

About.com: Psychology

Parenting Styles

The Four Styles of Parenting

By [Kendra Van Wagner](#), About.com Guide

Developmental psychologists have long been interested in how parents impact 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. Conversely, children who share a home and are raised in the same environment can grow up to have astonishingly different personalities than one another.

Despite these challenges, researchers have uncovered convincing links between parenting styles and the effects these styles have on children. During the early 1960s, psychologist Diana Baumrind conducted a study on more than 100 preschool-age children (Baumrind, 1967). Using naturalistic observation, parental interviews and other research methods, she identified four important dimensions of parenting:

- Disciplinary strategies
- Warmth and nurturance
- Communication styles
- 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 also suggested the addition of a fourth parenting style (Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

The Four Parenting Styles

1. Authoritarian Parenting

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 fail to explain the reasoning behind these rules. If asked to explain, the parent might simply reply, "Because I said so." These parents have high demands, but are not responsive to their children. According to Baumrind, these parents "are obedience- and status-oriented, and expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation" (1991).

2. Authoritative Parenting

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. When children fail to meet the expectations, these parents are more nurturing and forgiving rather than punishing. Baumrind suggests 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" (1991).

3. Permissive Parenting

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" (1991). Permissive parents are generally nurturing and communicative with their children, often taking on the status of a friend more than that of a parent.

4. Uninvolved Parenting

An uninvolved parenting style is characterized by few demands, low responsiveness and little communication. While these parents fulfill the child's basic needs, they are generally detached from their child's life. In extreme cases, these parents



Parenting styles play an important role in child development.

Image ©Joann Green/iStockPhoto

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 numerous other studies that have led to a number of conclusions about the impact of parenting styles on children.

- Authoritarian parenting styles generally lead to children who are obedient and proficient, but they rank lower in happiness, social competence and self-esteem.
- Authoritative parenting styles tend to result in children who are happy, capable and successful (Maccoby, 1992).
- 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 Do Parenting Styles Differ?

After learning about the impact of parenting styles on child development, you may wonder why all parents simply don't utilize an authoritative parenting style. After all, this parenting style is the most likely to produce happy, confident and capable children. What are some reasons why parenting styles might vary? Some potential causes of these differences include culture, personality, family size, parental background, socioeconomic status, educational level and religion.

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

References

- Baumrind, D. (1967). Child-care practices anteceding three patterns of preschool behavior. *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, 75, 43-88.
- Baumrind, D. (1991). The influence of parenting style on adolescent competence and substance use. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 11(1), 56-95.
- Maccoby, E. E., & Martin, J. A. (1983). Socialization in the context of the family: Parent-child interaction. In P. H. Mussen & E. M. Hetherington, *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 4. Socialization, personality, and social development (4th ed.)*. New York: Wiley.
- Maccoby, E.E. (1992). The role of parents in the socialization of children: An historical overview. *Developmental Psychology*, 28, 1006-1017.

This About.com page has been optimized for print. To view this page in its original form, please visit:

<http://psychology.about.com/od/developmentalpsychology/a/parenting-style.htm>

©2010 About.com, Inc., a part of [The New York Times Company](#). All rights reserved.