

Parenting Styles

Describe a parenting scenario to 10 individuals and you are likely to receive 10 different answers on how to best respond. This parenting reality can be both frustrating and relieving because it means there are a variety of ways to handle a specific situation. Research has identified two core factors (responsiveness and demandingness) that create four general parenting styles. Responsiveness is a parent's ability to recognize a child's needs or desires and respond to them. Demandingness refers to a parent having expectations for how a child should act along with appropriately engaging the child when those expectations are not met. While parents tend toward one general parenting style, every parent will find themselves displaying different styles depending on the situation. For example, a parent who highly values a clean room may appear more authoritarian when this situation arises but more dismissive at mealtime if they do not care as much about vegetable consumption. Energy level is also a significant factor impacting parenting style as this will affect a parent's patience, follow through, and concern about the present issue. Setting those two factors aside, parents generally have a specific parenting style they gravitate toward.

Being aware of parenting styles can be helpful as parents seek to grow and engage parenting moments with greater awareness and wisdom. Parenting styles provide both a goal to move toward and basic ideas to keep in mind as parents face challenges. The parenting styles below allow you to consider which general parenting style you gravitate toward and if your child might benefit from you shifting your approach. In general, the authoritative parenting style is most desirable. However, every child is different, and these differences will impact what responsiveness and demandingness look like with a given child.

AUTHORITATIVE PARENTING STYLE (High Responsiveness, High Demands)

Authoritative parents tend to have high expectations for their children yet are responsive to their children. This parenting style tends to be more open to explaining rules and expectations when a child questions or pushes against these. From a child's perspective they would have a clear understanding of expectations and know consequences will occur should an expectation not be met. A child will also be able to share their perspective in a respectful manner. While the child likely hopes to change the parents' perspective, they know the parent has the ultimate authority to adjust or maintain an expressed expectation.

Authoritative Parenting Mindset:

- I will communicate expectations and consistently follow through with consequences.
- I recognize I do not always have a full understanding of a situation and therefore will engage dialogue with my child to understand their perspective.
- I will allow myself to be influenced by my child.
- I often think about my relationship with my child.

AUTHORITARIAN PARENTING STYLE (Low Responsiveness, High Demands)

The authoritarian parent is low on responsiveness meaning they may not see or give high value to something that impacts their child. They have high demands meaning they have expectations of their child and will intervene with consequences when those expectations are not met. An authoritarian parent tends to interact with their child more like a judge where the letter of the law rules. Children with authoritarian parents tend to be well-behaved but tend to have more difficulty sharing their perspective in a helpful or respectful manner.

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Authoritarian Parenting Mindset:

- I have authority over my children.
- What I say goes and there will be no discussion.
- I view disagreement as disrespectful.
- I have very little patience with my child's emotions.

PERMISSIVE PARENTING STYLE (High Responsiveness, Low Demands)

The permissive parent tends to be responsive to their child's needs and desires but has low follow-thru when rules or expectations are not followed. Permissive parents tend to dismiss disobedience or not notice disobedience. They also tend to highly value protecting a child from feeling uncomfortable emotions. "This is your last warning" often means please do what I am asking, and I will give you another warning if you don't.

Permissive Parenting Mindset:

- I need to make sure my child is not emotionally wounded.
- I have rules but rarely enforce those rules.
- I don't often use consequences.
- I will pay close attention to my child's desires.

UNINVOLVED PARENTING STYLE (Low Responsiveness, Low Demands)

The uninvolved parent has few expectations for their child and low awareness of their child's needs/desires. The uninvolved parent is often unplugged from their parenting role due to either busyness or difficulty in other areas of life leaving little space (time, emotional energy, or purposeful thought) to consider engaging their role as a parent.

Uninvolved Parenting Mindset:

- I have a lot going on.
- I am not sure what is going on in my child's world.
- I am to provide for basic needs of my child.
- I don't think my child needs much from me.

Bringing up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord is going to require growing as a parent. While growth is often slow and painful, it is good. Two helpful principles related to change are knowing what you are trying to achieve and having a few simple concepts to keep you headed in that direction. Parents who are both responsive to a child and have high expectations (demandingness) tend to have the best behavioral outcomes. Long before research discovered this truth, the Bible revealed parents are to be caring and corrective to their children. Praise God that He has created humans resilient. Children often do well despite their parent's mistakes. Parents are not the ultimate determiner of how our children turn out. God's grace and healing is infinitely more powerful than our positive or negative parenting approach. Parents, however, are called to engage the role of parenting in a manner consistent with the Lord's instruction. Seeking to engage our children in a manner that points them toward living under God's authority (expectations) and experiencing His wondrous grace (responsiveness) is a worthy goal, and it is the ultimate goal that any of us as parents, even with our own default parenting styles, should aim for.