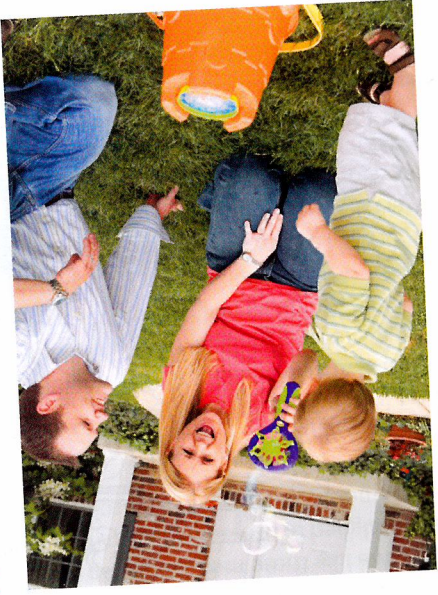


THE CAUSES OF CHILD-CENTREDNESS

- Families have got smaller since the end of the nineteenth century, and this means that more individual care and attention can be devoted to each child.
- In the nineteenth century, the typical working-week was between 70 and 80 hours for many working-class people. Today it is more like 43 hours (including overtime), and is tending to get shorter. This means parents have more time to spend with their children.
- Increasing affluence, with higher wages and a higher standard of living, has benefited children, as more money can be spent on them and their activities.
- The welfare state provides a wide range of benefits designed to help parents care for their children, and has increased demands on parents to look after their children properly. Social workers, for example, have an extensive range of powers to intervene in families on behalf of children, and have the ultimate power to remove children from families if parents fail to look after them properly. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) sets the international standard for protecting and promoting the rights of children, and the Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 established children's legal rights in the UK, and there is now a Minister for Children and a Children's Commissioner to champion the views of children and protect and promote their interests.



- Paediatrics, or the medical science of childhood, developed rapidly during the twentieth century, along with a wide range of research and popular books suggesting how parents should bring up their children to encourage their full development. The nurturing, protection and education of children are now seen as a vital and central part of family life, with parenting skills and early years education now recognized as an important aspect of children's educational and social development. There have been a number of TV programmes, like *Supernanny*, suggesting ways parents can avoid having, or learn to cope with, 'problem children'.
- Compulsory education and more time spent in further education and training have meant that young people are dependent on their parents for longer periods of time. Tuition fees for higher education and the abolition of student grants have recently extended this period of dependency on adults it involves, has itself become extended.
- Compulsory education from age 5 has meant that children are better educated today, and mix with and learn more from other children. This means they are probably both more knowledgeable and more assertive in their dealings with parents.
- Children's lives have become more complex, with more educational, medical and leisure services for them. This frequently involves parents in ferrying children to schools, cinemas, friends and so on.
- Parental fears (largely unjustified) of 'stranger danger' – the perception that their children are at risk of assault or abduction by unknown adults – and growing traffic dangers have meant that children now travel more with parents rather than being left to roam about on their own as much as they used to.
- Large businesses have encouraged a specific childhood consumer market. Businesses like Mothercare, ToysRUs, Nike, publishers and the music industry focus on the childhood consumer market, encouraging children to consume and parents to spend to satisfy their children's demands. Margo suggests children are taking greater control over family spending for decisions, and 7- to 11-year-olds have become an increasingly lucrative target audience for advertisers eager to harness their 'pest power' – where advertisers target children to pestle their parents into buying them CDs, clothes, toys, sweets and so on.