# **The importance of delaying gratification of children**

**Source: Akhila Das Blah, Storyteller & Content Writer**

As parents, our greatest wish is to make our children happy. We provide them with everything their little hearts desire. If we can afford it, they will have it. After all, what is the point of working hard and earning all that money if I can’t give my children what they want? As a society, we have far more disposable income than before and that leads us to indulge ourselves and our loved ones. It’s a natural instinct. It’s nice to be able to walk past a shop and buy something, whether we need it or not.

Unfortunately, this well-intentioned perspective of ours leads our children to believe that they are entitled and deserve instant gratification. If this need for instant gratification was restricted to the occasional shopping trip, there would be not much cause for concern. But, it percolates into every area of their lives with far-reaching consequences that we, as parents don’t necessarily realise. We give into every whim of our child, both those of a tantrum throwing two-year-old and a sulking teenager. They control everything – the food they eat, the number of toys they have, the amount of screen time they have access to and even their demand for constant entertainment. Our need to be liked and to be popular with our kids results in our inability to say no to them.

Children who demand instant gratification run the risk of becoming adults with a lack of control, and has sense of entitlement and a poor work ethic. They struggle in the real world, unable to come to terms with the fact that they will not be given instant promotions and be able to buy expensive houses and cars, the minute they start working. They constantly switch from one job to another, all the while blaming the company, their bosses and co-workers without willing to put in the required time and hard work.

By delaying gratification, we teach them to enjoy the anticipation of a reward while working or waiting for it. Learning self-control or self-discipline will help your child deal better with temptations, improve their relationships and perform better in school. Explain the concept of delayed gratification to your child. Even a two-year old child is able to understand the concept of waiting. By waiting for something they want, they will appreciate it even more when they get it. Avoid instantly giving in to their demands. Encourage them to use their pocket-money or birthday money for buying something that they really want.

**Don’t feel the need to fix every situation.** Allow for some minor stresses in their life. In the real world, they will not always get what they want. By providing them with opportunities to cope with minor situations that are in your control, you are instilling necessary life skills to help them deal with inevitable stresses later in life. Set and maintain consistent limits for your child.By restricting their screen time to weekends only for a couple of hours, you are teaching them self-discipline. A treat can be a couple of pieces of chocolate rather than the whole bar. Involve them in setting up rules and consequences. It will make them responsible for their own routine and make them understand the logic behind the rules.

**Follow through on consequences.** Your child needs to see that you mean what you say. As parents, it’s only natural that we will want to treat our children or indulge them, especially when they have been on their best behaviour. Let them know in advance why he is being treated, especially if it’s for something positive that they have done. Try and treat them with experiences rather than material gifts so that they don’t grow up equating rewards with material things.

**Learn to say ‘No’.** Everything does not need to be a negotiation. “No, we are not going to be doing this today.” Make it the end of the discussion. Do not cave in or make promises for later. Always let them know in advance. If you are taking them to a store and don’t plan on purchasing any extras, tell them. The other alternative is to give them a budget and tell them to choose within the budget.

**Encourage your child to talk about their feelings.** They will get frustrated when things don’t work out their way. By communicating their emotions, they are learning to deal with disappointment. Be aware of how you react as well. If you resort to yelling or showing your frustration when your child throws a tantrum, the situation will only get aggravated. By staying calm and controlling your emotions, you are showing them how to do the same. Talk to them about how hard you work to be able to afford the things you buy. Be cognizant of your own need for instant gratification and how often you indulge it.

**Remember that children do what you do and not necessarily what you say.**