

WI\$E PARENTING

Helping kids distinguish between “needs” and “wants”

As parents we clearly want the best for our children. However, there is a fine balance to be struck between wanting the best for your child, and raising a child to who appreciates the value of things. Once again, it all begins with communication. Here are some helpful talking points to get your started.

Define a real “need”

The word “need” tends to be overused in the daily vernacular, often replacing the word “want.” Convey to your child that a real need covers things that we actually must have for day-to-day survival, such as:

- Shelter (a roof over our heads, heating in the cold, protection from sun, rain, and snow, warm clothing in the winter)
- Food and water (whole, nutritious foods that give us energy and sustain us; clean drinking water from a reliable source)
- Transportation (to get from home to school or other places, and if we walk to school this will include a pair of shoes!)

Define a “want”

A “want” is something you don’t have, that you’d really like to have, but if you don’t get it, you will survive. Engage your child to make a list of wants (this exercise will be easy!) – which may include:

- Toys
- Video games
- A cell phone
- Candy

A day in the life

This simple exercise poses straightforward questions that make kids think about wants versus needs as they progress through a typical day. Simply thinking about these issues raises a level of awareness. Here are some questions you can ask your child:

- When you get up to go to school, what do you need to get ready?
- How will you get to school? What do you need in order to get there?
- What do you need in order to do your work in school?
- What about after school? What do you need in order to participate in any extracurricular activities?

Setting short and long term goals

Children typically have no shortage of “wants” on their list. This is a good thing, as it creates an opportunity for parents to help them set short and long-term goals, and to talk about the ways in which their child may contribute to reaching those goals.



An important concept for kids to understand is the difference between a “need” and a “want.”

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