

12 Ways to Become a More Authoritative Parent

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Updated on August 18, 2019



There isn't a single formula for raising children well. After all, parenting isn't an exact science. There's definitely a bit of an art to good parenting.

Researchers who examine parenting styles have consistently found authoritative parents raise happier and healthier children who are equipped to face real-world challenges.

The good news is, everyone has the ability to become a more authoritative parent. And you can match authoritative parenting strategies to your child's unique temperament to ensure you aren't using a cookie-cutter approach to parenting.

Here are twelve strategies that will help you become a more authoritative parent:

1. Listen to Your Child

Unlike authoritarian parents, who believe children should be seen and not heard, authoritative parents welcome their children's opinions. They listen to their concerns and allow them to share their ideas.

So whether your child is telling you the same joke for the tenth time, or he's sharing a long-winded story, be a good listener. Giving your child [positive attention](#) goes a long way toward preventing behavior problems.

2. Validate Your Child's Emotions

Authoritative parents acknowledge their children's feelings. They help kids label their emotions and they teach them to recognize how their feelings affect their behavior.

So the next time your child is upset, resist minimizing your child's feelings by saying, "It's no big deal," or "Stop crying. There's no reason to get upset." To him, it might be a big deal.

Validate his emotions by saying, "I know you are really sad right now."

Correct his behavior, not his emotions. Tell him it's OK to feel angry, but you will give him consequences for hitting. Or it's OK to feel excited but running inside the grocery store is not OK. Then, invest your energy into teaching him socially [acceptable ways to deal with his feelings](#).

3. Consider Your Child's Feelings

Being authoritative means taking your child's feelings into consideration. That doesn't mean, however, that your child gets an equal vote—that would constitute permissive parenting.

Show your child that you are in charge, but make it known that you care about how your decisions affect everyone in the family.

So if you're planning to move across the country, ask him how he feels about the move—but don't ask him if it's OK if you move. Kids lack the wisdom and experience to make major adult decisions. They feel more secure when they know adults know best.

4. Establish Clear Rules

Authoritative parents have clear [household rules](#). They make sure kids know their expectations ahead of time and they explain the reasons behind their rules.

So rather than saying, "Go to sleep because I said so," say, "Go to sleep so you can help your body and your brain grow." When your child understands the underlying safety concerns, health hazards, moral issues, or social reasons behind your rules, he'll develop a better understanding of life. He'll also be more likely to follow the rules when you aren't there to enforce them.

5. Offer One Warning for Minor Issues

Authoritative parents give immediate consequences for rule violations. If a child hits, he may be placed in a [time-out](#) or he may [lose a privilege](#).

But for minor issues, they offer a warning. They tell children what the consequence will be if they don't change their behavior.

So don't waste your time saying meaningless things like, "Knock it off," or "Don't make me tell you again!" Instead, say, "If you don't stop banging your fork on the table you won't be able to play video games today," or "If you don't pick up your toys now, you won't be able to go the park after lunch."

Show your child that you say what you mean and you mean what you say. If he doesn't listen to your warning, follow through with the consequence.

Avoid offering multiple warnings. Repeating yourself trains your child not to listen the first time you speak.

6. Use Consequences That Teach Life Lessons

Authoritative parents don't make kids suffer for their mistakes. They avoid shaming children and they don't use [corporal punishment](#).

They also don't use guilt trips or say things like, "I'm so disappointed in you." They help a child see he made a bad choice, but he's not a bad person.

Consequences are often logical in nature. So a child who refuses to shut off his video game may lose his video game privileges for 24 hours.

Create consequences that will help your child learn to do better in the future. If he hits his brother, don't spank him. Instead, take away a privilege. Then, focus on teaching him better anger management or conflict resolution skills. Ask, "What can you do next time you get upset so you don't hit?" Then, talk about his options and teach him alternatives to hitting. Make consequences time sensitive too. Instead of saying, "You can have your tablet back when I can trust you again," say, "You can use your tablet again once you can show me that you're

responsible. You can show me you are responsible for completing your chores and getting your homework done on time every day this week.”

7. Offer Incentives

Authoritative parents use [rewards](#) to motivate children. That doesn’t mean they shower kids with lavish gifts, however.

Instead, when a child is struggling with a specific behavior problem, they use incentives to help a child get back on track. Here are a few examples:

- A preschooler refuses to sleep in his own bed. His parents create a [sticker chart](#) and he earns one sticker each night he stays in his own bed.
- A 10-year-old is slow to get ready for school in the morning. His parents set a timer every morning. If he is ready before the timer goes off, he earns the opportunity to use his electronics that day.
- A 12-year-old has been forgetting to bring his assignments home from school. His parents begin monitoring his work more closely. For each assignment he brings home, he earns a token. [Tokens](#) can be exchanged for bigger rewards, like a trip to the park or an opportunity to invite a friend over.

Consider how you can use rewards to teach your child new skills. A simple reward plan is a fast and efficient way to change your child’s behavior.

8. Let Your Child Make Little Choices

Authoritative parents give options over little choices. This empowers kids and will prepare them to make bigger decisions later in life.

So ask your child, “Do you want peas or corn?” or “Do you want to clean your room before or after dinner?” The key is to make sure you can live with either choice.

9. Balance Freedom With Responsibility

Authoritative parents expect their kids to be responsible and they set them up for success. Here are a few examples of how they might do that:

- A child often forgets to pack all of the items she needs for school. Her parents create a checklist for her. Before heading out the door in the morning, they ask her to run through the checklist.
- A child struggles to get ready for school on time. His parents create a schedule to remind him what time he should be getting dressed, eating breakfast, and brushing his teeth. They remind him to look at the clock and stick to his schedule.

If your child is struggling with something, create a behavior management plan that will support your child's efforts to become more independent.

Provide extra support initially, but make sure that your child isn't becoming more dependent on you to tell him what to do. Over time, he should be becoming increasingly self-reliant.

10 Turn Mistakes Into Learning Opportunities

Authoritative parents don't embarrass kids for making mistakes. Instead, they help them figure out how to turn those mistakes into learning opportunities.

So when your child makes a mistake, explain why her behavior was a bad choice. Say something like, "Taking things that don't belong to you is wrong. It hurts other people's feelings and can cause people to think you are mean or that you don't tell the truth."

When your child hurts someone, help her make amends. Insist she loan her favorite toy to her sister after hitting. Or, help her apologize to someone she offended.

If your child is a repeat offender, [problem-solve together](#). Say, "This is the second time you've missed the bus this month. What do you think would help you to get to the bus stop on time?"

11 Encourage Self-Discipline

Authoritative parents aren't interested in controlling their children—they seek to teach kids to control themselves.

So don't calm your child down every time he's upset. Teach him how to calm himself down. And don't nag your child to do his chores. Help him become more responsible for getting his work done on his own.

Create a behavior management plan that focuses on teaching life skills. [Impulse control](#), [anger management](#), and [self-discipline](#) will serve her well throughout her life.

12 Maintain a Healthy Relationship With Your Child

Authoritative parenting isn't about barking orders and insisting on obedience. Instead, it's about being a good role model and teaching kids life skills.

Unlike authoritarian parents, authoritative parents are warm and loving. They show affection and they know it's important to nurture children.

Set aside a few minutes every day to give your child your undivided attention—even on the days when she behaves badly. Spending quality time together will help your child feel loved and accepted, which is key to helping her feel confident about who she is and what she is capable of accomplishing.