

Parenting Style

Janelle Durham, MSW. Parent Educator. GoodDaysWithKids.com, InventorsOfTomorrow.com

There is no one right way to parent. We all make compromises each day that juggle the concrete short-term needs of the day with long-term goals for our child, balanced with our child's temperament and our own. Having a vocabulary for talking about our parenting style can help us make more intentional choices that can guide us, over time, to becoming the type of parent that we want to be.

Let's start with a quiz. For each spectrum, there will be two statements representing two different parenting approaches. If the one on the left describes you perfectly, make a mark on the left end of the spectrum (yellow). If the one on the right is exactly what you would say, make a mark on the right end. If you're somewhere in between, mark somewhere in between, wherever feels right.

What is your approach to parenting a 6 month old baby?

Parent-Led. Parents create structure by scheduling feedings and naps. They may leave a baby to "cry it out" so the baby learns to self-soothe.

Attachment-Style. Parents watch for baby's cues to decide when to feed or to settle to sleep. Parents always respond to crying.



What is your approach to early learning? (for a 2 – 5 year old)

Structured learning. Parents buy educational toys, sign a child up for classes, and when they play, the parent works to find ways to teach new ideas.

Child-Led. They have a variety of toys, go on fun outings to see what child discovers / decides to do. When they play, parent follows child's lead



What is your approach to supervising at the playground? (for a 4 – 8 year old)

Close Supervision. Parents help children on the swings, remind them about rules, encourage them to try all the activities and play nicely with others.

Free Range. Parents sit back, let child explore – it's OK to climb *up* the slide. If kids squabble, parents allow them to sort it out on their own.



What is your approach to school and extracurriculars (for a middle schooler)

The Director. To get good at anything you have to work hard. Kids don't want to work hard, so the parents have to push them/make choices for them.

Unschooling. Parents trust their child's choices about what to do, when to eat and sleep. Children learn what they're passionate about.



What's your parenting style?

Parenting styles are often talked about as three categories. If you tended to make marks in the yellow zones, you may be an authoritarian style parent. If you tended to mark blue, you may be permissive. If you were always in between, that's called authoritative (or balanced).



One way to think about style is how you handle choices. A permissive parent lets the child choose anything they want. An authoritative parent offers a few options and educates the child about how to make the best choice. An authoritarian parent just states what will be done, no choices offered.

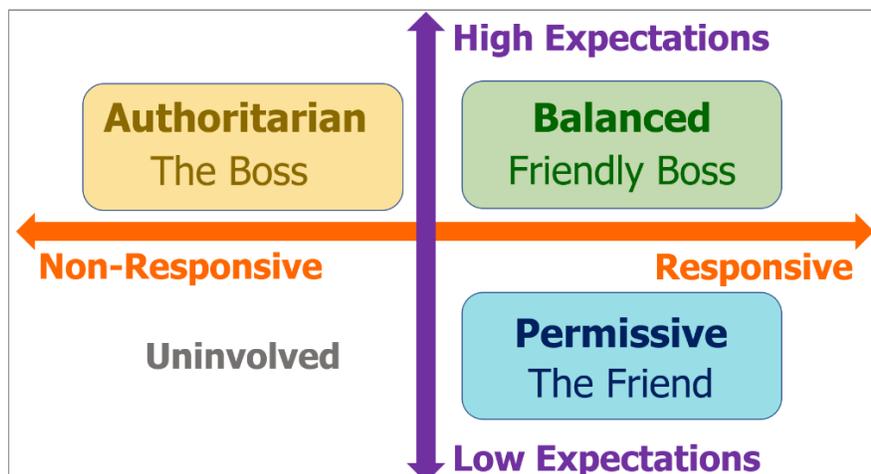
The permissive parent may value independence and imagination and allow the child to follow their passions. The authoritative parent values hard work but also smart decision-making that balances short term desires with long-term goals. The authoritarian parent may value obedience, and believe that learning to follow the rules and doing their best at their assigned tasks is the path to success.

Balancing Expectations and Choices

Parenting style affects how we negotiate conflicts that naturally arise between two views: Parents prioritize a child's *long-term well-being* and success and have wisdom and perspective that helps them know what's best. Children prioritize their own happiness *in the moment* and can't accurately envision the future. Sometimes they want something *now* that we know is not the best choice.

Parents who have high expectations for their child's success (however the family defines success, whether that's in academics, athletics, financial, support for the family, etc.) tend to want more control over their child's choices, so lean toward authoritarian or authoritative. Permissive parents may place more emphasis on the child's happiness than on their accomplishments.

Authoritarian parents believe they know what is best for their child, are not responsive to a child's individual desires, and apply the same rules in all situations. Authoritative and permissive parents are more responsive to the child as an individual, and also adapt to the situation. (For example, if the child has had a rough week, the parent may let them skip an assigned chore.) There are variations on all the parenting styles, of course. For example, a parent who is a little more responsive than a pure authoritarian could be called a "tough love" parent. You may find your own unique balance.



Questions to Reflect On:

What style of parent do you WANT to be?

What type of parent *are* you on a day when you're tired or sick?

Are you the same style as your parenting partner? Or different? How is that going?

Are you the same style of parent that YOUR parents were? Or are you very different? Why?