Parenting Styles - Discover yours and what the experts say



Permissive, helicopter, authoritative, authoritarian…There are enough labels out there to keep any parent second-guessing their parenting prerogative. Discover your child-rearing character and what the experts have to say about its impact on kids' behaviour now and down the line.

Permissive or "friend" parenting. Permissive parents try to be "friends" first, meaning they instantly respond to kids' needs and demands and don't often set ground rules for actions and behaviours. When they do, there's usually little follow-through with consequences. Research suggests this style can create children and young adults who aren't well-prepared to deal with life's challenges. They tend to be more aggressive in their teen years, less physically active, can have trouble with impulse-control and are more likely to abuse alcohol.

Helicopter parenting. Also known as over-parenting, helicopter parents focus on keeping kids out of harm's way—emotionally and physically—so they never have to experience disappointment, fear or upset. A classic helicopter parent story is the doting mom who follows up after her (adult) child's job interview to discuss why her son wasn't selected for the job. This constant "hovering" can cause anxiety, self-consciousness and a resistance to trying new things.

Command and control: authoritarian parenting. Often labelled as the "old school" parenting of yesteryear, authoritarian parenting focuses on rule-following, high expectations and strict punishment when rules are broken. Children have little input and don't receive much in the way of affection. "Because I said so," is the mantra of authoritarian parents. Ironically this inflexible approach often creates kids who have little respect for authority. Many kids raised under authoritarian rule can also face challenges with social situations, shyness and low self-esteem.

Authoritative or "balanced" parenting. Considered the "happy medium" of parenting styles, balanced parenting creates a solid foundation based on specific rules, behaviour expectations and a clear moral code. But it's also flexible so that kids' ideas and opinions are heard and valued. While there are consequences for acting out or not following the rules, they are consistent and fair. Balanced parenting sets out clear expectations for children and also celebrates good behaviour with positive praise. Studies suggest a balanced approach creates the healthiest bond between parent and child and kids are typically happier, more confident, do better in school and are less likely to act violently or engage in risky behaviours such as drug and alcohol use or sex.

You can be a more "balanced" parent by:

- Setting clear, age-appropriate expectations
- Praising your child for "good" behaviour instead of only emphasizing negative behaviour
- Making sure that when rules are broken, consequences are clear, consistent and followed through on
- Being a good listener and willing to compromise when your child makes a reasonable case
- Encouraging critical thinking and age-appropriate steps towards independence
- Handling disagreements with respect and fairness
- Showing love, affection and warmth

Single Parenting

Statistics show that if you're a single parent, your child is twice as likely to have poor outcomes at school and behaviour problems. Solo parenting is far from easy, but it doesn't have to stop your children from discovering social and educational success. Help them stay on the right track by:

Embracing the village. You don't need to go at it alone. Look to friends, family and support groups—either in-person or online—for help and advice. Whether it's finding your child a "big brother or sister" or asking a neighbour to keep an eye on your teen for the evening, you likely do have people around you that are happy to help!

Setting clear expectations. It can be hard to say "no" to your child—especially if you're feeling guilty that your son or daughter is "deprived" of a second parent. Sometimes it may not seem worth the battle, but the truth is kids crave and respond to healthy boundaries. Be fair, be consistent and most importantly, be strong enough to say "no" when it's an important issue.

Having fun. Parenting on your own can feel like a never-ending list of tasks, appointments, homework and "to-dos." It can seem impossible to find the time to sit down and connect with your kids. Embrace daily and weekly rituals with your children that are fun and focused—whether it's reading books before bedtime, a weekly games night or an after-school trip to the park. Having fun together will keep you connected to your kids and help them feel loved and appreciated.

Taking time out for you. Whether it's catching up with an old friend over coffee, joining a single parents' hiking group or taking an online course, make sure you carve out a little "me" time to recharge and reconnect to the non-parenting world around you. The more content you are, the happier your kids will be.

Did you know?

- Children who frequently eat dinner with their parent(s) are 40 per cent more likely to excel at school than those kids who eat less than three family dinners together every week.
- In a national survey, children were more likely to act aggressively if their parents disciplined them "punitively." However a follow-up eight years later suggests this aggressiveness was reversed when parents changed their punishing style of parenting.
- Children parented positively (i.e. whose parents calmly discussed issues and problems with children and explained more acceptable ways to behave) are four times less likely to be hyperactive, behave aggressively or have an emotional disorder.