

What Kind Of Parent Are You?

Psychological research has identified two broad dimensions of parental behavior that influence greatly the development of children and their personalities. These parental factors, first noted by Diana Baumrind, have been labeled responsiveness and demandingness. The first dimension, responsiveness, includes the degree to which parents express affection toward their children along with the amount of attention they give to their children's needs. Thus, the responsiveness dimension is largely an estimate of parental "warmth". The second dimension, demandingness, refers to the parents' use of rules and the degree to which they expect good behavior from their children. It is largely a "control" factor. How much do parents seek to control their children's behavior? According to Diana Baumrind, the two dimensions of parental behavior described above combine to form four styles of parenting. Some parents are rated high on both warmth (the responsiveness dimension) and control (the demandingness dimension). These parents are called "authoritative" parents. A second group of parents is high on warmth but low on control. These parents are called "permissive" parents. A third group is rated low on warmth but high on control. These parents are called "authoritarian" parents. Finally, a relatively small group of parents is rated low on both warmth and control. These parents are called "uninvolved" parents. Each style of parenting is correlated with specific types of parental behaviors. And, each seems to have its own set of consequences for child development. Authoritative parents are warm and accepting of their children. They love their children and they show it. While they show affection for their children, authoritative parents also value discipline. They set limits for their children and expect their children to follow family rules. Their disciplinary practices usually include a good deal of reasoning and explanation both for the rules they set and for any punishment they may use. Permissive parents, like authoritative parents, are warm and affectionate toward their children. Indeed, they are likely to be very involved in their children's lives. However, because they often value creativity and self-expression in their children, permissive parents exert very little "control". They generally do not set standards of behavior for their children. They have very few, if any, family rules and often do not to enforce the rules they do set. Authoritarian parents have a more detached approach than either authoritative or permissive parents. It is fair to say that they are not child-centered parents. They do not openly demonstrate warmth and affection toward their children. They do not encourage their children to develop independence. For authoritarian parents absolute obedience is a key value. Thus, they do not explain rules or punishments. They are simply the parents and they must be obeyed. Authoritarian parents often resort to harsh forms of punishment to control their children's behavior. Uninvolved parents are simply indifferent toward their children. They do not show affection and make no real effort to monitor or control their children's behavior. In the extreme case, their parenting style shades into parental neglect. The four styles of parenting have predictable consequences for children. In general, the best outcomes are associated with authoritative parenting. The children of authoritative parents tend to be the friendliest and most socially competent of all four groups of children. They tend to develop self-confidence, independence, a sense of responsibility, and good self-control. They tend to work up to their potential in school. The children of permissive parents, in contrast, are not very achievement oriented. They are often viewed by adults as less mature than their age mates. They have lower impulse control and more difficulty handling everyday frustrations. Interestingly, children of permissive parents do not develop the independence and curiosity that their parents seem to value. Like children of permissive parents, the children of authoritarian parents tend to lack initiative and self-reliance. They are often underachievers in school. From the preschool years on, these children also tend to have relatively poor social skills. They are likely to be anxious or withdrawn when they are around adults. As you might expect, the worst developmental outcomes are associated with uninvolved parenting. Children of uninvolved parents tend to be unhappy, moody individuals. They are often socially incompetent and aggressive. In the teen years, they are at risk for delinquency and drug use. What kind of parent are you? If you want to be an effective parent, the lessons from psychological research are simple and compelling. It is not enough to simply love your children. You must openly express your affection for them. At the same time, you must set rules for them and their behavior. Children need both love and limits. When one of these is missing, children experience less than optimal development.

About the Author

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