

Do You Know Your Parenting Style?

By Dr. Thomas Phelan

Want to be a better parent? Knowing what your current **parenting style** is will help you identify your needed areas for improvement. Promoting the self-discipline and self-esteem of the children in your family often requires an emotional juggling act by you as a parent. It is not easy to be firm and demanding with a child one minute, then warm and affectionate the next. This is an ongoing education process both for the parent and for the child. In addition, many adults naturally have personalities or temperaments that predispose them toward one parenting style or another.

Authoritarian Parenting

Parents who tend to overemphasize the discipline side of the equation are referred to as authoritarian. Authoritarian parents are demanding in the worst sense of the word. They are intimidators, requiring obedience and respect above all else. They become overly angry and forceful when they don't get that obedience and respect. Their love and acceptance appear totally conditional to the child. They do not teach or listen to their kids or explain the reason for their expectations, which are frequently unrealistic. They often see their children's individuality and independence as irrelevant or threatening.

Research has shown that authoritarian parents tend to produce children who are more withdrawn, anxious, mistrustful and discontented. These children are often overlooked by their peers. Their self-esteem is often poor.

Permissive Parenting

Parents who overemphasize the self-esteem side of the equation are referred to as permissive. They may be warm and supportive, but they are not good disciplinarians - even in the privacy of their own home. They make only weak demands for good behavior and they tend to avoid or ignore obnoxious behavior. They seem to believe that children should grow up without any anger, tears or frustrations. They reinforce demanding and inconsiderate behavior from their children and often find it easier to just give in to their child's demands. Their love and acceptance are "unconditional" in the worst sense of the word, for they set few rules or limits on what their children do.

Research has shown that permissive parents tend to produce children who are more immature, demanding and dependent. These children are often rejected by their peers. Their self-esteem is often unrealistic and hard to interpret, for they often blame others for their problems and misfortunes.

The Authoritative Parenting Model

Parents who are able to provide for both the discipline and self-esteem needs of their youngsters are referred to as authoritative. They clearly communicate high - but not unrealistic - demands for their children's behavior. They expect good things from their kids and reinforce those things when they occur. They also tend to give more positive encouragement at the right places. When kids act up, on the other hand, authoritative parents respond with firm limits, but without fits of temper. They are warm, reasonable and sensitive to a child's needs. They are supportive of a child's individuality and encourage growing independence.

Authoritative parents tend to produce competent children. These kids are more self-reliant, self-controlled, content and happy. They are usually accepted and well-liked by their peers and perform better in school. Their self-esteem is good and they report having a happier childhood experience overall.

Where Do You Need Work as a Parent?

Logic and research, then, support the idea that children need both firm discipline and emotional support to grow up psychologically healthy. After reading the descriptions of the parenting styles above, if you found that you leaned too much toward the demanding, authoritarian style, then you need to work on the warm, supportive side of parenting. You need to have more fun with your kids, listen better and dole out more praise. If on the other hand, you leaned too much toward the permissive style, you need to work on establishing clear rules, setting limits, and confronting obnoxious behavior. Need to modify your parenting style? Start today!

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Dr. Thomas Phelan is the best selling author of the 1-2-3 Magic parenting program, available in books, videos and DVD at <http://www.ParentMagic.com>. A registered clinical psychologist and an internationally renowned expert on child discipline and Attention Deficit Disorder, Dr. Phelan's books also include *1-2-3 Magic for Teachers*, *Surviving Your Adolescents* and *All About Attention Deficit Disorder*.