

# The 4 Types of Parenting Styles and Their Impact On Child Development

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The 4 types of parenting styles are authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved parenting style. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics and psychologists worldwide, the authoritative parenting style is the best. The uninvolved parenting style is linked to the worst outcomes in children.

A 2010 study in the United States surveying over ten thousand school-aged students found that authoritative parenting was the most popular style, followed by authoritarian parenting.

Choosing among different parenting styles is important because how parents interact with their children has a lifelong impact on children's healthy growth, including emotional, physical, and behavioral development.

The 4 types of parenting styles are authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved. Each parenting style involves different levels of responsiveness and demandingness.

- **Authoritative parenting style:** High in responsiveness and demandingness
- **Authoritarian parenting style:** Low in responsiveness but high in demandingness
- **Permissive parenting style:** High in responsiveness but low in demandingness
- **Uninvolved parenting style:** Low in responsiveness and demandingness

Demandingness refers to behavioral control and maturity expectations, and responsiveness pertains to parents' emotional sensitivity.



## What is a parenting style?

A parenting style is a set of child-rearing practices. Psychologists widely use the four parenting styles to understand the link between parenting methods and children's development and behavior. These Baumrind parenting styles were based on research by developmental psychologist Diana Baumrind at the University of California at Berkeley and the work of Eleanor Maccoby and John Martin at Stanford University.<sup>1</sup>

In 1967, Diana Baumrind identified three parenting styles, namely authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive, and added a fourth style, negligent parenting style, in 1971. In 1983, Maccoby and Martin suggested a conceptual structure to combine different levels of parental demandingness and warmth to categorize these four parenting styles.<sup>2</sup>

**Authoritative parenting** is warm and nurturing while maintaining high expectations and standards. According to Diana Baumrind's theory, authoritative parenting encourages children to be independent but still places limits and controls on their actions.

Authoritative parents are firm, assertive, and consistent. They are not harsh, rigid, punitive, or restrictive. Authoritative parents give their children firm limits but try to explain their actions to teach children values, morals, and goals. They use positive parenting strategies

to teach critical thinking and reinforce positive, responsible behavior. Authoritative parents care about their children's well-being and respect their autonomy. Parents and children tend to develop close and healthy relationships.

The authoritative style is also called the democratic parenting style because parents allow negotiations and consider children's feelings and opinions.<sup>3</sup>

Recent studies indicate that children of authoritative parents have more positive psychological outcomes and better mental health. They feel loved and cherished. They have fewer behavioral and delinquency problems. These children develop a strong sense of attachment security, independence, self-concept, and confidence. This foundation contributes to their overall happiness and higher self-esteem. Academically, they outperform their peers, further complemented by their enhanced self-reliance and well-developed social skills. These attributes are also linked to better physical health, creating a comprehensive profile of well-being and success.<sup>4,5</sup>



# What is authoritarian parenting?

[Authoritarian parenting](#) is cold and non-nurturing while setting high standards for children's maturity and achievement. Authoritarian parenting lacks the warmth, affection, and support characteristics of authoritative parenting, although both child-rearing styles have firm limits and expectations.

Authoritarian parents expect obedience without question from their children. They use "because I said so" to justify their decisions without explaining them. Any attempts to reason by the children are viewed as defiance. Authoritarian parents are restrictive and punitive. They care more about upholding their authority than fostering a nurturing environment for their children. They are punitive and use harsh punishment. They scold more often than praise. They focus on punishing the child, making them feel sorry rather than teaching appropriate behavior.<sup>6</sup> Parent-to-child communication in an authoritarian household is one-directional, as the child's opinions are unnecessary.

The authoritarian approach is also known as disciplinarian or autocratic parenting because of the high levels of control and the lack of consideration from the child's perspective.

Children whose parents have an authoritarian parenting style can be anxious, withdrawn, and unhappy. Studies show that they have more mental health issues, including depression, suicide attempts, alcoholism, and drug use. These children are unhappy, have lower self-esteem, and perform worse academically.<sup>7</sup>

Adults raised by authoritarian parents generally adhere to rules but harbor unresolved anger. They often rank low in happiness. Over-controlling parenting blocks opportunities for children to develop self-regulation and independent decision-making skills. This can lead to more impulsive, aggressive, and reactive behaviors.<sup>8</sup>

On the positive side, some research indicates that authoritarian parenting can have protective benefits in specific cultural backgrounds, including African-American and Asian communities. However, the findings are inconclusive as studies present positive and negative outcomes of this parenting style.



## What is permissive parenting?

[Permissive parenting](#) is warm and nurturing while having little limits on children's behavior. According to Baumrind, permissive parents are highly involved in their child's life but place few demands or controls on the child.

Permissive parents are indulgent, focusing extensively on their children's emotional well-being. They don't like to say "no" or disappoint their children. They believe it's important to be friends with their children and fulfill their desires whenever possible. Permissive parents provide a relaxed or inconsistent direction to their children. They also set very few rules and are unlikely to enforce them. When parents do give out consequences, the consequences may not stick. Children can avoid punishment by begging because permissive parents are lenient and forgiving.

The permissive approach is also called the indulgent, laissez-faire, or passive parenting style.

Kids brought up under permissive parenting display a sense of entitlement. Academic entitlement can contribute to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. They are at a higher risk for health problems, such as obesity, sleep deprivation, and tooth decay, because permissive parents don't limit intake. They are also prone to disregarding rules and showing antisocial behavioral problems.<sup>9-12</sup>

On the positive side, research indicates that children of indulgent parents tend to exercise more, linked to better overall health.<sup>13</sup>



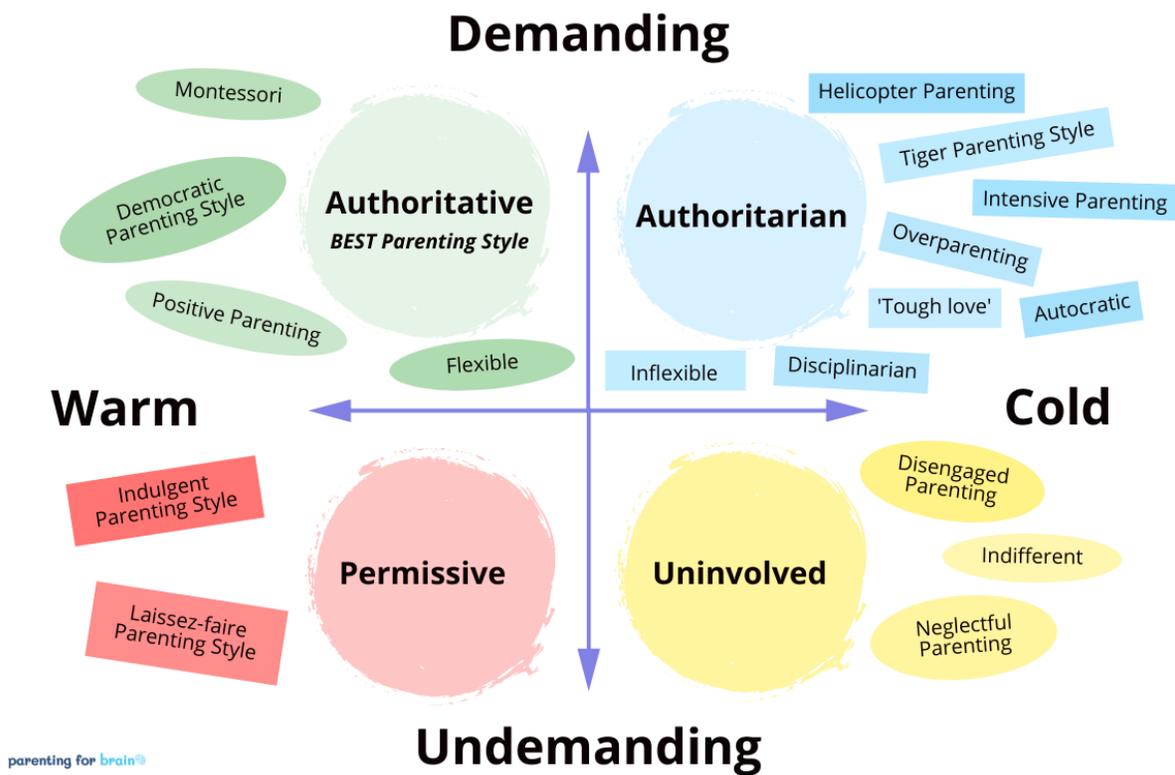
## What is uninvolved parenting?

[Uninvolved parenting](#) is cold and neglectful. Parents with low demandingness do not set firm boundaries or high standards. According to Baumrind, the uninvolved parenting style is characterized by a lack of involvement in the child's life.

Uninvolved parents make few demands of their children and are not responsive or nurturing. They rarely enforce clear rules, leading to a lack of structure and guidance in their children's lives. These parents don't spend time with their children and expect kids to raise themselves. Parents don't spend much time or energy meeting children's basic needs, and the children do not receive much parental attention or nurturance. They are indifferent to their children's activities or needs. These parents tend to grapple with challenges, such as depression, substance abuse, childhood trauma, or overwhelming responsibilities.

The uninvolved approach is sometimes called neglectful parenting because parents are emotionally absent.

Children raised by uninvolved parents generally feel that other aspects of their parents' lives are more important than they are and tend to have poor self-control, low self-esteem, trouble with peer relationships, and immaturity. Children commonly face mental health and emotional regulation challenges. These kids often report sadness and have the lowest self-esteem compared to those from other parenting styles, feeling neglected, unloved, and insignificant. They are at risk of behavior problems and delinquency.<sup>14,15</sup>



## What is the impact of parenting styles on child development?

Parenting styles impact child development in 7 ways – emotional, cognitive, social, moral, cultural, physical, and mental.<sup>16–19</sup>

- **Emotional development** – A child’s early bond with parents shapes their ability to form relationships and manage emotions throughout life. Secure attachment from a responsive parenting style provides a foundation for emotional regulation and resilience.
- **Cognitive development** – Providing a stimulating environment with educational toys, books, and activities and getting involved in a child’s education can positively impact academic performance.
- **Social development** – Children often mimic parents’ social interactions, such as relationship formation, cooperation, conflict resolution, and empathy.
- **Moral and behavior development** – Parents are the primary source of moral and ethical guidance, shaping a child’s sense of right and wrong. Parenting and disciplining styles also affect the child’s moral development. Parents with warmth, strict control, sympathy, and prosocial moral reasoning tend to create prosocial behavior in children.

- **Cultural development** – Parents pass down cultural norms, traditions, and values, shaping a child’s cultural identity.
- **Physical health** – Parents influence eating habits and attitudes toward physical activity, affecting a child’s long-term health.
- **Mental health** – Parenting styles affect a child’s self-esteem, stress-coping, and mental health development.

## **What are the statistics on parenting styles?**

According to a 2009 joint study by Pennsylvania State University and the University of Chicago using data from Wave I of the Adolescent Health Longitudinal Survey (Add Health), the statistics on parenting styles are as follows.<sup>20</sup>

## **What is the best parenting style?**

According to a 1987 study by the Stanford Center for the Study of Youth Development and many other studies, the authoritative parenting style has been associated with the best outcomes in children’s social competence, academic achievement, mental health, physical health, behavior, and adjustment outcomes.<sup>21</sup> The authoritative parenting style is the most encouraged in modern America.

## **What is the parenting style that has the worst effects on children?**

The parenting style that has the worst effects on children is the uninvolved parenting style, followed closely by the authoritarian parenting style. According to a 2019 study by the University of Valencia involving 2069 participants, children with neglectful parents have the poorest outcomes in emotional well-being, self-competence, social competence, and empathy, and children with authoritarian parents have the worst outcomes in academics, family relationships, nervousness, emotional instability, and hostility.<sup>22</sup>

## **What is the most common parenting style?**

The 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), found that the most common

parenting style among its 17,399 participants was the authoritative parenting style, with 53% of respondents identifying with this style.

### **What is the strictest parenting style?**

The strictest parenting style is authoritarian due to its high demands and low responsiveness. Authoritarian parents impose rigid rules and high standards, allowing little open dialogue.

When rules are broken, these parents utilize punitive, strict discipline with little explanation or emotional nurturing. While authoritarian parenting aims to produce obedient children, it can damage self-esteem, hinder social skills, and lead to behavioral problems.

### **What is the least strict parenting style?**

The least strict parenting style is the permissive parenting style. Parents who adopt this approach tend to be lenient and indulgent, often avoiding setting firm boundaries or enforcing rules.

Permissive parents are generally more responsive to their child's desires and less likely to exert authority, aiming to act more like a friend than a parental figure. While this style may create a relaxed home environment, it can sometimes lead to poor self-discipline.

### **What is the gentle parenting style?**

Gentle parenting is a child-centered approach emphasizing empathy, understanding, and emotional connection instead of punitive measures. Gentle parents build a solid emotional bond with their children, fostering a sense of security and well-being. These parents focus on understanding the underlying reasons for a child's behavior rather than simply reacting to the behavior itself.

In this style, discipline is not punishment or control but teaching and guidance. Parents use non-coercive methods to help their children understand the consequences of their actions, and they employ active listening, open dialogue, and mutual respect to solve problems

collaboratively. The goal is to equip children with the emotional tools needed to navigate challenges independently, now and in the future.

## **Why is parenting harder today?**

Parenting is considered harder today than in previous generations because many parents feel a shift in child-rearing practices. Most people learn parenting practices from their upbringing and as they navigate parenthood, which adds to the complexity. There is higher pressure to be the “perfect parent” nowadays. The prevalence of conflicting parenting advice online leaves parents confused and self-critical.

However, every generation believes they shoulder more parenting challenges than their predecessors. The “good old days” tend to be viewed through rose-colored glasses because of the lack of firsthand parenting experiences from one’s childhood.

In truth, parenting has always been hard regardless of the era.

## **At what age is parenting the hardest?**

Some parents feel that parenting is the hardest in infancy, while others think toddlerhood presents more difficulty. Similarly, some parents feel that pre-adolescence is the most challenging, while others consider teenage years the toughest.

There are different challenges at different stages of development. The perception can vary widely depending on factors such as the child’s temperament, the parent’s expectations, the parent-child relationship, and external circumstances such as financial stability or social support.

## **What is the nature vs nurture debate?**

The “nature vs. nurture” debate is a longstanding discussion in psychology, biology, and other disciplines about the relative contributions of genetic inheritance (nature) and environmental factors, including parenting styles (nurture), to child development.

One of the best ways to answer questions about the nature-nurture debate is to complete twin studies, especially with identical twins. A comprehensive study by the Queensland Brain Institute and the VU University of Amsterdam analyzed data from 14.5 million pairs of twins. The research has revealed that the environment shapes nearly half of an individual's behavior and personality traits.<sup>23</sup>

Parenting is one of the most impactful environmental factors children are exposed to since birth. Therefore, parenting style is vital in determining a child's future outcomes, which has been confirmed in decades of studies.

## **Final thoughts**

Understanding your parenting style isn't about getting into a cycle of guilt or shame. It's also not about striving for perfection. No parent is perfect, and parents are expected to exhibit different parenting styles in different situations.

Knowing your parenting choices can help you become the best parent you can be. Research consistently shows that authoritative parenting yields the most positive results. As you change toward the authoritative approach, the benefits to your child's behavior, well-being, and relationship with you will become evident over time.