



OVERINDULGENCE ONLINE COURSE

Using the Test of Four

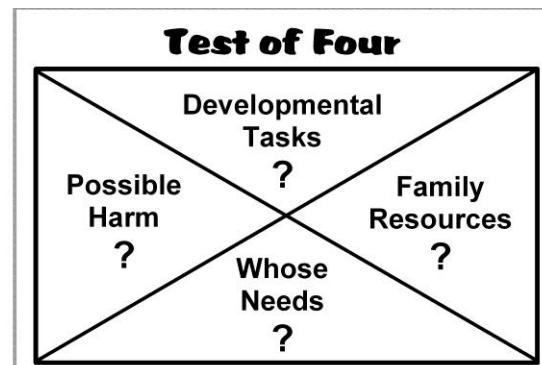
Your child wants a cell phone. Should you buy one for him or her? Knowing how much to buy for your children is not always easy. It's especially hard when the advertising industry spends billions of dollars telling everyone that they can't live without a particular product. And some ads specifically target children.

WHY USE THE TEST OF FOUR

The Test of Four tool helps parents and children learn about what is enough. It guides adults and children towards personal responsibility, and self-control; it encourages clear thinking and good decision making.

HOW THE TEST OF FOUR WORKS

The Test of Four consists of asking questions in four key categories (see graphic) about a potential overindulgence situation. Use the test for one problem at a time. A "yes" response to questions in any of the four categories is a signal that overindulgence exists or might occur.



1. Developmental tasks?

- Will doing or giving this keep my child from learning what he or she needs to learn at this age? In other words, might this prevent my child from meeting a developmental goal – from completing a developmental "task?" Or might it harm the child in some other way?

2. Family resources?

- Will doing or giving this use a disproportionate amount of family resources, including money, space, time, energy, or attention, to meet the wants (not the needs) of one or more of our children?

3. Whose needs?

- Will doing or giving this benefit you, the parents, more than your child.
- Will doing or giving this insist that your child focus on activities you like but are counter to the child's interests and abilities?

4. Possible harm?

- Will doing or giving this deplete or otherwise harm others, the community, or the environment in some way?

EXAMPLES OF WHEN TO USE THE TEST OF FOUR

- Should my child get a treat or toy every time we go shopping?
- Is my child doing his or her share of household tasks?
- If I want my child to succeed, should I do my child's homework?
- Should I buy new shoes for my child or a coat I need for myself?



USING THE TEST OF FOUR WITH CHILDREN AND TEENS

A Guide for Parents

There are times where parents need to be in charge and make decisions for children, whatever their age. Decisions should be based on the *problem*, as well as the *age* and *needs* of the child. The Test of Four helps guide parents in decision making. Questions in the four categories help parents set rules that are healthy for the whole family.

Empowering the Child

Invite children age 6 and over into family decision making using the Test of Four, whether it is deciding on the amount of time on media screens, what to do on the weekend, or whether to play house league sports vs. traveling sports. The Test of Four is not only a tool for parents – it's a tool to help children learn to make responsible, well thought-out decisions.

THE BEAUTY OF THE TEST OF FOUR

The beauty of the test of four is that it helps families decide what is best for them. What looks like overindulgence in one family may not be over indulgence in another.

Let's try it

Still wondering what to do about that cell phone? Let's assess the issue using the Test of Four.

1. **Developmental Tasks?** Might a phone prevent the child from getting school work completed, or getting enough sleep, or helping with household tasks? Is your child ready to learn to make smart choices about texting, sending pictures and calling?
2. **Family Resources?** Does the family have money in the budget for the cell phone? Is there enough money in the family budget to replace a lost or damaged phone? Do the parents have enough time and energy to monitor proper use of phone to insure the safety of their child and others with whom the child may be communicating?
3. **Whose needs?** Would having the cell phone benefit the adult more than the child?
4. **Possible Harm?** Might your child hurt another child by bullying, or sending inappropriate pictures, or texting while driving?

REFERENCES

- Clarke, J. I. (n.d.). How to detect overindulgence: *The test of four*. Retrieved from <http://www.overindulgence.info/Documents/HowtoDetectOverindulgenceTheTestofFour.pdf>
- Clarke, J. I., Dawson, C., & Bredehoft, D. (2014). *How much is too much? Raising likeable, responsible, respectful children from toddlers to teens in an age of overindulgence* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Da Capo Press.

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

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