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Have you ever heard of a child being ‘parentified’ or exhibiting ‘parentified behaviors?’ This is a disturbing trend of accusations against parents that is emerging and being exploited by child savers to the detriment of families nationwide.

Parentified behaviors are often described in social worker, guardian ad litem, and CASA (court appointed special advocate) reports as children who cook meals, watch younger siblings, clean the house and do laundry.

It seems that, according to the child savers, children should only be expected to play. In fact, according to the child saver standards, parents are expected to entertain their children whenever they need it.

Pardon me while I gag. I remember when my boys first came up to me complaining, “Mom, I’m bored.” I had no intention of being the entertainment director for these boys. They had toys, books, two dogs, two cats, and the great outdoors to stimulate their imaginations (I strictly limited their television time and content). If I thought up their activities, they would never learn to appropriately entertain themselves.

So I asked them, “Are you sure you want me to think up something for you to do?”

Relief flooded their faces, “Yes!” they insisted.

“OK, Hamal, go scrub the bathroom. Eric, vacuum the living room.” They were about eight and five years old at the time.

They thought I was kidding. “Aw, mo-o-om,” they whined.

I wasn’t kidding. “You wanted me to think of something for you to do, that’s what I thought of.”

Of course they didn’t like my idea. “Never mind, we’ll think of something ourselves,” they said.

“Too late, guys. You asked, I decided. You don’t have the choice any more. Get to work.” They mumbled and even cried a bit, but they knew I meant business so they got to the task at hand. They never asked me again to be the entertainment director.

By today’s standards, this is portrayed as child abuse. Sigh.

Let’s go back to when I was a child. I was the oldest in my family and the oldest of the next generation of kids. Whenever the extended family got together, I had to watch my younger cousins and siblings while the grownups talked or played cards. We weren’t allowed to interrupt adult conversations like children are today. Not only did I have to keep the little ones entertained, I even had to change diapers. I hated it, but I could hardly characterize it as child abuse. It was part of being a member of the family.

While babysitting by cousins and siblings at family gatherings, I learned to recognize what is age-appropriate behavior in children in various stages of development and how to deal with problems under the careful supervision of adults. When I had my own children, I already had years of practical experience caring for children under my belt. This was but a small part of my training for adult responsibilities; training administered by loving family members rather than alphabetized ‘experts.’

By the time I was six in addition to keeping my room clean, I was doing simple ironing and drying dishes. By nine, I was cooking simple meals and washing dishes every day. By ten I had rudimentary housekeeping and management skills and could sew simple items of clothing. By

thirteen, I was responsible for the house and my siblings while my mom worked. I had supper ready when she came home from work. I did the laundry. I did my own shopping for school clothes, and even made some of my own clothes. I babysat the neighbor's kids. Many of these skills were learned while earning merit badges for girl scouts. I was - by today's standards - 'parentified.'

OK, I confess, I raised my sons the same way. By ten, they each did (gasp) their own laundry. They cleaned the garage, the basement, their room and their bathroom. They cleared the table and loaded/unloaded the dishwasher. They fed the dogs daily.

When Eric was thirteen, he would stay home from our shop (where we home-schooled him) on Fridays and he got to clean the house. I gave him \$15.00 to buy cleaning supplies every month, whether he spent it all or not on cleaning supplies was no concern of mine. Our deal was, if the house passed inspection (I told him exactly what I expected right up front), he got \$5.00. If it failed inspection, he paid me \$5.00.

The first week, he passed with flying colors. The next two weeks he failed. He didn't want to do it any more. But I didn't let him renege on our deal, and he eventually passed consistently.

By these 'abusive' tactics, he learned responsibility and how to keep a commitment. It wasn't an easy lesson, or a fun lesson. But it was a needful lesson. Each chore that our children learn not only teaches responsibility, but increases their self-esteem. There is genuine pride in a job well done or a difficult task accomplished; pride that cannot be artificially instilled in a person. Self-esteem is earned with blood, sweat and tears, it cannot be manufactured by touchy-feely exercises and foolish rationalizations.

So I guess it's time to put organizations like girl scouts and boy scouts on trial, after all, earning those all-important merit badges clearly constituted 'parentifying' a child's behavior.

Listen, all of you out there who object to children being taught responsibilities or receiving training to help them in adulthood, get a life. Nobody ever died or went on a shooting spree because mom made them clean their room.

The real abuse is 'Peter Pan-izing' children by never teaching them how to grow up and turning them out on their own without a clue as to how to function in the adult world. Life isn't about childish games, and kids need an entire childhood to learn that.