

Parenting Styles

Developmental psychologists identify **four major parenting styles**, based on two key dimensions: *responsiveness* (warmth, support) and *demandingness* (structure, expectations).

1. Authoritarian Parenting (Low Warmth, High Structure), common phrase: “Because I said so!”

Authoritarian parents emphasize obedience, discipline, and authority. Rules are strict, and questioning those rules is discouraged. Communication tends to be one-way, from parent to child.

This approach tends to produce compliance. Research suggests that children raised in authoritarian households are more likely to experience anxiety, lower self-esteem, and difficulty with independent decision-making. They may follow rules, but often out of apprehension rather than inclination. This parenting style is not bad and it need not be mean. However, there are emotional limits to this form of parenting that impact emotional attachment.

2. Permissive Parenting (High Warmth, Low Structure), common phrase “Oh, Okay”.

Permissive parents are nurturing and emotionally responsive but place few demands or limits on their children. They may avoid confrontation and allow children to regulate their own behavior at an early age.

Children raised in permissive environments often feel loved and accepted, but they may struggle with impulse control, authority, and responsibility. Of course, everything must be considered in degree. Most parents want to provide for their children what they didn't and wish they had as children. There is nothing wrong with that. However, it is easy to spoil children by not making sufficient maturity demands. If permissiveness is without consistent boundaries, children may have difficulty managing frustration or respecting rules in other settings, such as school. This may also hurt later emotional attachment capabilities.

3. Authoritative Parenting (High Warmth, High Structure), common phrase, “let’s discuss this further”.

Ideally, Authoritative parents combine emotional warmth with clear expectations and consistent rules. They set boundaries but explain the reasons behind them, listen to their children's perspectives, and encourage independence within limits. The more responsibility the child demonstrates, the more freedom and independence, within limits.

While research consistently shows that this style is associated with the most positive outcomes, there is little doubt that there is a middle-class bias to this style of parenting. Children raised by authoritative parents tend to be socially competent, emotionally regulated, academically successful, and confident. It is accurate to note that fair and predictable rules support children's

learning self-discipline. This is not to say that more permissive and authoritarian parents can accomplish similar results.

4. Neglectful (Uninvolved) Parenting (Low Warmth, Low Structure), common phrase, “maybe later, or stop bothering me”.

Neglectful parents provide minimal emotional support and little guidance or supervision. This style is often associated with parental stress, mental health challenges, or lack of resources.

You don’t need a PH.D to know that neglectful parenting leads to the most negative developmental outcomes, including attachment difficulties, academic problems, and emotional or behavioral challenges. Children feel unsupported and unsure of their value or place in the world.

Key Elements of Good Parenting

Independent of Parenting Style, there are key elements fundamental to good parenting. Across cultures and family structures, effective parenting is less about style and more about consistency, connection, and care. The following elements are central to good parenting:

1. Warmth and Emotional Support

Children *need to feel loved, accepted, and emotionally safe*. Warm parenting fosters secure attachment, which supports healthy emotional development and resilience throughout life.

2. Consistent Structure and Clear Expectations

Children thrive when they understand what is expected of them. Clear rules, predictable, consistent routines, and fair consequences help children feel secure and learn self-control.

3. Maturity demands.

When they can do an activity, whether it is toilet training, tying their shoes, brushing their teeth, putting their plate in the sink, straightening out their room, or throwing out the trash, they have to do it. This is how children internalize responsibility as a member of the household. This is how they are encouraged to be a big girl or boy. This is how to avoid the spoiled, entitled child. Not by praising how smart they are, or how pretty. Rather, by praising effort. Don’t praise traits; praise effort, which promotes persistence and perseverance.

Open Communication

Good parenting involves *listening* as much as talking. When parents encourage dialogue and explain their decisions, children develop stronger reasoning skills and feel respected. Effective parents gradually allow children to make choices and take responsibility by offering guidance

rather than control. This supports confidence, competence, and decision-making skills. This does not mean abdicating one's parental responsibility to make critical decisions.

4. Modeling Appropriate Behavior

Children learn not only from what parents say, but from what parents do. You can't say don't smoke or yell with a booming voice and a cigarette in one's mouth. You can't respond to a tantrum with a tantrum of your own. Demonstrating empathy, problem-solving, emotional regulation, and respect teaches children how to behave in the real world.