

# Therapist Explains Why Parents Should Not Seek 'Consent' to Change Their Child's Diaper

It seems “consent” is the buzzword of choice these days. Consent on [college campuses](#). Consent [amongst high schoolers](#). Consent for changing your baby’s diaper. Wait... what?

Believe it or not, you read that right. Sex educator Deanne Carson recently appeared on an Australia news station [suggesting](#) that parents must teach consent early, starting even with asking permission to change the baby’s diaper.

Now as anyone who has ever changed a diaper will tell you, obtaining consent for it isn’t as easy as getting a few coos and giggles. In fact, it will likely involve a royal struggle of the wills at some point or another. It is for that reason that I appreciate therapist Michael Ungar’s balanced [response](#) to Carson’s suggestion in *Psychology Today*.

Noting that there is a time and place to teach children about consent over their bodies, Dr. Ungar also recognizes that children in diapers are still young and therefore need to be taught personal responsibility and control over their own selves before they learn empowerment. As he explains, teaching children empowerment before responsibility “quickly leads to entitlement and narcissism.”

Dr. Ungar goes on to share that such wisdom stems from personal experience:

*“Having wrestled my own children to the floor on a few occasions to get a diaper changed, I hope that my actions were telling them that there were limits to their behavior and that if that diaper didn’t get changed that there were*

*consequences.... In this case, the need for control over the child is less about consent and more about finding the right balance between individual empowerment and the need for the child to learn how to act responsibly. ...*

*After all, diaper changes are just one of the many ways we impose structure on our children, teaching them each day about this balance between their empowerment and their responsibilities.”*

The philosopher John Locke would likely agree. Although it's doubtful he ever heard of asking consent to change a child's diaper, he does appear to have witnessed a number of parents who fostered a willful spirit in their children. Writing in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke [notes](#):

*“The great mistake I have observed in people's breeding their children has been, that this has not been taken care enough of in its due season; that the mind has not been made obedient to discipline, and pliant to reason, when at first it was most tender, most easy to be bowed.”*

Instead, the parents “cherish their [child's] faults” and end up with the following situation:

*“They must not be crossed, forsooth; they must be permitted to have their wills in all things: and they being in their infancies not capable of great vices, their parents think they may safely enough indulge their little irregularities, and make themselves sport with that pretty perverseness, which they think well enough becomes that innocent age. ...*

*Thus parents, by humouring and cockering them when little, corrupt the principles of nature in their children, and wonder afterwards to taste the bitter waters, when they themselves have poisoned the fountain.”*

Today, it's popular for parents to “encourage” the creativity and independence of their offspring by taking a hands-off

approach and letting them be empowered to choose their own way. But is such an approach reasonable? Instead of teaching them to be empowered by bringing their strength and will under the control of appropriate structures and boundaries, does it instead teach them to be weak and susceptible to the vagaries and whims of their own desires?

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