

ENTITLEMENT — THE GO-TO WORD FOR EVERYTHING WRONG WITH TODAY'S GENERATION. IS THERE REALLY MORE ENTITLEMENT TODAY? WHAT CREATES IT? HOW DOES IT AFFECT FAMILY DYNAMICS? WHAT IS THE LONG-TERM DAMAGE? AND HOW CAN WE COMBAT IT?

VOICES

Three people grappling with the effects of entitlement offer a slice of their lives.

Another day, another battle. I am so tired of fighting. And the worst part? Even when I win, I lose.

Today, it was about sleepaway camp. Chasya and I felt 8 T-shirts were more than enough; Shira insisted she couldn't do without 12. And forget 10 pairs of socks; she couldn't manage without 15. Plus, a new pair of Nikes (only Roshe!) was "basic." *Everyone* in camp would have them.

I felt like crawling back into bed.

Being a parent in this generation is a catch-22. If all their friends have it, if all their friends get it sponsored, you're the bad parent when you don't provide. Even the professionals join the chorus: "Get him that Borsalino, or his social life will be ruined!" "You want your daughter to be the only one in class without Venettinis?"

My children know our finances are precarious, yet they're still resentful! My older kids won't say anything out loud, but the negative vibes are there. They watch friends cruise around in late-model Infinitis and their resentment simmers inside. My younger marrieds and teens, though, are embarrassingly overt with their expectations.

Recently, my third daughter became a *kallah*. Her take-charge older sister decided we were throwing the *l'chayim* of the century.

"Ta, I'm picking up really elegant paper goods — square, and hard plastic," she informed. "We'll get two Siegelman cakes, four fruit platters, and some petit fours. It won't cost a fortune to rent Mimi's mini chocolate fountain."

I looked past her, squirming inside. I had no desire, intention, or ability to make an extravagant *l'chayim*. Why couldn't I just say that? By the end of the conversation, it still wasn't clear who'd be footing the bill.

"Um, Ta, can I have your credit card?"

"Uh... I misplaced it," I blurted out.

A funny look. An exasperated sigh. "Ugh, just forget it!" She stormed out. Later, I found out she shelled out several hundred dollars for the spread, most of which remained untouched.

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I know we have a communication problem. I should've just calmly stated we didn't have the money, but she was welcome to buy things herself. I think the reason I flee from money conversations is because my kids can't hear them. *Everyone else manages!* I can almost hear them howl. *This is the norm!*

So my wife and I live with conflict, constantly at odds with our teens, struggling to convey that we don't agree with their expectations. It's like talking to a wall.

TZIREL. AGE 53

I just hung up the phone and I'm feeling sickened.

"Your son will start dating soon," the *shadchan* said, the same one who ignored my calls when I struggled to marry off two great girls. "He's really a very *choshuv* boy,

the type who can get ten years of full support. Let me handle his *shidduchim*; I'll make sure he gets it." He can get *what? Ten years of full support?!*

Maybe if I didn't suffer through *shidduchim* with daughters, I'd find the comment flattering. But after years of sleepless nights and tears and extending ourselves far beyond our means, I refuse to do unto others what has been painfully done to me.

How can we expect our boys not to feel entitled when society and "the system" cultivate these feelings? And can we expect our girls not to cave in when they have nightmares of becoming the infamous 10 percent?

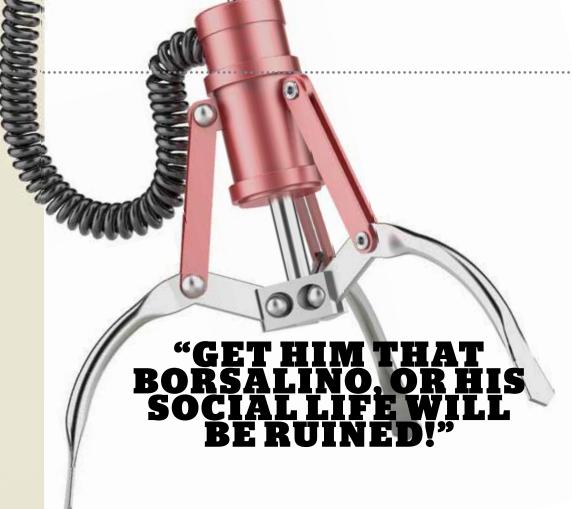
So the girls cheerfully sign on, insisting they'll work ad infinitum to provide for their families. Then real life hits and the tune changes: *Mom, you know Shulamit's parents just helped her buy a house? I could really use clothes for the kids, thanks so much. Any chance Maria could come by my apartment too this week?*

The worst part? The effect on fledgling marriages. As a therapist — specializing in postpartum depression — too many of my female clients report unhealthy levels of entitlement in their husbands. It's not a shocker: a boy who spends a couple years in *shidduchim* deliberating how much to "charge" for the privilege of becoming his mate, can become self-centered and may find the transition to becoming a thoughtful husband quite challenging.

And even when the husband are mentshen, and go the extra mile for their hardworking wives, rolling up their sleeves and doing the dishes or getting the baby to sleep, there are often great demands on these young women. They're expected to hold a full-time job, care for the kids, keep a clean home, and prepare beautiful Shabbos and Yom Tov meals for the family — and possibly a few guests. This often leaves the women depleted and resentful.

Why are we surprised? When kids *expect* overexerted parents to bankroll endless extras, when boys are told by society they are "worth" ten years of \$2,000 monthly support, why are we surprised when we see family dynamics in tatters?





TOVA LEAH, AGE 26

I see Miriam's number on the caller ID and

I'm excited at the thought of company while I bake. "Hey, what's up?" I ask. "Nothing much," she says, but I can already hear in her voice that something is bugging her. It comes out soon enough. "Chana bought a house yesterday. Actually, Chana's parents bought Chana a house. Right in the middle of town, near all the shopping. It's got six bedrooms, four bathrooms, and a backyard you can get lost in. And the kitchen, oh gosh, that kitchen is beyond."

"That's nice," I say carefully - and trigger an explosion.

"Do you realize that this is the eighth girl in our class whose parents bought her a house? At Shifra's *chasunah* last night, I was sitting next to a bunch of the *chevreh*, and it seems every one of them is getting major help from their parents. If it's not a house, it's rent, or a car lease, or shopping sprees that outfit their kids for the entire season. I'm the

loser who gets zero from her parents and has to live in the basement of mansions like Chana's."

I take a deep breath as I separate my 16th egg. I hear Miriam's pain, I really do. But honestly, why do her parents owe her anything? I knew from day one that my parents wouldn't be able to buy me a house. Or anything else for that matter. So after scraping by on my salary for a year while living in a tiny basement, Menashe and I moved out of town. And I mean really out of town. One school, no pizza shop. But we got a spacious house that even has a yard for under \$100,000. I'm working remotely, and Menashe learns in the community kollel.

"I know," Miriam says, "you're going to tell me to come join you in Nowheresville where I can get a house for pennies. But I can't do that, I'd lose my mind hanging out with the cows all day."

"No cows, we don't even have roosters," I answer. "And I'll make you a pan of my killer brownies the very first day you move in."

"Sorry, I like your brownies but not that much... Honesty, Tova Leah, don't you ever get so mad? All through school and seminary we're told about the importance of *kollel* and living simply but no one ever mentions just how crazy expensive life is! No one talks about tuition or electric bills, unless they're telling us some incredible story of someone who had *emunah* and he got exactly the amount he needed to pay his bills on the day they were due. That never seems to happen to me, we were nearly cut off a bunch of times. But no rich uncle died.

"Chaim's totally given up on long-term learning. He's in that accelerated B.A. program in accounting I was telling you about. But it will take at least two years until he brings home any cash. And my salary is good, even though the work nearly kills me, but by the time I pay my student loans, there's barely enough to cover the bills. I totally counted on my parents to help me. It's just not feasible to live this life without a lot of help"

"They did help you," I say quietly. Miriam's parents supported her for two full years, up to her graduation. That was a lot more than my parents could do. I did private jobs all through the long evenings of *shanah rishonah* to help cover the expenses. And how we watched every dollar: we never ate out, vacation was a walk around the park, I borrowed maternity clothing from my sister-in-law.

Though she's 200 miles away, I can feel Miriam's anger snaking through the phone line. "Two years! They helped us for two years. That is nowhere near enough. And they gave us all of three months' notice before pulling the rug out from under us. Is it my fault my sister got married at that point and they had to help her?"

"Is it their fault?"

There's a high-pitched wail in the background. "Oh gosh, the baby's up," Miriam says, "gotta go." She hangs up without a goodbye.

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distill the issue's roots and explore solutions,

Family First asked several community experts the following questions:

- Which factors contribute to heightened feelings of entitlement? How do parenting styles, secular culture, and societal norms come into play?
- How does entitlement play out in early adulthood? How does it impact relationships with parents after marriage, with a spouse, and with society?
- What might mitigate this phenomenon? What measures can parents and educators take to reduce entitlement attitudes and increase feelings of gratefulness?

DR. RUCHAMA FUND

Dr. Ruchama Fund is a clinical psychologist with a private practice in New York. She is also the rebbetzin of Congregation Sheves

The entitled person feels he has a right to something that others believe should be obtained through effort. He has an inflated view of his own importance, and unrealistic expectations of favorable treatment or automatic compliance.

Mr. Entitled believes the world owes him. He expects to be taken care of financially; he might be exploitative in relationships. His ability to tolerate frustration is limited. Why should I have to do the dirty work? he thinks. He hates the limitations of reality, often spending beyond his means. When his expectations are not met, he reacts with anger. He does not sufficiently appreciate the sacrifices of others. He believes G-d-given talents like intelligence or charm make one deserving of better treatment and different standards.

The truth is, we all feel bits of entitlement. Inside, we harbor expectations that life should be easier, that we should be spared the inevitable suffering and hard work that is the essence of This World. Whatever our material status, we experience gnawing dissatisfaction, a feeling of "it's never enough."

Extreme entitlement is called narcissism. Often, what's behind it is shame: If I don't get what others have, what's considered "normal" in this situation, maybe it's because I have no value. The narcissist reacts to "injustices" with the defense mechanism of rage; it's easier to blame others than contemplate the possibility of being worthless. This is not right, he seethes. I don't deserve this. This dynamic is often present in abusive marriages.

Today, normative feelings of entitlement are exacerbated by societal realities. The 21st century features more choices — in food, clothing, cars, and homes — than ever before. What's more, unlike non-Jewish or secular communities, where the rich live with the rich and the poor with the poor, frum families often live in a jumble of haves and have-nots. It's not uncommon for the recipients of Tomchei Shabbos food packages to live next door to a real estate magnate worth billions. This proximity creates a tremendous nisayon.

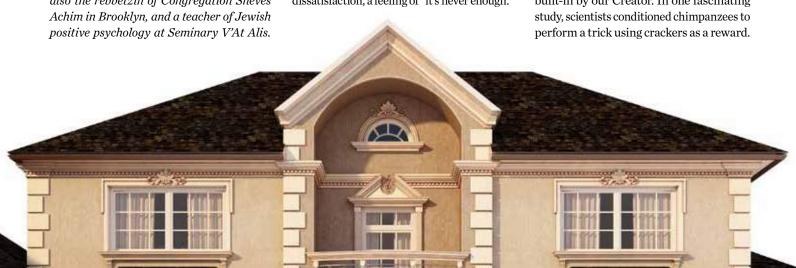
Frum media is another major player. Repeated exposure to advertising messages like, "You deserve the best" or "Luxury is the new standard," lead the reader to internalize them. Gleaming \$200,000 kitchens, breathtaking Alpine resorts, and runway-worthy children powerfully mold our views: after seeing them one, three, fifteen times, the reader starts believing this is a "normal" kitchen or vacation or wardrobe. And if she is an impressionable teen, the effect is exponentially more potent.

Social comparison is to be expected; it's built-in by our Creator. In one fascinating study, scientists conditioned chimpanzees to perform a trick using crackers as a reward. At some point, the scientist handed one chimp a cracker and the other a grape a more desirable award. Instantly, the first chimp flung his cracker onto the floor: he'd have nothing less than a grape!

We can relate to this. Formica countertops were nice, until we discovered granite! We were proud when Yanky earned the talmid hashavua award, but then his friend Shuey was Student of the Month! We will entertain thoughts like these, and that's okay. When it happens, have compassion on yourself, then ask Hashem to help you overcome the nisayon. Acknowledge that this thought pattern may be instinctive, but can - and must - be quelled withconscious inner work.

Before outlining solutions to what some term the "entitlement epidemic," I'd like to applaud the many hardworking people in

our community - particularly women. On the whole, our young women spend their time in far more productive ways than their secular counterparts. They have a greater sense of responsibility to family and the klal. Our girls run to do chesed, make day camps, and serve as special-needs counselors with no compensation. After a long day of school, they'll often help with younger siblings at home.



ENTITLEMENT:The Destructive Fire in Matchmaking

In her 25-year career, veteran Flatbush-based *shadchan* Chana Rose has seen plenty of near-final *shidduchim* derail thanks to entitlement. But a recent comment from a boy's mother indicated a new low: "My son deserves a brand name," the woman declared.

But I Deserve It

"I'd love to tell people: In Hashem's Eyes we're equal," Mrs. Rose says. "You think you're entitled to money, a 'big' name, a balabatish shidduch, but ultimately Hashem shows us what we're entitled to."

Lakewood *shadchan* Reb Tzodek Katz notes that because of today's lopsided *shidduch* system, boys no longer have to earn their stripes: they demand whatever they want, regardless of stature or achievements. What's more, the parents often insist on parental support from the girl's side — even when the girl maintains a lucrative job.

"A wonderful girl saved \$30,000 a year for years, but the boy's mother wouldn't agree until her parents committed to support," Katz recalls. "Maybe it's because they were forced to support their own girls; they couldn't stand someone else 'getting away with it.'"

"I advocate for girls all the time," the seasoned *shadchan* muses. But, he adds, today's young women have their share of entitlement: many cannot manage without an upscale lifestyle.

Chana Rose often sees wealthier families turn down less affluent names — they are willing to support, but feel entitled to a partner. She understands the rationale, but warns of the pitfalls.

"I know people who shortchanged their kids — they got big money, but didn't get 'sechorah.' Money comes and goes, but personal qualities are for life."

The matchmaker sees entitled parents too. She often works with families who can easily afford to help, but feel entitled to demur when the child in question is male. Mrs. Rose tries very hard to convince all boys' parents to help — even minimally.

"It's not healthy for one side to do it alone. Not for the couple, not for the *mechutanim*," she asserts. "I tell parents, If your son was single, he'd still cost a couple hundred each month. So why are you entitled to exonerate yourself from all participation?"

"I KNOW PEOPLE WHO SHORTCHANGED THEIR KIDS — THEY GOT BIG MONEY, BUT DIDN'T GET 'SECHORAH'"

Our young marrieds are also doing an impressive job, despite intense stressors. Making ends meet is harder than ever. Most couples struggle on two incomes. With our encouragement, young adults get married, have babies, ace school, and maintain demanding jobs — all at a very young age. They do their best, but are naturally overwhelmed.

Some middle-agers resent the new "norm" of parents hosting children and grandchildren for Yom Tov, or after a baby. Are young people "entitled" to it? I believe they desperately need it. We demand high levels of maturity and achievement, and we must offer commensurate support.

Others in our community decry the entitlement attitudes that crop up in marriage: *If I'm not happy, I'll leave.* This may be true in some situations, but from my standpoint as a marital therapist, I see thousands more remain in difficult (non-abusive) marriages so children can have intact homes. These are the quiet, non-entitled heroes of our generation.

Nonetheless, the media onslaught and generational affluence have promoted feelings of jealousy and entitlement. Below are ways parents can combat the trend — in themselves and their children:

- Model gratitude. $Hakaras\ hatov$, the antidote to entitlement, must be cultivated, cultivated, cultivated. Constantly thank your spouse in detail for the smallest things. An 18-year-old told me, "I don't remember one Shabbos seudah where my father didn't say to my mother at the end, 'What a wonderful, delicious, beautiful meal.' " Customs like that leave a mark.
- **Say no.** My brother Rav Avrohom Moshe Seidman, a *rosh yeshivah* in Monsey, advises parents as follows: When something is important for your child's healthy development, go to the ends of the earth to make it happen. But when an item is nonvital, periodically say no. This conveys: Your needs are so important to us, but sometimes, when we feel it's not essential, the answer is no.
- **Stress responsibility.** Convey to children that right and responsibility are inseparable. If you have a gift or talent, you have a responsibility to use it for the *klal*. Your intelligence/ *chein*/personality do not entitle you to something, but actually obligate you.
- **Fight habituation.** In an age-appropriate way, tell children about the hardships of their grandparents and great-grandparents. Describe the joy felt upon coming across a whole potato, a clean shirt, or a minimum-wage job. Encourage teenagers to read historical biographies.



But I Deserve It



"MY MOTHER'S STUDENTS INSISTED ON WASHING HER FLOOR EACH FRIDAY — SO DEEP WAS THEIR GRATITUDE"

One of the most common items kids take for granted is Torah chinuch. In the seminary where I teach, I showed a slideshow of my mother's career as a Bais Yaakov teacher in the DP camp in Föhrenwald, Germany. In one photo, my mother was surrounded by 100 beaming girls, all survivors of concentration camps, wearing Nazi Youth uniforms. (That was the only clothing available.) The Klausenberger Rebbe had established a Bais Yaakov so these orphans could continue their brutally interrupted Torah education, and they were so thankful. In Paris, where my mother later taught girls previously incarcerated in Siberia, her students insisted on washing her floor each Friday — so deep was their gratitude. When you hear accounts like these, your perspective on receiving a Torah chinuch is forever altered.

• Verbalize your gifts. Halachah states that a giver must inform his recipient of the gift endowed. Parents should say, "Mommy worked so hard to prepare this Yom Tov meal. It took many hours, but it's a joy to be able to give to you." As long as the statement integrates messages of there was real effort here and we are happy to do this, it will not induce guilt.

RABBI ARYEH ZEV GINZBERG

Rabbi Aryeh Z. Ginzberg is the rav of the Chofetz Chaim Torah Center of Cedarhurst and a published author of several sifrei halachah. A sought-after lecturer, he is a frequent Torah contributor to magazines and newspapers.

I believe entitlement stems from a societal reality: Our kids are no longer children of immigrants, and they no longer appreciate struggle.

When my parents — and the parents of my peers — came to America, their focus was giving their children a better life. We watched them struggle. We knew whatever they gave us was heartfelt and borne of sacrifice. When I got \$10 spending money, I valued every cent.

Nowadays children see no struggle. Even today's most bare-bones frum lifestyle is better-heeled than what we saw growing up. Hashem has been good to us, and we expect it to always come easy.

These entitlement attitudes threaten the basis of marriage. I've been helping couples with shalom bayis issues for over 20 years. I've been saddened by the recent phenomenon of spouses who opt out, simply because too much work is required. People who had everything

handed to them have trouble embarking on personal change. No one ever made me stretch my muscles — why should I start now?

I was involved in a shidduch that was going nicely but the boy wanted the girl to open up more. When I conveyed this to her tactfully, she responded, "This is the way I am. If he doesn't like it, he can stop going out with me." I was floored. He's not asking you to stand on your head; he's making a legitimate request! Why has the smallest change become threatening?

I see entitlement wreak havoc on family relationships. In one example, the wealthy father-in-law of a boy I know promised support for five years of kollel. After three years of learning, the boy went into business. He then wanted to buy a house. The father-in-law said, "I'm sorry, I can't help now." Furious, the son-in-law threatened a din Torah. When I heard this, I said, "Is this a joke?"

I called the father. "Business is not what it used to be, and my other two children are starting shidduchim," he explained. "I was prepared to stretch myself so my son-in-law could learn with peace of mind. I felt it was a zechus. Now he's

entered business, and I just don't have the means! I'm not prepared to struggle so he should buy a house now."

I called the son-in-law. "Your shver's financial situation is not good," I said. "If you force the issue, that might be *gezeilah*. And if you're going to put blood money into your house, I can't believe you'll see brachah there."

The son-in-law backed down, A "happy"

How can we minimize entitlement? Below are some strategies for parents:

• Let them earn it and deserve it. My son in beis medrash recently approached me for \$300 to fly to Chicago for a friend's wedding. A bunch of guys were driving, but he didn't want to sit in a the monthly sum and time frame. Most car for 15 hours. My wife and I thought about it. Ultimately, I said, "It's not our responsibility to sponsor a ticket. But if you do something particularly worthwhile

this bein hazemanim — join a program that mentors kids at risk, or engage in other volunteer work — we'll pay for your ticket with the greatest *simchah*." Several days later, my son said, "You're right, Abba. I thought about it. I'm going to join the program, and you don't have to pay for my ticket."

- **Teach mussar.** Most yeshivos do not learn enough mussar. If your son's veshivah stresses *mussar* teachings, express appreciation to the *hanhalah*. If it doesn't, make the request. At the very least, share divrei Torah and stories at the Shabbos table that emphasize *middos*.
- **Be clear.** If you commit to supporting children after marriage, clearly delineate young couples can't manage without some support, and unpleasant surprises can cause profound shalom bayis issues. If you are not able to commit, don't.

MRS. ELISHEVA KAMINETSKY

Mrs. Kaminetsky has been educating teens for over 20 years, and serves as teacher and administrator at the Stella K. Abraham High School (SKA/HALB) in Woodmere, New York. She's also a popular lecturer and kallah teacher.

There's a growing, erroneous belief that a good parent makes sure his child is never denied or deprived. Maybe it's a second generation post-Holocaust phenomenon immigrant children want not only to provide the best for their kids materially, but want their children's lives to be easy. They think protecting children from struggle ensures success and happiness.

The problem is that life is full of dips and valleys beyond our control. Children who never struggled will crumple in the face of challenge. In Carol Dweck's bestselling *Mindset*, she shows how children who are praised for intelligence and ability, or raised

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to believe they must be the best, have a *fixed* mindset: they fear failure, avoid risks, and are remarkably unresilient. Children with a growth mindset, in contrast, feel less "entitled" to success. They know hard work is valuable, regardless of outcome. They embrace risks and accept failure, all while trying to figure out how to do better.

As parents, we can promote the growth mindset by conveying that not everything comes easily, but there's value in the struggle. Praise the process, not the results.

Entitlement also affects our relationship bein adam l'Makom. I am still moved upon recalling the words of Rachelle Fraenkel. When she observed a Tehillim gathering at the Kosel, where hundreds of children were davening for her kidnapped son Naftali's welfare, Mrs. Fraenkel stopped several boys and said, "You know, G-d doesn't work for us. We will pray, and HaKadosh Baruch Hu will act in accordance with His Will."

We need to live and breathe this reality. Our daily actions and reactions must convey, *I'm here by the grace of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Every day and breath is a gift.* When we and our children truly believe that, feelings of entitlement will drastically shrink.

At its root, entitlement is an indignance, a cry of "Foul! This shouldn't happen to me!" Mrs. Fraenkel's approach is the opposite. It's not whitewashing, or smiling cheerfully through tragedies. It's accepting that a perfectly just G-d is in control.

A Jew is a Yehudi; his essence is thankfulness. One who is truly grateful for the ultimate gift — the gift of life — will feel entitled to no other "perks." Bereaved father Rabbi Gavriel Sassoon, a paradigm of strength after losing seven children, has said numerous times: Lo magi'a li klum (I have nothing coming to me).

Some people take concrete steps to make gratitude part of their lives. Rabbi Paysach Krohn often stresses the value of a gratitude journal. My friend asks her children each evening at dinner to share three things: something they are proud of, something they could improve upon, and something they are grateful for.

A former student and now current colleague adopted the following practice: every Friday, she writes (not texts!) a thank-you card to one person who deserves her *hakaras hatov*, trying hard not to repeat. The person can be anyone from a mentor who helped her through a crisis that week, or the lady at the supermarket who let her go ahead in line. With this kind of practice, you become mindful of gratitude all week long.

Lastly, it's critical to expose children to people who are disadvantaged. A visit to the hospital or old-age home gives new meaning to *birchos hashachar*: He opens my eyes; He releases that which binds me. A visit to a food distribution center for the homeless gives new meaning to *hazan es ha'kol*. Don't assume children will apply the concepts on their own; articulate them and connect the dots.

In Lashon Kodesh, every root is underlaid with meaning. *Hakaras hatov* is not thankful-ness (*hodaah*); it is continual *recognition* of the good that surrounds us. When we make a conscious effort to verbalize the blessings in our lives, our families will develop gratitude glasses that leave little room for entitlement. ::