

Children and consumerism



We live and breathe in a consumerist world, a world where participating in the rat race is becoming the norm often at the expense of spending quality time in the company of people we love most.

Today, the world is such that our children also grow up to compete against each other, rather than stand by each other or lend a hand to each other in times of need. The materialistic world is giving birth to future materialists, who obtain happiness from their material possessions -- toys, clothes, shoes and accessories.

A 2004 report by the American Psychological Association on children and advertising found that American children on average watch 20,000 commercials each year. An alarming reality!

Although the above-mentioned statistic only applies to the U.S. economy, it is safe to say that if you live in Bangladesh and your child is a regular TV viewer, he or she is also exposed to a few thousand commercials each year. Even YouTube videos are not free from advertisements.

You become aware of the controlling power and influence of TV programs and commercials when your child demands persistently a plaything or a savoury snack that he or she has seen on TV.

You also must have spotted at least one child in your lifetime, who cried at the top of her voice inside a store because she liked something on a shelf and wanted it. I have seen children who sat on shop floors and refused to get up. In such situations, parents often relent and buy their children what they have demanded.

Jafrin Sabrina, 32, a lecturer at a private university in Dhaka, is the mother to a six-year-old boy. Sabrina says that although she tries to ignore his son's tantrums by being patient, there are times when she gives up, especially after a long day at work.

"Throwing tantrums is a trick that my son cannot successfully play on me, but his father and other members of my family surrender to his temper, and get him what he wants," she said. "It is hard to make his dad understand that buying too many toys does a child no good," she added. "What we need to give him is quality time, which we fail to give him because of our work and

It is hard to combat consumerism in a world where we are bombarded with carefully designed, tempting commercials every second, but that does not mean we should not try.

To curb consumerism, teach your children to share their belongings with others. Ask them to donate the toys they no longer play with or the clothes and shoes they do not wear anymore.

Perform an act of kindness together; children copy what adults do. It is also important for parents to learn to say no.

Do not surrender to your child's whines and tantrums all the time. Tell your child about and show them photos and videos of children around the city, country and the world who suffer every day in various forms and explain what we can do to change their lives.

Develop a reading habit in your

family situation."

Young children, who cannot differentiate between a commercial and a children's programme, believe the messages delivered through TV advertisements as true and unbiased. This often leads to unhealthy eating habits and a consumerist attitude from a very young age - an artificial need

for things they do not need is planted in their developing brains.

"Children nowadays do not have appetite for the main meals; they are more into eating unhealthy snacks such as chocolate, flavoured candies, cookies, chips and canned beverages," Sabrina said. "These foods not only jeopardise their health but also make them cranky and hyperactive."

child; a book-lover rarely gets bored. Encourage your child to draw and paint. If possible, teach your child to play a musical instrument. Creative minds can come up with creative ways to entertain themselves.

When you buy playthings for your children, opt for items that they can play over and over, for instance, age-appropriate building blocks, modelling clay, etc. Do not overwhelm your child with toys, clothes, shoes or unhealthy snacks, no matter how much they insist on having them.

Last but not least, we need to spend quality time with our children. If we keep aside some time from our busy schedules to spend one-on-one time with our sons and daughters, we certainly can raise a generation of children who are thankful for what they have.

By Wara Karim

She believes that parents like her therefore should be careful about not giving in to their children's tantrums when they demand these unhealthy nibbles and munchies.

Young people today own more clothes, shoes, toys and other non-essential items than their parents did when they were

children. Artificially created demand for material possessions created through appealing TV programmes and commercials alone are not responsible for it, though.

Many modern-day households now feature two working parents with one or two children, which means that families today have more disposable income than families in the past did.

It also means one more thing: parents in the twenty-first century do not get to spend as much time with their children as they would like to; material goods are often therefore given to children as compensation for the time that parents cannot pass with them. Faria Bari, a teacher at a renowned English-medium school in Dhaka, says that she and her husband buy games, playthings, etc., for their child not because they want to, but because they feel they do not have a choice.

"Dhaka has very limited scope for recreation, so to keep our child occupied we have to buy him things, sometimes more than what he needs," Bari said.

"When we are at work, my son, who has no siblings, has to spend a few hours at home with the maids. During this time, it is the toys which keep him engaged," she added.

But Bari believes that buying gifts, toys and TV-watching alone do not decide whether a child will become a consumerist. She thinks that a child's home environment, friends, the kind of parents he or she has, and many other factors determine whether a child will become a materialist.

"I want my son to learn the value of things, I don't think that buying him less or more has anything to do with that. Teaching him how to care for his things is more important to me," she said.

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