**Vitamin A** is good for your eyes, plays a role in bone growth and helps regulate the immune system. Pumpkin also contains important minerals, fiber and even a small amount of protein.

**It’s “nutrient dense,”** meaning it offers a lot of nutrition in a low-calorie package (about 49 per cup).

Both fresh and canned pumpkin are nutritious, delicious and versatile, adds Giannopoulos. But if you buy it canned, be sure to choose a brand that lists pumpkin as its sole ingredient—not a pumpkin pie mix with added sugar and salt.

**An ideal cooking pumpkin** is about the size of a cantaloupe. Look for a deep orange color and a hard, smooth skin with no holes or bruises.

**Cut pumpkin into wedges** or cubes and bake it or toss it into a vegetable soup. And don’t forget the seeds. They’re a great snack, baked and sprinkled with your favorite herbs and spices.

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Adapted from Weill Cornell Medical College’s Food and Fitness Advisor
Helping our children to develop character

The challenge for parents today, says Dan Kindlon, Ph.D., author of Too Much of a Good Thing, is to balance two major tasks. First, we need to show our children that we love them and then we need to raise them with the skills and values they will need to be emotionally healthy adults.

Often, this balancing act requires us to make choices that upset our kids and make them angry. But when we hesitate to set appropriate limits, we undermine their character development.

We indulge our children because we’re able to—we have the resources and we want to share our own strengths and limitations.

Dr. Kindlon offers sensible advice that tries to help parents maintain the best of both worlds: the emotional closeness and informality with our children that characterize parents today—as well as the ability to set realistic limits required to build character (see front page story).

As a generation of parents, Dr. Kindlon says, “I think we should ask ourselves what kind of adults we want our kids to be—what we think is most important to teach them.”

The author provides guidance and ideas for parents on how to avoid having spoiled kids who “seem to lack the generosity of spirit that is one of the true signs of character.” He describes ways to help them develop self-control and deal with stress. He also covers topics such as the tyranny of homework, eating problems, doing chores, family rules, motivation (and the lack of it) and drug use by teenagers.

Too Much of a Good Thing: Raising Children of Character in an Indulgent Age (Hyperion/Miramax Books) is available online and in bookstores.