

Guiding Your Young Children



Parents use different styles to interact with their children. Researcher Diana Baumrind has spent years studying parents and children. She describes four ways that parents interact with children. Take the short quiz below to learn about your parenting style. Circle the numbers of at least five statements below that are most like you.

1. I would rather have no rules than to worry about breaking them.
2. Children should obey their parents and not talk back.
3. Kids are too hard to figure out. It tires me to try.
4. Children can get along pretty well if you just leave them alone.
5. Children should be given choices.
6. My work and home responsibilities are too stressful; I can't worry about what the children are doing.
7. I was spanked when I was a child, and I turned out okay.
8. My children can get themselves up and put themselves to bed. They have little need for me.
9. The children won't listen to me, so I have quit trying.
10. Sometimes when children talk, they make good points so I try to listen to them.
11. My children should do as I say until they are old enough to make their own decisions.
12. Although it takes hard work, parents and children should try to talk about their feelings to make family decisions.
13. When my children don't mind me, I yell at them and threaten them with punishment.
14. I am not good at parenting. It is easier to let my ex- take care of the kids and for me not see them.
15. Children should be allowed to be individuals.
16. Children should realize that my work is stressful and that I am tired at the end of the day.
17. Video games are a lifesaver. They keep the children out of my way.
18. I expect my children to conform to my decisions without discussion.
19. I do not criticize my children or call them names even when I can't understand why they act as they do.
20. My parents are better with the children. If they watch them, I can go out with my friends and I am happier.

TRANSFER THE NUMBERS OF THE ITEMS YOU CHECKED TO THE NEXT PAGE.

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HOW DID YOU SCORE? ____ ____ ____ ____ ____

Compare your list of items to the parenting style items. Which style is most like you?

Did you choose 1, 4, 6, 9, 16? Then your style is Permissive

Did you choose 3, 8, 14, 17, 20? Then your style is Unengaged

Did you choose 2, 7, 11, 13, 18? Then your style is Authoritarian

Did you choose 5, 10, 12, 15, 19? Then your style is Authoritative

PARENTING STYLES

PERMISSIVE

The permissive parent makes few demands, administers little punishment, sets no guidelines, has little structure, and avoids asserting authority. Stress and work may keep you from spending time with your children.

The child of the permissive parent grows up lacking self-control, is immature, may be aggressive at home, and may behave irresponsibly. These children tend to have less self-esteem and may be low achievers in school. They may skip school, use drugs, or become involved in illegal issues in their search for attention.

UNENGAGED

The unengaged parent does not discipline or guide the child's behavior, does not nurture or play with them. If you are unengaged, you spend only a minimal amount of time and make little effort to teach, read with, or take an interest in your child. You may not be available emotionally because of your own problems, immaturity, or substance abuse.

The child raised by an unengaged parent may be very anxious or depressed and may have poor social skills. These children may not follow through with tasks, may have problem behavior, or have poor academic performance. Their self-esteem and confidence is low.

AUTHORITARIAN

The authoritarian style of parent is demanding and strict, uses punishment, and generally doesn't allow choice or freedom of expression. Do you value obedience, tradition, and order, and discourage independence and individuality? You may dislike having your authority questioned, and may use physical punishment, yelling, or threatening for disciplinary measures.

The child of an authoritarian parent may lack spontaneity, curiosity, and creativity. These children often have limited independence and assertiveness. Since they don't learn how to decide for themselves, they depend on others to decide for them. They may do fairly well academically but have low self-esteem and may be aggressive and defiant.

AUTHORITATIVE

The authoritative parent is balanced in warmth and control, setting high expectations of the child. You firmly enforce rules, and encourage independence and individuality while doing so with warmth and nurturing. You recognize your children's individual rights and give them choices. Positive communication and listening help you and your children work together to solve problems.

The child of an authoritative parent is competent, responsible, and independent, has higher self-esteem and confidence, and is better able to control his or her aggression.

HOW TO REDUCE DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS

All children must pass through the experiences of childhood. There is distress and frustration but you can reduce behavior problems by preventing them. Once you know how children grow and develop, you can build a healthy environment and set clear expectations that can reduce tensions.

You need to:

- Understand
- Guide
- Motivate
- Nurture, and
- Act as an advocate

You also need to take care of yourself.

Read the parenting tips in the following chart. What are you already doing well? What do you need to improve?

Tips to help you understand, guide, motivate, nurture and advocate for your child as you take care of yourself

UNDERSTANDING Your Children	I am doing well	I need to improve
Keep waiting (for turns, meals, listening) realistic for children under 5 years.		
Childproof area so toddlers can learn to explore freely.		
Give reasons and explain rules and expectations.		
Help upset or angry children recognize their feelings and find solutions.		
Base limits and rules on the child's ability to understand them.		
Help children try new things so they can discover talents and strengths.		
Respond to children's body language when they are in a bad mood. Say, "It looks like you had a bad day" rather than criticizing their behavior.		
Listen and respond when the child is frustrated saying supportive things like, "That is so hard." Then help them find solutions.		
Be sensitive to your children's moods so they learn to be, and act caring.		
Set reasonable limits. Do not be too severe.		
When children are being good, notice this and spend time telling them what things they have done instead of focusing on telling them what to do or what not to do.		
Give children choices from an early age, no matter how small the decision (such as picking sock color, for example).		
Allow children to choose between two appropriate options.		
Provide outlets for the child's anger (safe space to run around outside, play dough, music, movement).		
Use time-out sparingly (see page 5).		
Offer alternatives and redirection instead of threats and bribes (see page 5).		
Act as a positive role model in word and action.		
Use words like "good" and "bad" to describe children's actions or behaviors, not to describe the child.		
Involve older children in setting their own limits.		
Use natural or logical consequences (see page 5).		
MOTIVATING Your Children	I am doing well	I need to improve
Check good books out of the library for you and your children to read together and talk about the things you are learning.		
Keep your home environment organized.		
Have a variety of play materials to allow choices and reduce arguing.		
Use positive words. Say, "I like the way you are playing," or "Let's walk," instead of "Quit that," or "Stop running!"		
Genuinely listen to your children's ideas.		

Tips to help you understand, guide, motivate, nurture and advocate for your child as you take care of yourself

MOTIVATING Your Children (continued)	I am doing well	I need to improve
Use questions to help the child learn to think. For example, "What do you think will happen if..." or "Tell me about..."		
Encourage children to figure out solutions.		
Give nods and positive responses to support children beginning to make choices and decisions.		
NURTURING Your Children	I am doing well	I need to improve
Consider consequences to the child before making suggestions.		
Keep your promises to the child.		
Strengthen parent-child trust.		
Take time to talk and listen. Ask questions and show concern for feelings.		
Use kind words to convey that you are trying to understand: "How frustrating." "It seems your feelings were hurt." "It's tough when the other kids all seem to pair up."		
Be supportive and kind in all communication.		
Speak the child's words back to the child to show understanding. For example, say, "You mean...".		
Let your tone of voice and a smile convey empathy and kindness.		
ADVOCATING for Your Children	I am doing well	I need to improve
Learn about the community and the interesting places to explore with your children and family.		
Let your child's teacher know when there is something out of the ordinary happening at home (parent out of town, family death, lost pet).		
Observe in your child's classroom to help identify what may be bothering a child who does not seem interested in going to school.		
Know your neighbors. Meet your children's friends and parents.		
Work to make your neighborhood a safe place to be and the school a positive learning environment.		
TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF	I am doing well	I need to improve
Have friends and family you can turn to when you need to talk about being a parent.		
Get help if you need it. Many books and organizations, including the Cooperative Extension Service, can help (www.ces.ncsu.edu).		
Make time to do things that you enjoy.		
Pay attention to your own health and stress level. Care for yourself so you can care for others.		

GLOSSARY

CHILDPROOFING — Making the world safe and interesting for children is the heart of childproofing. Put breakables and unsafe objects out of reach or out of sight until children grow up and begin to understand safety and limits.

NATURAL CONSEQUENCES — A natural consequence is the likely outcome of a behavior. Many times, children learn as a result of natural consequences. Parents can be supportive and warm but let the learning occur naturally. For example, children who will not eat supper during mealtime may feel hungry when they are not allowed to eat again until breakfast. Or children who forget to put skates away each night may one day find that they are gone.

LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES — If a natural consequence is not safe or appropriate; a logical consequence may be used. Children can see directly how the behavior and the consequence relate. For example, if the child oversteps his or her boundaries when riding a bike, taking away the bike for a reasonable amount of time may be the consequence. Or if toys are not put away, a reasonable consequence may be to collect the toys for charity or at least put them in temporary storage. The consequence should relate to the action.

REDIRECTION — A way to help children gain self-control is to redirect them to another activity. This allows the children to get away from the problem situation and yet still have something constructive to do. Redirecting children may be preferable to time-out.

Suggest an alternative activity or setting when a situation seems ready to get out of hand. Pose timely questions to avoid heated confrontation and conflict. Rather than yell at children for playing with forbidden objects, provide them with safe and interesting alternative toys. Put the forbidden objects where they are not a temptation to children.

TIME-OUT — Time-out is used with children who have briefly lost self-control. Self-control is a developmental process. In early childhood, it is normal for children to be confused and frustrated if they are tired or hungry or when they do not understand taking turns and sharing. A normally sensible child who is upset, tired, and hungry may need rest or soothing, not punishment.

Time-out can be effective but it is often misused as a punishment instead of a time to regroup. Time alone gives the child a chance to calm down. Then the child may rejoin the activity. Children who view time-out as a punishment may spend time figuring out how to get even and grow even madder.

These questions may help you decide when to use time-out:

- Is time-out being used as a time for the child to regroup?

- Is time-out used as a retreat for the child, not the adult?
- Is time-out used as one answer among other alternatives?
- Are children given the chance to have some control by making choices about their daily activities?

Instead of yelling "Go to the time-out area and sit there until I say to get up," try saying "I see you are having trouble keeping your feet to yourself. It hurts when you kick. You need to sit alone for a few minutes. Then you will be able to come play again." Or you might say, "If you continue to play rough with the ball, you will have to pick something else to do."

GROUP TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

The group leader sets the tone for the group to allow informal sharing, a sense of understanding, and confidentiality without ridicule. Parenting is a very personal topic. To set the participants at ease and to smooth transitions, activities are needed. Some suggested activities are presented here as a stimulus for group leaders.

ACTIVITY — Use the first set of questions in this fact sheet as a pre-quiz. Instructors may rename the parent types with words that may seem more descriptive. Be creative and role play or act out the types. One suggestion for labels is The Enforcer (authoritarian), The Negotiator (authoritative), The Yielder (permissive), and The Invisible (unengaged).

ACTIVITY — Ask the group participants to imagine their child or one with whom they have come in contact, one who they see daily or quite often. Ask them to think of ways to describe this child. List these terms on easel paper, or on a writing board before the group. Post these. At the end of the learning session, review these and see if any of these descriptions that are negative can be turned into positive statements based on new learning that has occurred.

ACTIVITY — In small groups, ask parents to work together to list of all the methods they use to discipline children. Have them bring the list before the total group before beginning to outline those listed in the guide sheet.

ACTIVITY — On index cards, ask parents to list things about their child that they do not like; one characteristic per card. Take the cards and mix them up, then have each participant draw a card and read that characteristic aloud. Use this activity to turn that characteristic around into a positive aspect or an aspect easily explained by the child's developmental age. For example, talking back could mean that the child will learn to question things, which may come in handy during adolescence when tempted with illegal or immoral practices. Or asking for everything in sight in a store

may mean that the child has not gained a sense of self-control yet. The ability to have self-control begins to emerge in children about age 7 or 8.

ACTIVITY — Ask participants to describe their definition of discipline. After this has been discussed, ask for their definition of punishment. How are these different?

ACTIVITY — Ask participants to brainstorm in small groups or as a large group about the types of parents with whom they have come in contact. Summarize characteristics. Discuss: What is a “perfect” parent?

ACTIVITY — Discuss what you consider to be ongoing undesirable behaviors. When do children’s behaviors seem to be in need of “professional” counsel or parents in need of outside assistance?

ACTIVITY — Instructors can complete some self-study by reading further about Baumrind’s parenting types or reading John Gottman’s book on raising an emotionally intelligent child. For additional reading on parenting types, see: http://www.kidneeds.com/diagnostic_categories/articles/parentcorrelates.pdf

Additional publications about children’s development and parenting online:
<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/human/pubs/index.html>

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