

Family Transitions Coaching

Creating Balance, Resilience, & Fulfillment

Parenting Styles and Their Impact

By Ellen Neiley Ritter Ph.D.

Watching a young girl hit, kick, and call her mother names I never imagined a 6 year old knew, engaged in an (ultimately successful) attempt to get an extra dessert led to an enlightening luncheon conversation with a few friends last week. As parents ourselves, we had all dealt with incidents like this and had different opinions on how the mother should have handled the outbreak. As we talked, it turns out we represented the three most common parenting styles identified during the last 30 years of psychological research.

One end of our table clearly represented the Authoritarian parenting style, parents with clearly defined rules that they expected their children to follow without questioning or even discussion. Known as the strict parents, Authoritarian parents hold high expectations for their children and believe that parents are, and should be, in complete control. According to Diane Baumrind (1996), who developed the most widely used parenting style categories, these parents "shape, control and evaluate the behavior and attitudes of the child in accordance with a set of standards of conduct, usually an absolute standard . . . [which] values obedience as a virtue and favors punitive, forceful measures to curb self-will" (p. 890).

At the other end of the parenting continuum, exhibited by the young girl's mother as well as a friend at the other end of the table, are Permissive parents. Such parents place few, if any demands on their children, allowing children "complete freedom to make life decisions without referring to parents for advice . . ." (Hickman, Bartholomae, & McKenry, 2000, p. 42). Permissive parents allow the "child to regulate his own activities as much as possible, avoid the exercise of control" (Baumrind, 1966, p. 889). Such parent often view themselves as their child's friend or peer more than an authoritative guide.

Sitting in the middle of the table were the Authoritative or Democratic parents, an integration of the other two parenting styles. These parents have clear rules and expectations but also encouraging discussion and give-and-take, especially as their children get older and are able to take more responsibility for themselves. Democratic parents "remain receptive to the child's views but take responsibility for firmly guiding the child's actions, emphasizing reasoning, communication, and rational discussion in interactions that are friendly as well as tutorial and disciplinary" (Baumrind, 1996, p. 410).



No surprise that there are big differences in the ways we approach parenting – our culture, the situations in our lives, and even the way our parents raised us influence what we think is the right way to parent. What is surprising are the consistent findings about how these different styles of parenting impact our children's development. Having spent years studying parenting and resiliency, I knew that the way you parent can influence how your children do in school, relate to others, and whether or not they develop the personal strengths which help children

to thrive and be able to best deal with life's stresses. What seems to matter the most is the level of parental demandingness and parents being responsive to their children's changing needs.

Research shows that children raised by Democratic parents have higher self-esteem, do better in school, relate better to their peers in large part because they had greater self-confidence and self control. On the other hand, families with Authoritarian or Permissive parenting tend to have children who do less well in school, have lower self-efficacy, less self-control, and lower self-esteem, placing these children more at risk when dealing with life's adversities.

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Parenting Styles continued

So what about the woman and young girl who wanted ice cream even though she didn't eat her lunch? What lessons might she have learned during this encounter? Instead of learning self-control, patience, and the important lesson that there are consequences to our actions, she may have learned that she can get whatever she wants by being aggressive. She's also learned that her mother will not enforce rules of what is appropriate behavior, even though a six-year old isn't able to always make such a decision. Imagine the impact of this when she's with her friends or as she enters the teenage years or beyond.

Being a parent is one of the most difficult jobs in the world, in part because the demands of parenting change as our children grow. What may have worked with toddlers is not necessarily the best approach it when our children are growing, becoming more independent. As the research shows, a parenting style which balances parents' expectations and guidance with allowing the child to have more input can be the best for helping these children grow into happy, successful, resilient adults. And isn't that what parenting is all about?

Baumrind, D. (1966). Effects of authoritative parental control on children. *Child Development*, 37 (2), 887 – 907.

Baumrind, D. (1996). The discipline controversy revisited. *Family Relations*, 45 (4).

Hickman, G.P., Bartholomae, S. & McKenry, P.C. (2000) Influence of parenting styles on the adjustment and academic achievement of traditional college freshman. *Journal of College Student Development*, 41, 41 – 52.

This is the first of 3 articles in a series presenting this author's extensive research on families and resiliency. To receive Ellen Neiley Ritter, Ph.D.'s articles on the ***Importance of Resiliency*** and ***How to Help Your Family Become More Resilient***, sign up at on the Contact Page at www.familytransitionscoaching.com



Why Hire a Family Coach?

Families are the cornerstones of our lives and yet they don't come with an instructional manual that tells us how to deal with many of the stressors we experience. From conflicts over parenting our children or conflicts with our partner, to figuring out how to redefine ourselves once our children are grown, to having to now parent our aging parents, these issues can cause much pain and confusion.

Family coaches understand the unique dynamics of the family system and are committed to working with you or your family to help you better resolve those issues and create the life you want, for members of your family as well as for yourself. With its focus on your strengths and possibilities, coaching can help you to deal with these transitions with less stress, and much more fulfillment and peace.

Coaching can also help you transcend the self-imposed limits that often hold us back – the shoulds that drain our energy, or the "gremlin" voice in our head which makes us doubt that we can move forward, are good enough, etc. , encouraging you to bring out the highest and best in yourself.

If you're interested in determining whether coaching might help your family to deal with the transitions that all families go through and help you focus on the joys of being part of a family, consider signing up for a complimentary coaching session with one of our trained family coaches at www.familytransitionscoaching.com .