

What Kind of Parent Are You?



Learn About Your Parenting Style



Children of *authoritarian* parents may seem to behave well but have worse mental health and self-esteem, and they may lie to avoid punishment.



Children of *authoritative* (democratic) parents enjoy better mental health, emotional well-being, and academic performance, while being less likely to use drugs, alcohol, cigarettes or try other risky behavior, including sex.



Kids of *permissive* parents experience less anxiety or depression, but are more likely to neglect academics and experiment with drugs or sex.

Psychologists divide parental styles into 3 types

Don't be confused by the similar string of letters in authoritarian and authoritative – these are quite different parenting styles. [The Apprenticeship Model](#) of parenting that I describe in my book, *The Good News About Bad Behavior*, rests within the authoritative parenting framework, but includes new scientific findings about how children develop social-emotional skills as well as road-tested strategies for actually winning children's cooperation in the home or classroom.

I recommend reading all three summaries, because even if one doesn't apply to you, it might describe your spouse – or parent. (There's a fourth parenting style: uninvolved, but those parents don't read parenting books or answer quizzes!)

Authoritarian

In authoritarian parenting, adults are in charge and children do what they're told. Parents achieve their goals through fear and punishment. Authoritarian parents put a higher priority on parental control than on warmth. The classic authoritarian parent is "Father Knows Best," the 1950's TV dad Jim Anderson, who is obeyed simply because of his role as head of the family.

If you lean towards authoritarian parenting, you may use tactics like counting to three or sending children to time out. *The*

Good News About Bad Behavior explains why these strategies may seem to work in the short term, but don't instill the skills and habits that your children need long term.

Authoritarian parents may find it easier to implement the parts of the **Apprenticeship Model** that require us to stand by while our children experience the tough consequences of their choices. They may struggle more with reflective listening and using games to lighten the mood. Stick with it. Of all parenting styles, authoritarian parents have reported to me the most change, growth and joy in their relationship with their children as a result of adopting the ideas in my book.

Authoritative

Authoritative parents balance limits with warmth, and expect children to follow household rules while according them respect. They listen to kids, encourage independence and enforce boundaries consistently. Parents who follow the **Apprenticeship Model** are authoritative parents – often known as democratic because it's easier to distinguish from authoritarian. The classic authoritative parent is TV mom Clair Huxtable from the *Cosby Show*, who expressed warmth and gave advice to her children, while also not hesitating to uphold consequences.

Whereas the authoritarian parent tells a child to do something “because I said so,” the authoritative parent explains the reason behind the rule and may even be open to negotiation if a child presents a reasonable argument. Authoritative parents are likely to find the techniques in *The Good News About Bad Behavior* to be second nature, and a welcome addition to their parenting toolbox.

Authoritative parents respect children as individuals with their own goals and perspectives, while insisting that they contribute to the family and abide by its overall values and rules. From all the successfully discipline systems described in my book, I distilled **The Apprenticeship Model** of parenting with these three elements: connection with children, communication about problems, and building kids' capability. Upon this foundation, adults and children together set healthy limits and boundaries.

As with many category systems for human nature, some people may combine different aspects of each of these parenting styles. Or you may vacillate between the different styles. Keep returning to the ideas in the book and experiment to see what works for your family. The goal isn't to be perfect right out of the gate, it's to play with new strategies and learn what achieves the goals you have for your children.

Permissive

Permissive parents achieve their goals through a close relationship with their children. They're more likely to wheedle or cajole a child into doing something and find it hard to stick with a rule when their child is crying or upset. Permissive parents put a higher priority on warmth than being in control. The classic permissive parent is the mom who wants to be her daughter's best friend, who caves on a punishment as soon as she starts to cry and turns a blind eye to teens drinking and doing drugs in her basement.

If you lean towards permissive parenting, you probably worry it's too damaging to your relationship to uphold a limit when your child is hysterical. *The Good News About Bad Behavior* will explain how you can stay close with your children and be loving even when you're enforcing a rule.

Permissive parents may find it more natural to implement the parts of the **Apprenticeship Model** that rely on reflective listening, special time with kids and cooperative decision making. They may struggle more with the conflict and upset that inevitably erupts during any change in parenting techniques, or expecting kids to help with chores. Don't give up. Permissive parents are often exhausted by long bedtime routines and no help with the household. You'll soon find that it's not only better for you to share the load – it's better for your kids.

The History of Parenting

While parents with each one of these styles can be found throughout modern history, there are some general trends that may be helpful to understand.

The 1940s and 1950s were characterized more by authoritarian parenting. Men ruled the roost at work and women commanded the household with an iron fist. Mothers were admonished not to spoil their children, who were expected to be seen and not heard. Authoritarian parenting worked better in a time when people could devote fifty years to a business in exchange for guaranteed employment and a gold watch upon retirement. This was the era of “company men” and lifetime pensions for faithful service.

Today, in schools, workplaces, and government, we value collaboration and mutual respect far more than the command-and-control model of the past. On college campuses, nineteen-year-old students are demanding apologies for racial micro-aggressions and confronting faculty toe to toe. In this environment, it shouldn't be surprising that children challenge authority. They increasingly see themselves as equal to adults—or at least equally deserving of respect and a voice in decisions. Even preschoolers pick up on the attitudes of older children in their family and community, especially if they're exposed to smart-mouthed tweens on Disney and Nickelodeon.

In the 1990s, the permissive parent dominated the national ethos. An overwhelming focus on self-esteem as the key to success in life prompted many parents to praise their kids no matter what. Little League teams awarded trophies and medals to everyone who showed up. Instead of punishing children, parents tried to placate them, in hopes of making them happy. Helicopter parents jumped in to negotiate on behalf of their children in school and activities—and sometimes continued to intervene through their kids' college years and first job. William Sears's *The Baby Book*, published in 1993, inspired parents to seek to be their kids' best friends and cheerleaders, not their bosses. Research on the importance of early childhood development and secure attachment for lifetime success reinforced the importance of nurturing parents and set the stage for a cascade of writings on mommy guilt.

Whereas 1950s homemakers thought nothing of leaving Junior in a playpen for hours while they completed their daily chores, moms in the 1990s and early 2000s co-slept, wore their babies, and often had no privacy from their children, not even in the bathroom. (I plead guilty on the latter two.)

References

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