Why Parenting Styles Matter When Raising Children

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Updated February 27, 2018

Developmental psychologists have long been interested in how parents affect child development. However, finding actual cause-and-effect links between specific actions of parents and later behavior of children is very difficult.

Some children raised in dramatically different environments can later grow up to have remarkably similar [personalities](https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-personality-2795416). Conversely, children who share a home and are raised in the same environment can grow up to have very different personalities.

Despite these challenges, researchers have posited that there are links between parenting styles and the effects these styles have on children. These effects, some suggest, carry over into adult behavior.

What Research Says

During the early 1960s, psychologist Diana Baumrind conducted a study on more than 100 preschool-age children. Using [naturalistic observation](https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-naturalistic-observation-2795391), parental interviews, and other [research methods](https://www.verywellmind.com/introduction-to-research-methods-2795793), she identified some important dimensions of parenting.

These dimensions include disciplinary strategies, warmth and nurturing, [communication styles](https://www.verywellmind.com/managing-conflict-in-relationships-communication-tips-3144967), and expectations of maturity and control.

Based on these dimensions, Baumrind suggested that the majority of parents display one of three different parenting styles. Further research by Maccoby and Martin also suggested adding a fourth parenting style to these original three.

Let's take a closer look at each of these four parenting styles and the impact they can have on a child's behavior.

Authoritarian Parenting

One of the three major styles identified by Baumrind was the [authoritarian style](https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-authoritarian-parenting-2794955). In this style of parenting, children are expected to follow the strict rules established by the parents. Failure to follow such rules usually results in punishment. Authoritarian parents don't explain the reasoning behind these rules.

If asked to explain, the parent might simply reply, "Because I said so."

While these parents have high demands, they are not very responsive to their children. They expect their children to behave exceptionally and not make errors, yet they provide very little direction about what their children should do or avoid in the future. Mistakes are punished, often quite harshly, yet their children are often left wondering exactly what they did wrong.

According to Baumrind, these parents "are obedience- and status-oriented, and expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation."

Parents who exhibit this style are often described as domineering and dictatorial. Their approach to parenting is one of "spare the rod, spoil the child." Despite having such strict rules and high expectations, they do little to explain the reasoning behind their demands and simply expect children to obey without question.

Authoritative Parenting

A second major style identified by Baumrind was the [authoritative style](https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-authoritative-parenting-2794956). Like authoritarian parents, those with an authoritative parenting style establish rules and guidelines that their children are expected to follow. However, this parenting style is much more democratic.

Authoritative parents are responsive to their children and willing to listen to questions. These parents expect a lot of their children, but they provide warmth, feedback, and adequate support.

When children fail to meet the expectations, these parents are more nurturing and forgiving rather than punishing.

Baumrind suggested that these parents "monitor and impart clear standards for their children’s conduct. They are assertive, but not intrusive and restrictive. Their disciplinary methods are supportive, rather than punitive. They want their children to be assertive as well as socially responsible, and self-regulated as well as cooperative."

It is this combination of expectation and support that helps children of authoritative parents develop skills such as independence, self-control, and [self-regulation](https://www.verywellmind.com/emotion-regulation-skills-training-425374).

Permissive Parenting

The final style identified by Baumrind was what is known as the [permissive style of parenting](https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-permissive-parenting-2794957). Permissive parents sometimes referred to as indulgent parents, have very few demands to make of their children. These parents rarely discipline their children because they have relatively low expectations of maturity and self-control.​

According to Baumrind, permissive parents "are more responsive than they are demanding. They are nontraditional and lenient, do not require mature behavior, allow considerable self-regulation, and avoid confrontation."

Permissive parents are generally nurturing and communicative with their children, often taking on the status of a friend more than that of a parent.

Uninvolved Parenting

In addition to the three major styles introduced by Baumrind, psychologist [Eleanor Maccoby](https://www.verywellmind.com/eleanor-maccoby-biography-2796020) and John Martin proposed a fourth style that is known as [uninvolved or neglectful parenting](https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-uninvolved-parenting-2794958). An uninvolved parenting style is characterized by few demands, low responsiveness, and very little communication.

While these parents fulfill the child's basic needs, they are generally detached from their child's life. They might make sure that their kids are fed and have shelter, but offer little to nothing in the way of guidance, structure, rules, or even support. In extreme cases, these parents may even reject or neglect the needs of their children.

The Impact of Parenting Styles

What effect do these parenting styles have on child development outcomes? In addition to Baumrind's initial study of 100 preschool children, researchers have conducted other studies that have led to a number of conclusions about the impact of parenting styles on children.

Among the findings of these studies:

* Authoritarian parenting styles generally lead to children who are obedient and proficient, but they rank lower in happiness, social competence, and [self-esteem](https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-self-esteem-2795868).
* Authoritative parenting styles tend to result in children who are happy, capable, and successful.
* Permissive parenting often results in children who rank low in happiness and self-regulation. These children are more likely to experience problems with authority and tend to perform poorly in school.
* Uninvolved parenting styles rank lowest across all life domains. These children tend to lack self-control, have low self-esteem, and are less competent than their peers.

Why is it that authoritative parenting provides such advantages over other styles?

Because authoritative parents are more likely to be viewed as reasonable, fair, and just so their children are more likely to comply with the requests that these parents make. Also, because these parents provide rules as well as explanations for these rules, children are much more likely to internalize these lessons.

Rather than simply following the rules because they fear punishment (as they might with authoritarian parents), the children of authoritative parents are able to see why the rules exist, understand that they are fair and acceptable, and strive to follow these rules to meet their own internalized sense of what is right and wrong.

Of course, the parenting styles of individual parents also combine to create a unique blend in each family. For example, the mother may display an authoritative style while the father favors a more permissive approach.

This can sometimes lead to mixed signals or even situations where a child seeks approval from the more permissive parent to get what they want. In order to create a cohesive approach to parenting, it is essential that parents learn to cooperate as they combine various elements of their unique parenting styles.