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**Parenting by Design- Vol. 2**

**What is the Ideal Parenting Style?**

Having a game plan for parenting makes good sense. Granted, we cannot anticipate so much of the scenarios and issues that may surface. However, having a thoughtful strategy to cope with the parenting landscape is a good start.

First, let’s agree that there is no “ideal” parenting style. Depending on your child’s temperament and various learning challenges and/or behavioral difficulties, how you “parent” may need to remain flexible. That being said, there are three widely recognized styles of parenting- authoritarian, authoritative and permissive. Let’s go through each one to get a better understanding.

**Authoritarian**

Characteristics of an Authoritarian style of parenting include an adherence to strict rules that most likely have been determined by the parent(s). Following the rules, not allowing for special circumstances or an explanation of why a mistake was made would not happen in an authoritarian household. Much of the parenting energy is focused on rule-following, correcting mistakes and not too much emphasis on giving encouragement or praise for a job well done. Encouragement is in short supply, but rather an expectation on the parent(s) part, of perfection or something close to it. Chores tend to be assigned at an early age and they must be done. Punishment is usually used when the rules are broken. It could be physical punishment, being grounded (isolated from others) or taking away privileges and/or devices or treasured toys. When described this way, it may sound harsh. However, many children have been and are growing up with one or more of the primary caregivers using this method of parenting.

**Permissive**

A permissive style is quite different from the authoritarian model. There may be some rules, but they are treated like more of a suggestion than to be taken seriously. The idea tends to be that if I become “friends” with my child, he/she will confide in me, trust me and make good choices. When the child “gets into trouble”, there aren’t any consequences. The idea here is that the child, by experiencing the “natural consequences” of the action, will learn not to engage in that behavior again. Usually, chores are not assigned and the child has the freedom to come and go more freely than in an authoritarian household. Parents rely on the child to make good, responsible and right choices.

**Authoritative**

An authoritative style of parenting is characterized by a collaborative effort by parent(s) and child. Making decisions, creating rules, assigning chores and coming up with logical and fair consequences for misbehavior are discussed and agreed upon by all parties. (within reason of course). The child is encouraged rather than forced to comply with house rules. Generally, parents are in agreement on how to “parent”. Discipline is not punitive nor is it given in anger. When parents react with anger when deciding upon consequences, they are often not congruent with the offense. Having a clear head is needed in order to think about that. How this works is that collaboration leads to compromise which leads to cooperation, which leads to compliance. It’s a win-win for both sides!

**Key terms [Collaboration, Compromise, Cooperation, Compliance]**

Here’s some information in a different format to facilitate understanding of the different styles of parenting:

Authoritarian seems easier in the short term, no compromising made by parent,

assumption that parental authority is absolute, child cannot be trusted,

may result in child anxiety, higher risk for child abuse, higher risk of child

acting out (misbehavior) or acting in (depression)

Permissive seems easier in the short-term, child can be trusted to do the

“right” thing, inconsistency with rules may cause child to have

anxiety, child has a friend in the parent, higher incidence of

testing parents’ authority

Authoritative lots of discussion between parent(s) and children, compromise is used,

consistency w/rules, however, rules are subject to change when

necessary, collaborative and cooperative, mutual respect with parent

making ultimate decision.

Please keep in mind that sometimes a parent may make a mistake. Parenting requires making multiple decisions about a great number of things on a regular basis. After all, a parent is only a human being and human beings are flawed. As a parent, we need to be able to ask our children for forgiveness when necessary. Showing your child that you make mistakes is not a bad idea. Children will internalize that it is OK to make a mistake and not have to be perfect. Not measuring up is a common theme among children and adults of all ages. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to have greater self-acceptance and self-compassion? But I’m afraid that’s a topic for another article.

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