

4 Types of Parenting Styles and Their Effects on Kids

What's Your Parenting Style?

By

Amy Morin, LCSW

Medically reviewed by

Joel Forman, MD

Updated on July 12, 2019



Your parenting style can affect everything from how much your child weighs to how she feels about herself. It's important to ensure your parenting style is supporting healthy growth and development because the way you interact with your child and how you discipline her will influence her for the rest of her life.

Researchers have identified four types of parenting styles:¹

- Authoritarian
- Authoritative
- Permissive
- Uninvolved

Each style takes a different approach to raising children, and can be identified by a number of different characteristics.

1. Authoritarian Parenting

Do any of these statements sound like you?

- You believe kids should be seen and not heard.

- When it comes to rules, you believe it's "my way or the highway."
- You don't take your child's feelings into consideration.

If any of those ring true, you might be an authoritarian parent. Authoritarian parents believe kids should follow the rules without exception.

Authoritarian parents are famous for saying, "Because I said so," when a child questions the reasons behind a rule. They are not interested in negotiating and their focus is on obedience.

They also don't allow kids to get involved in problem-solving challenges or obstacles. Instead, they make the rules and enforce the consequences with little regard for a child's opinion.

Authoritarian parents may use punishments instead of discipline. So rather than teach a child how to make better choices, they're invested in making kids feel sorry for their mistakes.

Children who grow up with strict authoritarian parents tend to follow rules much of the time. But, their obedience comes at a price.

Children of authoritarian parents are at a higher risk of developing self-esteem problems because their opinions aren't valued.

They may also become hostile or aggressive. Rather than think about how to do things better in the future, they often focus on the anger they feel toward their parents. Since authoritarian parents are often strict, their children may grow to become good liars in an effort to avoid punishment.

2. Authoritative Parenting

Do any of these statements sound like you?

- You put a lot of effort into creating and maintaining a positive relationship with your child.
- You explain the reasons behind your rules.
- You enforce rules and give consequences but take your child's feelings into consideration.

If those statements sound familiar, you may be an authoritative parent. Authoritative parents have rules and they use consequences, but they also take their children's opinions into account. They validate their children's feelings, while also making it clear that the adults are ultimately in charge.

Authoritative parents invest time and energy into preventing behavior problems before they start. They also use positive discipline strategies to reinforce good behavior, like praise and reward systems.

Researchers have found kids who have authoritative parents are most likely to become responsible adults who feel comfortable expressing their opinions.

Children raised with authoritative discipline tend to be happy and successful. They're also more likely to be good at making decisions and evaluating safety risks on their own.

3. Permissive Parenting

Do any of these statements sound like you?

- You set rules but rarely enforce them.
- You don't give out consequences very often.
- You think your child will learn best with little interference from you.

If those statements sound familiar, you might be a permissive parent. Permissive parents are lenient. They often only step in when there's a serious problem.

They're quite forgiving and they adopt an attitude of "kids will be kids." When they do use consequences, they may not make those consequences stick. They might give privileges back if a child begs or they may allow a child to get out of time-out early if he promises to be good.

Permissive parents usually take on more of a friend role than a parent role. They often encourage their children to talk with them about their problems, but they usually don't put much effort into discouraging poor choices or bad behavior.

Kids who grow up with permissive parents are more likely to struggle academically. They may exhibit more behavioral problems as they don't appreciate authority and rules. They often have low self-esteem and may report a lot of sadness.

They're also at a higher risk for health problems, like obesity, because permissive parents struggle to limit junk food intake. They are even more likely to have dental cavities because permissive parents often don't enforce good habits, like ensuring a child brushes his teeth.

4. Uninvolved Parenting

Do any of these statements sound familiar?

- You don't ask your child about school or homework.
- You rarely know where your child is or who she is with.
- You don't spend much time with your child.

If those statements sound familiar, you might be an uninvolved parent. Uninvolved parents tend to have little knowledge of what their children are doing.

There tend to be few rules. Children may not receive much guidance, nurturing, and parental attention.

Uninvolved parents expect children to raise themselves. They don't devote much time or energy into meeting children's basic needs.

Uninvolved parents may be neglectful but it's not always intentional. A parent with mental health issues or substance abuse problems, for example, may not be able to care for a child's physical or emotional needs on a consistent basis.

At other times, uninvolved parents lack knowledge about child development. And sometimes, they're simply overwhelmed with other problems, like work, paying bills, and managing a household.

Children with uninvolved parents are likely to struggle with self-esteem issues. They tend to perform poorly in school. They also exhibit frequent behavior problems and rank low in happiness.

A Word From Verywell

Sometimes parents don't fit into just one category, so don't despair if there are times or areas where you tend to be permissive and other times when you're more authoritative.

The studies are clear, however, that authoritative parenting is the best parenting style. But even if you tend to identify with other parenting styles more, there are steps you can take to become a more authoritative parent. With dedication and commitment to being the best parent you can be, you can maintain a positive relationship with your child while still establishing your authority in a healthy manner. And over time, your child will reap the benefits of your authoritative style.