



## Parenting Style and the Process of Discipline



As a parent, it is important to note that the manner in which you choose to discipline your children impacts heavily on their development, their relationship with you and eventually the personality they adopt in adulthood.

Maccoby and Martin (1983) identified four parenting styles namely: *Authoritarian, Authoritative, Uninvolved and Permissive styles*. All four styles are characterized by various approaches to discipline and levels of emotional availability.

**The authoritarian style** involves an autocratic approach in which the parent is rigid and directive. There is usually a high level of behavioral control and demandingness on the part of the parent. The parent

assumes the role of "the boss," makes rules and just expects the child to obey. Authoritarian parents tend to adopt the use of punishment as a way of getting the job done or deterring the child from engaging in undesirable behaviors. Additionally, such a parent is emotionally aloof and usually dismisses the child's feelings. This style of parenting usually results in a cold relationship between the child and the parent and the child is likely to develop anxiety, an unhappy disposition and be withdrawn. Children with authoritarian parents are likely to develop poor reactions to frustration; girls in particular are likely to give up and boys become hostile. They are usually well behaved and do well in school.

**The authoritative parent** is affectionate and engaged. The parent sets limits and enforces consequences. Such a parent adopts the use of logic and appropriate negotiation and empowers a child's decision making skills; the child is encouraged to be independent, while the parent maintains limits and controls on their actions. This style of parenting is characterized by a high level of warmth and supportiveness and low control and demandingness. The authoritative parent is flexible, and yet upholds set standards. Because authoritative parents encourage dialogue, the children learn how to negotiate and engage in discussions; they are more likely to be socially competent and autonomous. They tend to have well developed self and emotion regulation skills, they are confident about their ability to master tasks and less rigid about gender-typed traits.



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**The uninvolved/indifferent parent** is "emotionally removed." Such parents are cold towards their children and do not place any demands on them. Their interaction time is minimized and in some extreme cases, the parent is neglectful. This parenting style is characterized by inconsistency, low demandingness, low responsiveness and unpredictability. The parent more or less maintains a passive role and usually abdicates discipline. Uninvolved parents rarely consider their children's input in decisions as they generally do not want to be bothered by their children. Due to the neglect and unresponsiveness experienced by the children, they are likely to become needy and clingy, be inappropriate and rude, have poor emotion regulation and are likely to get into trouble.

**The permissive parent** is indulgent and over-involved. Such a parent is very warm and affectionate but undemanding. They do not like to say "no" or disappoint their children; as a result, adolescents are allowed to make many important decisions without parental input. Permissive parents are easily manipulated by their children. They are non-directive and passive in their parenting. Children with permissive parents are likely to be demanding and whiny, easily frustrated, and likely to be rebellious and defiant when desires are challenged. They are also likely to be lacking in kindness and empathy and have low persistence to challenging tasks. For parenting to be effective, it is important that parents strike a balance between autonomy and

control, while maintaining love. Parents need to work at not allowing excessive autonomy with their children and at the same time guard against excessive control. As a child grows older, the dynamics change, therefore parents need to adapt the style of parenting to suit the changes.

Discipline is an important part of a child's developmental process. It extends beyond punishment and incorporates three basic aspects namely: direct contact, modeling and environmental control. Direct contact may involve face to face dialogue with a child or physical contact in which a child is restrained from an undesired behavior. Modeling involves exhibiting desirable behaviors for children to emulate.

Environmental control involves monitoring the media materials children are exposed to, the kinds of company they keep and the kind of climate they are exposed to in the home. Three basic strategies usually employed by parents while disciplining children are power assertion, love withdrawal and internalization. While the first two may be effective in some situations, more often than not, they are not conducive for good healthy relationships. Internalization however is very instrumental in encouraging children to be self-reliant. According to Stephen Glenn (1987), people with a strong sense of influence over events are said to have predominately internal locus of control or personal responsibility. Therefore, parents are encouraged to engrain in their children a sense of control from within. Rather than just tell children to do or not to do certain things, parents need to help them



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understand the reason why and this helps them internalize the idea. Children need to understand that even though they can't always control what happens to them, they have the power to influence how they deal with events. Developing an internal locus of control also helps the child to identify the correlation that exists between their actions and their experiences.

More often than not, parents tend to focus more on punishment as a means of discouraging undesired behaviors in children. There are some cases where punishment could be effective; however, its effect is usually short-term. Reinforcement on the other hand has been found to have a more effective and long lasting influence. Punishment is usually effective when the goal is to immediately stop a behavior. It must be consistent and should be accompanied by explanation and nurturance. However, if the goal is for the child to be able to learn from the experience, thereby internalizing the process, reinforcement is a better and more effective option.

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