

## Parenting Styles and Their Impact Upon Teens

The way a parent parents significantly impacts the child's well-being, their psychosocial development and academic performance. How a parent incorporates varying degrees of responsiveness, love, limits, accountability, and discipline in their style of parenting determines a particular parenting style. The following are seven of the most common styles of parenting. Each style is discussed in terms of: what that style looks and feels like to the child; how children respond to that particular style; and why the parent chooses to use that style of parenting. Many parents will employ more than one of these styles at the same time and some will change from one primary parenting style to another over time. Some use a certain parenting style to compensate for, or to counter the different parenting style of their spouse.

### Authoritative (V)

Authoritative parents like themselves and their kids. They provide a high degree of responsiveness, limits, warmth, and validation. They strive to maintain a healthy social, emotional, mental, and physical lifestyle. They understand the importance of a strong marital bond to their children's social and emotional development and collaborate in the parenting of their children. They are clear about their values. They take action when action is called for. Their actions are intended to influence rather than control behavior. They are not afraid to take a stand with their child, to deal with conflict. They seek a high degree of accountability from their child. But they do this in an atmosphere of love, warmth and support. When necessary they are able and willing to set clear, firm and consistent limits and provide logical and natural consequences. They know how to have fun. They allow open communication and listen to their child's point of view. They may consider their child's input when making decisions, but have the final say. They encourage their child's independence, individuality, and creativity by being highly interactive and responsive toward their child. They teach and encourage their child to be assertive as well as socially responsible. Their children are happy and well-adjusted. The message they convey is: "I love you. I enjoy being a parent. I am not afraid to set limits or discipline you. You are a good person. You can do it. You are very important to me. I am interested in your thoughts and feelings. I make mistakes. I will consider your wishes. I am a lifelong learner and open to change."

#### *How the Children of Authoritative Parents Behave*

The children of authoritative parents are the kids who are fun to be around. Established research shows that they are generally:

affectionate	energetic	responsible
curious	confident	respectful
attentive	persistent	reflective
resourceful	creative	thoughtful
spontaneous	helpful	independent

#### *How Authoritative Parents Get That Way*

Many authoritative parents had one or both parents who were highly responsive to them as children. They felt validated and loved. They were also held accountable to a developmentally appropriate standard of behavior when they misbehaved. As parents they too are highly responsive to their children and seek accountability from their child. Others who are authoritative were not so lucky as children, but they have made a conscious decision not to be victims in this world. They continuously put energy into "working" on themselves so that they feel good about themselves and, to the best of their ability, are loving and encouraging parents. These parents are open to learning effective parenting techniques and are not resistant to attending a parenting education class.

## Authoritarian (A)

Authoritarian parents emphasize and equate discipline and self-control with social responsibility and successful adulthood. They fully expect their children to follow their rules. They may adhere to a rather dogmatic or rigid belief system about parenting. They are more likely to lecture than listen. They do not believe it is necessary to give explanations for their decisions and may see their child's individuality and independence as being less important than their child's obedience to them. They expect a high degree of accountability that may be developmentally inappropriate. At the same time they do not provide a sufficient degree of warmth and responsiveness to their child. They may love their child very much but their love and acceptance appear conditional to the child. They are more likely to try to control their child's behavior rather than influence it. They become angry and forceful when they feel their child is challenging them, questioning their judgment, lying, not listening, or not otherwise being obedient and respectful. An authoritarian parent is experienced by his/her child as being unreasonable, humorless, detached, demanding, and controlling; sort of like a Marine drill instructor. Authoritarian parents may believe it is beneficial to use corporal punishment and may refer to the saying: "Spare the rod, spoil the child." Over time they may become quite harsh in their methods of discipline. It is common for a child to develop a high degree of anxiety, anger and frustration as the result of being the smaller, weaker party in a long-term relationship with that kind of person. The message authoritarian parents give to their child is: "I'm the boss. It's my way or the highway. While you are under my roof you will do what I say; it is not negotiable."

### *How the Children of Authoritarian Parents Behave*

The behavioral symptoms of children who are reacting to an authoritarian parent are sometimes loud, noisy ones, sometimes quietly physical ones, and sometimes a combination of both. They may display:

excessive shyness	forgetfulness	talking back/disrespectful attitude
excessive anxiety	procrastination	stubbornness with angry outbursts
frequent headaches	selective listening	susceptibility to inappropriate peer pressure
acquiescent ineffectuality	passive-aggressiveness	substance abuse/self-injurious behaviors
withdrawal	lack of cooperation	provocative behavior
excessive unhappiness	lying to parents or others	sexually active

### *Why Authoritarian Parents Are That Way*

Authoritarian parents are parents who push. As children they were pushed, and now they push themselves and their children. Authoritarian parents fear that their children won't turn out well. They talk of them being "lazy" and worry that they will not be successful in life. When challenged, such parents will say, "I made it without coddling. He can too." Some are married to a spouse who is permissive and act authoritarian to compensate for the lack of accountability in their child they believe has primarily stemmed from the permissive spouse. Others who are authoritarian were raised by parents who were permissive or ineffectual. They remember feeling uncared for and believe the discipline they did not receive is the discipline they should give to their children. Accordingly, such parents explain and justify their treatment of their children by saying that they are giving them the structure and discipline that they need to succeed in life. They don't recognize that they are exasperating their child; and that a child's sense of structure and discipline is most effectively developed in an atmosphere of love and warmth. They hold self-discipline and productivity above all the other elements that go into making up a successful life. Authoritarian parents may be very successful in the field of business or the military, but they can be just as often unsuccessful in matters of the heart.

## Critical (C)

Critical parents demand accountability. Although they may be less detached than authoritarian parents they are also "unresponsive" to the needs of their child, but in a different way. Their default response to their child tends to be negative and judgmental rather than positive or encouraging. Their message to their child may be received as: "You don't do anything right. You don't measure up to my standards. You're not okay."

### *How Children of Critical Parents Behave*

The behaviors of children who are reacting to a critical parent often go unconnected in the parent's mind with his or her own behavior toward the child. Because critical parents are critical people, they focus on the other person's flaws and faults and don't examine their own as much as they might need to. Over time their children often display the many of the following behaviors:

excessive shyness	headaches	substance abuse/self-injurious behaviors
excessive anxiety	excessive unhappiness	withdrawal*
poor self-image	lying to parents or others	lack of cooperation*
lack of initiative/creativity	secretiveness	acquiescent ineffectuality*

### *Why Critical Parents Are That Way*

Critical parents had critical parenting. Critical parents are often as critical and hard on themselves as they are on their children. In their minds, they do not look all right, act all right, or accomplish enough. Therefore, since they see their children as extensions of themselves, these feelings of inadequacy are projected onto their children. These parents abhor failure. They may be overly concerned about how the achievements or failures of the child will be perceived by friends, neighbors, relatives, etc. They may imagine themselves feeling better about themselves and attaining fulfillment as parents once their children are successful according to their terms of success. Most genuinely and selflessly want their child to do better in life than they did. They point out the child's faults, with purpose and may say they do this for the child's "own good." They believe that with their criticism, they are able to correct, influence or challenge their children. However, their excessive reminders of past mistakes can have the opposite effect. Without having a sense of forgiveness, validation and acceptance from the parent the child of a critical parent (who readily accepts what the parent says) feels inadequate, worthless and/or guilty.

\*The developmental onset of abstract thinking helps a teen to have an enhanced or newfound understanding of things. The teen that seems disengaged, uncooperative, and ineffectual may, as a form of emotional self-defense, be resisting the critical input from their parent(s) so as to maintain or seek a positive self-image.

### **Overprotective (O)**

The overprotective parent is highly responsive to the child but low on accountability. They say or think "no" when their child can handle "yes." They do not encourage assertiveness in their child because they are assertive for their child. They speak for their child or take it upon themselves to take care of a problem the child is having with another adult or peer. They may be highly demanding or confrontational with school personnel. The overprotective parent gives his/her child the following message: "You're not capable. You can't do it, at least not by yourself. You need my help. I'll take care of this for you."

### *How the Children of Overprotective Parents Behave*

The children of overprotective parents may exhibit behavior patterns that the parent does not connect with his/her own attitudes and actions. Some of these are:

lack of confidence	hesitation to try something new	gullible to peers and others
excessive shyness	eating or sleeping problems	angry outbursts*
helplessness	somatic complaints	lying*
excessive anxiety	lack of persistence when frustrated	rebelliousness*

### *Why Overprotective Parents Are That Way*

Some children of overprotective parents were born premature or had a significant health-related illness or disability. Although these children have now caught up to their peers and are developing at the same rate as their peers, the parent remains fixed on the past and the associated vulnerability of the child to his/her environment. The protective instinct continues even though its function is no longer necessary. Some parents are this way to compensate for a spouse who is authoritarian or critical. Other overprotective parents often say, "I don't want my child to do that. I wasn't permitted to do it." Some overprotective parents were, as children, given the message "You can't do it by yourself; you need me to do it for you." As it is with their own children, this was their parent's way of keeping them close and protected. Overprotective parents underestimate their child's capabilities which can undermine the child's sense of self-efficacy and confidence. Some have excessive or unreasonable fears about their child's social environment. They assess it as being more toxic than it is. These fears are made obvious through frequent statements that often include "watch out" and/or "be careful." Excessive restrictions limit trial and error experiences with the outside world or the "streets" of the neighborhood and this may create a vulnerability to the "streets" of the internet. They may also try to spare their child from being disappointed, being challenged or getting stressed out. Hovering like a helicopter, smothering, restricting, rescuing, accepting limited effort in the face of adversity, or doing for the child what they can do for themselves delays the child's development as a capable and responsible person.

\*Later in life the child may realize how stifling overprotection is to their growth and independence. When this seems evident, many will relate to their parent in a hostile, deceptive, and rebellious manner.

### **Ineffectual (I)**

Ineffectual parents are overwhelmed, distracted or stressed out. They may have mood swings, be depressed and unable to cope during an especially low mood, become highly irritable or lethargic, and unable to function as a parent. They may suffer from excessive anxiety and this may prevent them from doing necessary things such as going out of the house or interacting with other people involved with their child. They may have an addiction to alcohol, drugs, or gambling. They may be unable to control their anger and have episodes of limited tolerance, yelling, demanding or unpredictable violent behavior. They may be very stable socially and emotionally but not really know enough about effective ways of disciplining children or how to be encouraging and supportive. Their message to their child is: "I am not able to give you what you need. I am ill. I'm too tired. I am overwhelmed with the job of being your parent. I'm unpredictable. I'm a pushover."

### *How the Children of Ineffectual Parents Behave*

The behavioral patterns of the children of ineffectual parents are often similar to the behavior of adults who are involved with alcohol or drugs. Much of this is role modeled to them by their parents. Being children, however, they feel that they have even fewer resources on which to call for help and may feel "caught in a trap." The feelings that the trap is not of their making and that being children, and knowing they should be protected rather than being forced to give protection may cause enormous frustration. They may display the following behaviors toward the parent or others outside the home:

excessive anxiety	poor coping skills	manipulative tactics
depression	angry outbursts	acting out at school or in the community
pseudo maturity	lack of respect	over dependence on teachers, friends or relatives

### *Why Ineffectual Parents Are That Way*

Many ineffectual parents were raised in dysfunctional families. As children they had difficulties coping with stress and still cope poorly with stress. Others may not have learned enough about how to be an effective parent. Some are afraid of losing their children's love, of saying no, of not being liked. Another type of ineffectual parent is one who resorts to drug or alcohol abuse. In some situations both parents resort to drug or alcohol abuse. These are parents who are overwhelmed by the world and its demands, and mismanage

the pressure. They use drugs and alcohol to temporarily anesthetize themselves from the frustration, pain, etc. and postpone doing something to improve whatever is overwhelming to them.

### **Permissive (P)**

Permissive parents overemphasize self-esteem and misunderstand how a child derives and maintains self-esteem. They are responsive to their child but very low on accountability. They do not establish clear expectations of behavior and they do not set limits. Their demands for good behavior are weak and they tend to avoid or ignore irresponsible or obnoxious behavior. Their love and acceptance are unconditional in the worst sense and this reinforces demanding, rude, and inconsiderate behavior from their child toward themselves and others. They accept plausibly questionable or incredible excuses from their child. They may not collaborate with their spouse especially if their spouse is perceived as harsher and unresponsive to the child. They are indulgent and say “yes” when they should say “no.” These are the parents who inadvertently host parties where alcohol is consumed, or otherwise insufficiently supervise the recreational activities of their child and his or her friends within the home. They may yell and scream as they correctly label behavior as inappropriate or bad but fail to provide or follow through with corrective action when that is what their child needs. They may yell at their child in the principal’s office or police station, but the child knows this is an act or that things will be different at home. Their message to their child is: “I’d rather be your friend than your parent. I’d rather believe you over the other adults that you deal with if they try to get me to hold you accountable. I really don’t like the job of being a parent. I don’t really care about you. I’m not going to hold you accountable. I’m afraid to discipline you. I’m not going to take corrective action with you. I’m a pushover.”

#### *How the Children of Permissive Parents Behave*

The behavior patterns observed in children of permissive parents may also be seen in children who have parents who are ineffectual or disengaged. The children of permissive parents may display the following behaviors:

unrealistic self-esteem	pseudo maturity	reckless risk-taking behavior
immaturity	lack of responsibility	delinquent behavior in the community
self-centeredness	poor academic performance	high reliance on peers
lack of self-control	lack of respect for authority	substance abuse
rude and inconsiderate	excessive misbehavior in school	
excessive lying	unresponsive to consequences at school	

#### *Why Permissive Parents Are That Way*

Permissive parents may believe in the philosophy that children can teach themselves to regulate their emotions; to interact and cope with others; and learn from their mistakes without parental intervention. Permissive parents are those who, as children, were often over-disciplined, some may have been physically, emotionally, or psychologically abused. They are concerned about causing emotional harm or damaging their child by being too strict. These parents abhorred such childhood experiences and want to be the opposite of what their parents were to them. They don’t want to do anything that might make their child hate them like they hated their own parents. They want to be their child’s best friend and not be seen as a mean or authoritarian parent. Many are afraid of losing their children’s love or not being liked if they say no or give a consequence. They imagine parenting as either being strict (and uninformed) or being permissive (and informed). They don’t understand that a parent can be loving and responsive and simultaneously hold their child accountable. When their child misbehaves, they may misjudge the cause of their child’s misbehavior. For example, some may believe that their child is suffering from a handicap, or environmental condition that is not of their making or within their control. These parents may attribute all negative behaviors to the handicapping condition or they may ascribe the beginning of misconduct to a negative life event. Some may blame themselves for their child’s reaction to a negative life event such as a difficult divorce. If the parent feels at fault, they may want to spare the child additional pain, will not seek accountability and will

tolerate misbehavior due to their guilt. Many permissive parents avoid conflict and are willing to give in to tantrums. As their children get older permissive parents will often give in to unwarranted or unjustified requests or demands by their child to avoid tension or conflict. When their child is accused of misbehavior they believe that the version of events the child offers reflects what really happened. Or they deny or minimize the seriousness of the behavior. For example, they may believe that there is no cause for concern, because the child's habitual pattern of misbehavior is just a stage of rebelliousness or a natural part of growing up. The parent may say "That's how he is" as if he is not capable of change. In their view, attempts to discipline a child who they deem developmentally incapable of changing can only damage the child. They withhold discipline and give their child more trust and freedom than their child deserves believing that he will grow out of this stage or somehow reform himself on his own.

## **Disengaged (D)**

Disengaged parents are preoccupied or seem unwilling to be available or involved. This may be the way they have always been or there may be life circumstances causing the parent to be disengaged. In any event, they are unresponsive or indifferent in their behavior toward their child. Nor do they seek accountability from their child. Their needs and wants are paramount or they have other priorities. Some are single and very focused on dating; some are highly involved in a special interest. Some are disengaged because they have acquiesced to a spouse who believes they have better ideas on how to parent. They may say "Okay, you're so smart you raise our child, I'm done." Some actually did not want to become a parent, but did, and resent the demands of parenthood. Like the ineffectual parenting style, the uninvolved, neglectful, and disengaged parent may be heavily involved in addictive behaviors, leaving the child to take care of themselves. (Others appear to be disengaged but have no choice about how much time and attention they can give their child. They are the ones for example who also have to give hours of care and attention to a very handicapped or very ill sibling or grandparent, are working a second job, or are trying to better themselves and are adult students in college.) The message disengaged parents (who do have a choice on how they spend their free time) communicate to their children is: "I don't have time for you. You are not as important to me as other things. I don't like being around you."

### *How the Children of Disengaged Parent Behave*

Children of disengaged parents, in order to avoid facing painful truths, may spend a great amount of energy denying what they see and feel. It is quite painful to accept that a parent doesn't want to be around when they know most other parents do want to be with their children. This is often observed in divorced families where the father gets together with the children infrequently and where the children know how he could make more time for them if he wanted to. It may be too difficult for him to deal with his ex-wife and/or acknowledge that he doesn't want to be with them especially if he has to deal with her in order to have contact with the child. The child of a disengaged parent does not feel accountable or important and may show these behaviors:

anxiety	exaggeration	low self-esteem
nagging	somatic complaints	depression
attention seeking behaviors	withdrawal	delinquent behavior
intense feeling of loneliness	feelings of worthlessness	

### *Why Disengaged Parents Are That Way*

Chronically disengaged parents who are emotionally unavailable to their child may not have really wanted to become a parent. Many feel awkward with feelings, their own and others, especially their children's, and some resent their children's emotional needs. The greater those needs, the more they may resent them. Most are distracted by whatever is happening to them, personally or vocationally. Those who are going through a divorce, or single parents trying to survive economically, may become depressed and disengaged if seemingly overwhelming circumstances coincide with their own feelings of inadequacy. The disengaged parent may be distracted by his/her own problems in his/her adult relationships, at work, with his/her parents, with his/her self-esteem, etc. The sad truth is that there is little room or concern in the head or heart for what ever is going on with the child.

## Summary

We often fall back on parenting our children in ways that are similar to the ways we were parented. Despite our best efforts to live up to the model of our own parents or to be different from them we all make mistakes. No parent is perfect.

Children are not alike from the start. Some are born with an even disposition. Some are not, have greater needs than others, and are very difficult for anyone to raise. Siblings within the same household may be the recipient of differing parenting styles especially if their needs or behavior differs.

Parents who are being too authoritarian, critical, overprotective, ineffectual, permissive, or disengaged should strive to be different. Why? Because the negative effects of such problematic parenting styles accrue over time, and by the teen years, teens can become exasperated, quite sad or both. Teens often react strongly to a problematic parenting style, and when they do, they can react in all types of ways. It helps if at least one of the parents is authoritative. When neither is authoritative the situation can become quite dire by this stage in a child's development.

If you think you are too authoritarian or critical try you're hardest to be a warmer and more supportive parent. Have fun with your kids while they are still living with you. Don't hesitate to give them a hug, look at them and smile. Listen better, be more patient and be more encouraging. Your child may notice even a small change on your part and respond quite well. Consider the use of a mutually agreed upon parent-child contract. If that doesn't work for you consider family counseling. As young adults living on their own, their friendship and desire to voluntarily spend time with you is a sign of successful parenting and can be extremely rewarding.

If you realize how permissive you have been and your child has gone astray you know that you need to work on establishing clear rules, setting limits, and addressing irresponsible or obnoxious behavior with real consequences. This may not be a welcomed change but your child will know deep down inside that they need you to be this way with them, especially if things have gotten out of control or they have friends whose parents are authoritative and seem to care.

If you are overprotective relax! It's quite likely that your child can handle more than you think. Figuratively speaking, they may not want to put their toe in the water when they have been told for so long that it is dangerous to be so close to the edge. But your calm and encouraging words will help him or her to take the initiative necessary for their growth and independence. If there is hostility between you and your teen that may be a sign that he or she is quite able and ready for more freedoms.

If you see in yourself the signs of the ineffectual or disengaged parenting style you may have contributed to the problems your teen is having. Every parent tries to do the best they can. Difficult life circumstances cause regrettable behavior for those who don't normally cope well with overwhelming stress. Try your best to connect or reconnect with your teen. The supportive involvement of a relative or same sex mentor for your teen may also be helpful. With the will, determination and guidance most individuals can achieve things they didn't think they could. Please consider the guidance and coaching of a professional counselor.

The authoritative parenting style is the most common and the most desirable parenting style. If you relate mostly to the authoritative parenting style description, congratulations! Keep up the good work! However, be vigilant to the influence of your child's peer group. Inappropriate peer pressure, especially from those whose parents are permissive can weaken or counter the beneficial effects of the authoritative parenting style.

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