Bridal Registry

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May 25

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Living With Children

By John Rosemond

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To the many readers who recently asked: Yes, I do take requests, and yes, I will riff on the Perpetually Beautiful People Who Laid Out Mega-Bribes to Guarantee That Their Beautiful and Everlastingly Entitled Bratz Get into the College of Their Choice Scandal.

Why would anyone who's been paying attention be surprised? When polls find that a majority of high school students believe that cheating on tests is acceptable if it means they might get into a better college, why would anyone be aghast at their parents paying big bucks to fudge transcripts and test results to guarantee their admission to said schools? And let's face it, if more people made mega-bucks, this scandal would not be limited to people stalked by paparazzi.

There are three factors at work here (and I've already identified one of them): Entitlement, Self-Esteem, and Co-dependency. In order…

First, the parents and children in question come from two generations disproportionately populated by people who believe they are entitled…entitled to be entitled, even. The individuals in question believe three things that until recently were reserved to European royalty, toddlers, criminals, and career politicians:

1. What I want I deserve to have.

2. Because I deserve it, the ends justify the means.

3. The rules do not apply to me because I am special (semi-divine, if you must know).

This mentality, which defines a sociopath, began to spread in the 1970s as America's collective parenting goal shifted from instilling self-responsibility and the work ethic – as in, preserving culture – to fostering success and happiness. That shift accounts for the dramatic increase over the same time period of children and teens in therapy and on psychiatric medications.

Second, he ongoing encroach of entitlement has been accompanied by the post-modern notion that high esteem for the self is a good thing and that parents should do whatever possible to guarantee that this psychological virus finds permanent lodging in their kids.

The mental health community tied self-esteem to achievement, so parents got busy helping their children achieve. When is the last time you heard someone brag about their child's manners? Or his character? His morals? You probably cannot remember unless you are Amish. Come to think of it, Amish parents don't brag about their kids, period. That explains it! My parents were closet Amish!

Which brings us to the third factor: Parent-child co-dependency has also become ubiquitous in recent years, a symptom of which is parents who, when their kids do bad things at school, deny they are culprits or could even be culprits and say really dumb things like "My child has never lied to me!" and "My child would never do such a thing!"

Today's parents feel their children's pain (as opposed to understanding why their kids are in pain and after offering helpful suggestions, wish them well with it). That is the operational definition of co-dependency. When you feel someone else's "pain," you enter into their reality. At that point, you become their personal enabler and enabling is the primary feature of a co-dependent relationship.

Parents who are in co-dependent relationships with their kids are beyond being helicopters; they are now called lawn-mower and snow-plow parents. I call them "Cuisinart Parents," because their lives and their children's lives are blended together – pureed, even. Their children's successes, failures, disappointments, frustrations, rejections, upswings, downswings – every swing in every way, in fact – are theirs as well. No wonder mothers take more anti-depressants than any other demographic.

My final word on the subject: We ain't seen nothin' yet. How about paying for your kid to get a prime job and then paying his or her salary? I'm not kidding.

Family psychologist John Rosemond: johnrosemond.com, parentguru.com.

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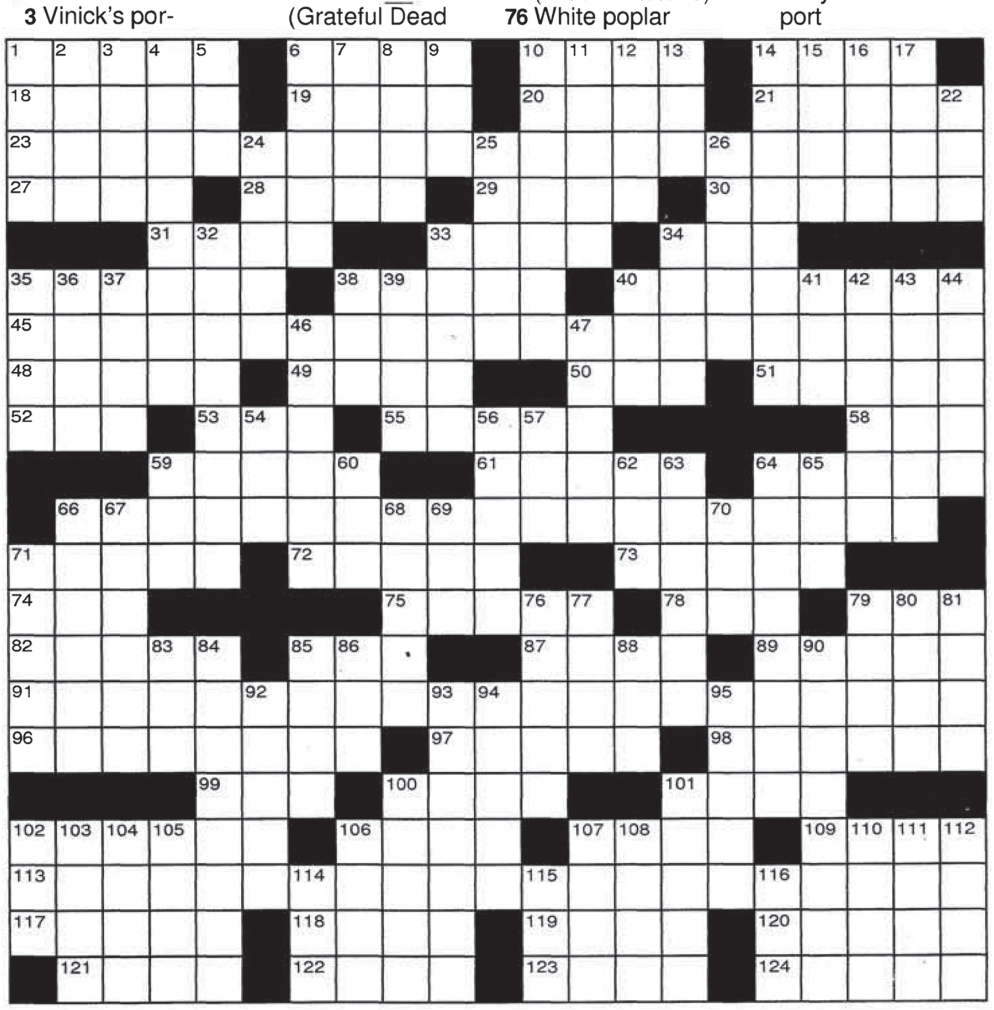
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