

Parenting Styles

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Parenting style – the broad pattern of practices and behaviors employed by parents to discipline their child – has been consistently shown to greatly influence children's development. Studies have persistently documented the significant role parental communication behaviors play in shaping children's characteristics and abilities in all realms of their lives. Although the literature on parenting and its associations with developmental outcomes for children has its roots back in the 1920s, much of the research has relied on the concept of parenting style developed by Diana Baumrind in the 1960s. Baumrind defined parenting style as the attitudes parents have about childrearing and the practices they employ to socialize their children. Exploring the concept of parental control, this approach was the first to present a theoretical model that elegantly organized parenting styles into a clear taxonomy. Baumrind's (1966; 1967; 1971) typology initially identified three distinct parenting styles: permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative. The three styles vary in patterns of parental authority and reflect different parental values and naturally occurring patterns of parental behavior.

Permissive parents employ little control in their interaction with their child. They communicate total acceptance of the child's behavior, do not use punishment, and often give in to the child's desires and pleading. As they do not believe in a family hierarchy, they tend to avoid confrontation and encourage children to be responsible for their own actions. *Authoritarian* parents believe in a

family hierarchy and view themselves as having a higher family status than their children. They articulate clear rules for the family and children and expect them to be followed and obeyed. They tend to employ punitive measures to control their children's behavior and have no tolerance for expressions of disagreement. When interacting with the child, they communicate few supportive messages and discourage any response. Finally, *authoritative* parents are relatively strict but also show a high level of emotional support for the child. Their expectations are age-appropriate, and they are able to balance firm control with supportive communication. Authoritative parents encourage children's individuality by employing a two-way communication process whereby the child actively participates in the interaction. Explaining the reasoning behind their own behavior and decisions to the child allows authoritative parents to demonstrate useful negotiation while maintaining structured discipline.

Drawing on Baumrind's framework, Maccoby and Martin (1983) suggested that parenting style, rather than being a function of parental control, should be understood as a two-dimensional construct, reconceptualized along the dimensions of parental responsiveness and parental demandingness. Responsiveness is defined as parental messages of support and acceptance that are intentionally articulated to encourage individuality and self-regulation of the child. Demandingness includes parental practices and behaviors that aim to socialize children into their social environment by introducing them to the family and cultural rules they are expected to follow. Whereas responsiveness is not similar to parental warmth, as its main and primary purpose is to promote

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independence in the child rather than only to demonstrate love, affection, and praise, parental demandingness reflects parents' efforts to discipline children by supervising them and setting clear boundaries for their behavior.

Based on the orthogonal dimensions of responsiveness and demandingness, Maccoby and Martin then reorganized the categories of parenting to characterize four styles: authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglecting. Whereas authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles generally reflect similar understanding of the equivalent styles depicted by Baumrind, Maccoby and Martin's typology distinguishes between two types of permissive parenting: indulgent and neglecting. *Indulgent* parents are low in demandingness and high in responsiveness. They are very accepting, making few demands for mature behavior because they trust their children to regulate themselves. They view the family as a democratic environment rather than as a hierarchy and thus exercise little authority. *Neglecting* parents are low in both demandingness and responsiveness. They are uninvolved and often see their responsibility toward the child as providing only their basic needs, such as food and clothes. Thus, neglecting parents often ignore the emotional and social roles they may have as parents. Some researchers have highlighted the benefit of employing the fourfold typology over the three-category taxonomy, pointing to the profound theoretical and empirical differences between indulgent and neglectful permissiveness (Lamborn et al. 1991).

In terms of outcomes for children, research has found associations between parenting style and a child's developmental characteristics in many domains. Children of *authoritative* parents perform better in school and exhibit fewer problem behaviors and better prosocial skills than other children. These children are usually very self-reliant

and independent as well as self-motivated. Children of *authoritarian* parents tend to be dependent on their parents. They also tend to be withdrawn, less sociable, and vulnerable to stress and depression. On the other hand, some studies, although inconclusive, show that, as high demandingness is positively associated with instrumental competence, children of authoritarian parents tend to perform moderately well in school. Children of *indulgent* parents tend to be self-centered and to have difficulties controlling their impulses. Their social competence is usually low and they are often characterized as immature. They do, however, report relatively high levels of self-perception. Several studies show that, because their parents are low in demandingness, children of indulgent parents perform relatively less well in school. Finally, children of neglecting parents perform most poorly in all behavioral, emotional, and social domains. These children are the least sociable of all groups of children as they tend to be emotionally detached and have poor prosocial skills. Some studies have found that children of neglecting parents may also show poor physical and cognitive development.

Although the effects of parenting styles on child outcomes usually show consistent patterns across family contexts, including gender, race, family structure, and education, a closer look at this research points to a degree of variability in the associations between parenting styles and characteristics of socioeconomic status and cultural background. Generally, the authoritarian parenting style is more dominant in traditional families and among parents with low social and educational levels, whereas the authoritative style is more common in families from a higher socioeconomic status. This quantitative difference may suggest that parents from different backgrounds hold different values with regard to parenting that, in turn, are reflected in their parental behavior. Nevertheless, the

extensive body of empirical evidence accumulated over the last several decades suggests that the typology of parenting styles is a useful framework for understanding parental dynamics and the potential outcomes they may have for children.

SEE ALSO: Authoritarian Parenting; Authoritative Parenting in the United States; Child Development; Childhood Socialization; Fathering Styles in the United States; Mothering Styles; Parental Roles; Social Class and Child-rearing

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