

Parenting Styles and Strategies

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Parents and Guardians,

Thank you for stopping by! There is so much to say about *parenting* and there are amazing resources available! My intent is to give you some guidelines – a few principles to think over and to incorporate into your family as they apply to your healthy practices in raising your children.

We are going to examine the following:

- **Three Styles of Parenting**
- **Tough Questions To Ask Yourself**
- **Six Strategies for Proactive Parenting**



Three Styles of Parenting

- **Three Styles of Parenting**

Although many parenting fads or practices have come and gone over the years, there are basically three styles of parenting that remain consistent in the literature. In briefly describing each one, I will also share the predicted outcomes of each. Of course, there can and will be exceptions regarding the outcomes because of individual differences and unique characteristics of every child.

1. Permissive Parenting

Permissive parenting is exactly what it implies. Child rearing is approached with a loose set of guidelines or rules. Or, at times, there are no rules in place. Children are either left to explore on their own and/or are encouraged to do so. Typically, there are very few, if any, direct consequences for inappropriate or acting-out behaviors. Frequently, parents defend their children's poor behaviors and/or rescue them when unpleasant outcomes are incurred or impact others in a negative way. Within permissive parenting is an underlying pervasive belief that *children thrive in freedom of choice and action and in the ability to discover their own way and potential.*

Probably Outcome: Children raised in permissive environments tend to be irresponsible. There is often a general lack of accountability for one's behaviors and children tend to have a strong sense of entitlement or hold an overly inflated sense of self-importance. As children mature, they can also be unmotivated and lack a desire or need to succeed. While their sense of creativity, wonder, and exploration may be strong, they typically are lacking the structure in how to apply those talents.

2. Authoritarian Parenting

Authoritarian parenting is just the opposite of permissive parenting. Its root word – *authority* – means to be in charge or in control. Child rearing is approached with specific rules, expectations, and guidelines, and with clear consequences if defined expectations are not met. Parents often tend to be quite rigid in their beliefs around what is acceptable or unacceptable behaviors and there is little or no negotiation or compromise with their children around set expectations. Within authoritarian parenting is the underlying pervasive belief that *parents know best and questioning their authority is viewed as disrespectful and defiant.*

Probable Outcome: Children raised in authoritarian environments tend to be rebellious. They typically have very low sense of self-esteem or self-worth feeling that they have not been able to measure up to the expectations or they have been told they are failures. While these children have a strong work ethic or excel in many areas of their lives, as they are maturing they frequently act out or become oppositional or defiant in their own environments. Children raised in overly strict, critical, or rigid homes are often deeply depressed and/or angry. Unable to express that anger in a safe environment, they begin to rebel against authority.

3. Authoritative Parenting

Although at first glance, authoritative parenting may seem like authoritarian parenting, it is quite different. The key ingredient to authoritative parenting is mutual respect. Parents respect their children and children respect their parents. However, unlike authoritarian parenting, it is not a respect that is demanded – it is one that is the result of mutual regard for one another. Child rearing is approached with expressed expectations and guidelines; however, it is couched in a compassionate and caring way. Although there are consequences in place for inappropriate and irresponsible behaviors, they too are delivered in a manner that is mindful of the child’s personhood, individuality, and stage of development. Within authoritative parenting, there is an underlying pervasive belief that *parents encourage open expression and communication within the home; compromise and negotiation are viewed as healthy tools in achieving a meaningful result while maintaining respect for one another’s roles.*

Probably Outcome: Children raised in authoritative environments tend to feel safe, respected, and loved. Although they have a strong work ethic and understand their choices have consequences, children reared in authoritative environments are not afraid of failure and see it as an opportunity to grow and learn. Because of their nurturing and caring environment, these children tend to have a strong sense of self-worth and they feel valued. Of course, these children are not perfect; however, because of the respectful approach modeled by parents, the children feel safe in communicating their problems and challenges to them.

With the style of parenting you find yourself most aligned, take some time and reflect on how it is working for you and for your children. Remember that although it may not always feel like it, parents and guardians are the most influential persons in their children’s lives, even as they become teens. It is never too late to change the way we parent.



Parents and Guardians Remain Influential

- **Tough Questions To Ask Ourselves**

How many of us actually thought about what kind of parents we wanted to be before becoming parents? How many of us read books or took parenting classes? How many of us really felt *equipped* to handle the job of parenting?

Over the years of working with parents and guardians, it was usually the case to find their parenting styles reflected one of the following patterns:

1. Parenting the same way we were parented.

Our parents and guardians were our examples for how to parent. They were our role models. Some parents do an extraordinary job; obviously, some do not. Sadly, many times individuals, even those who are aware that their parents or guardians' behaviors towards them were not healthy, repeat those same patterns. On the other hand, many parents glean from the positive healthy roles modeled by their parents and make conscientious attempts at replicating those nurturing behaviors into their parenting style. Whether we have had positive role models or we have experienced dysfunctional parenting, it is helpful to be aware of how those patterns are influencing our parenting style. We can make healthy adjustments where needed.

2. Parenting a different way than we were parented.

Many individuals make a deliberate effort to parent a different way than they were parented. Although there are many distinct reasons for this, usually parents feel that they want their children to have a different experience than they had. Of course, for individuals who were raised in highly dysfunctional families or toxic environments, choosing different more healthy ways of parenting is a commendable and constructive path to take. Other individuals often feel that their childhood experiences did not fully meet their individual needs, and thus, choose or follow other styles of parenting that are more attractive or more accommodating for them and their children.

3. Parenting our own way.

And lastly, there are many individuals who read, educate themselves, and become aware of a myriad of parenting beliefs, persuasions, and practices. As their children develop, parents adapt their style of parenting to suit the needs of each child and to accommodate the family as well. There may or may not be a predetermined plan of parenting and there may or may not be a deliberate attempt to include or exclude parenting practices from our childhoods.

Spend some time thinking about how these three patterns have influenced and currently influence your parenting. Get comfortable, grab some writing tools, and answer the following questions:

1. As I make parenting decisions or choices for my children, am I over-compensating for my needs that were not met as a child? If so, how? What do I need to change?
2. As I parent, am I favoring an *overly permissive* approach because of too much involvement in my childhood or in reaction to my own experiences with rigid parents? On the other hand, am I *overly authoritarian* because of my own chaotic childhood which was lacking in structure, protection, and provision of basic needs? What can I identify right now that I need to work on?
3. As I embrace a parenting practice or behavior, is this in my child's best interest or well-being or is it my best interest or my well-being? What evidence do I have that supports that what I am doing is in my child's best interest? Have I asked my child how he/she is feeling about what I am doing or not doing?
4. Am I being overly influenced by parenting fads, movements, or what my friends are doing instead of looking at what is best for my child and his/her unique characteristics and needs? What examples can I list that demonstrate I am on the right track?
5. Do I ever catch yourself saying, "Oh no....my mother/father (or guardian) said that...or did that! I promised myself I would never do that!" And then, do I change those patterns or do I repeat them? Identify areas of concern that still need attention and begin working on them.
6. What grade would I give myself as a parent/guardian? Why? What would make it higher? What grade would my children give me? Ask them and then calmly listen to them as they explain their reasons and feelings.

These are not easy questions to ask. However, parenting is the most important job we will ever have. It is important to take stock on a frequent basis of what we are doing and why. Keep the practices that are working and change those that are not. Children are incredibly resilient. We must be brave enough to trust that they can handle healthy change.



What Grade Would My Children Give Me?

- **Six Strategies For Proactive Parenting**

In the appendix of *Another Way*, there is a section dedicated to parents and guardians – *Offering Another Way To Parent*. Please take time to read it. Proactive Parenting is based on the principle that parents and guardians navigate their children’s development (from birth through young adulthood) with a vigilant commitment to their on-going well-being. Utilizing the parenting styles and methods that work best for your children, *proactive parents maintain an active involvement in their children’s lives and mindfully incorporate healthy means of communicating and interacting*.

Let’s take a look at Six Strategies For Proactive Parenting.

1. **Educate ourselves and stay informed.**

So many times over the years as a teacher and as a therapist, parents would often say, “Holli, I didn’t know it was this bad.” Or, “Holli, if only I had known.....” Whether it is with social issues such as bullying, sex, drugs, alcohol, social media, gangs, violence, etc., or whether it is with the policies at school, or sports clubs, or church groups, etc., we must educate ourselves and stay informed about what is going on in our children’s world.

- Read materials or information provided by schools, clubs, organizations, etc. Familiarize yourself with their policies and procedures.
- Take parenting classes or workshops.
- Attend meetings, open house/back to school night, parent conferences.
- Volunteer often, even as children get older. Serve on boards, chaperone dances or field trips, assist with clubs or groups, coach sports or help out with other performance interests.
- If something doesn’t feel right, ask questions and get answers. Talk with other parents or guardians.

2. **Do our homework.**

Before agreeing to anything or making a decision about where, when and with whom regarding our children, we must do our homework. When children are little, parents are usually very conscientious about this. Unfortunately, as they mature, many parents take a *hands off – minds off* approach. As they get older, the risks and dangers they face are more severe. It is so much easier to do the hard work up-front than to live with the heart-ache in the end.

- Take on the role of a compassionate version of Sherlock Holmes. Become a gentle but concerned investigator. Get all the details: who, what, when, where, why, and how long.
- If there is resistance when inquiring about a situation or person, there is probably a reason for it. Remind children that keeping them safe requires trust and transparency.
- When children are under-age, always confirm there is an adult in charge and make contact with that person. Again, get all the details.
- As children get older, their abilities of persuasion become finely tuned! Don’t give in just to be nice or be their friend. It is our job to be their parent – to be their first line of defense.
- Don’t be afraid to say *no*.

3. Communicate with our children.

We are living in a time where communication is incredibly easy and accessible. And yet, families are communicating less and less as technology fills its place.

- It is critical that we communicate with our children – face to face – with no technology. Make it a family ritual to communicate during meal times or after homework is done.
- Before bed time or during quiet time, talk face to face and one on one with each child. During this time, parents need to be subtle investigators, but we must also show our children that we want to listen to them. Ask them about their friends, classes they like or dislike, or a favorite movie or book. Ask them how they are feeling on a scale of 1 -10. And what they are feeling and why. Ask them what they need and how to be available for them.
- Just as many parents do when their children are younger, spend time with your growing children doing fun activities together. Whether it is a Father/Daughter night or Mom playing catch with her kids, use this time to communicate. Sometimes, the best conversations take place when children don't feel put on the spot.
- Also, remember that children, especially as they get older, are often reluctant to share their feelings – not wanting to disappoint or worry parents. Sometimes, they are feeling embarrassed or ashamed. If a pattern of communication is in place, children of any age are more like to share what is going on with them.



Communicate Face to Face

4. Get to know our children's real life neighborhood and their net neighborhood.

This parenting strategy blends in with #1 – Educate ourselves and stay informed. However, it is important to separate it out because typically parents and guardians are really good at knowing their children's real life and on-line friends when their children are younger, and then, they become less vigilant as their children mature. Remember, the more freedom you give your children, the more at-risk they are. And yes, we do need to give them independence and autonomy. And, we still have the right to keep them safe and to guide their course.

- Get to know our children’s friends, their boyfriends/girlfriends, and the parents/guardians of their friends. Know where they live and their contact information.
- Get to know where kids like to hang out – and why.
- This is really important. Parents must sit down with their children and learn where they spend time online! Absolutely get to know their net neighborhoods and who their online friends are.
- While spending time with our children in their net neighborhoods, check their online privacy settings, implement safety measures, and have a protective plan in place in case they ever feel as if they are in danger.

For more information on *kids and technology*, consider implementing additional strategies in [Cyber Bullying No More: Parenting A High Tech Generation](#) .



Know Children’s Net Neighborhoods

5. Monitor, supervise, and randomly check in on our children.

Over the years, many parents have asked me, “Holli, do I have the right to invade my children’s privacy?” Or, “I don’t think I should look at their lap top or phone, should I?” The answer is, “Yes, we have every right to protect our children; however, it is crucial that we do so while maintaining trust and respect with our children, especially as they get older.”

Parents and guardians, this is really important. Whether it is in their *real life or on-line life*, it is absolutely mandatory to communicate to our children ahead of time what parents expect of them and to let our children know how we will be monitoring and supervising them, or randomly checking in on those expectations.

- In our children’s *real life relationships and interests*, clearly communicate expectations to them *in advance*. Discuss curfew times, dating ages, boyfriends/girlfriends, at-risk behaviors, as well as places and activities that are off limits, etc. Most importantly, explain why these expectations are in place. Children respond well to adults who are open, honest, and genuine. Also, listen to them, answer their questions, and keep the dialogue respectful.

- As children mature and demonstrate responsibility, compromise and negotiate with them. And while it is important to validate our children’s positive choices and behaviors, it is also reasonable to have constructive consequences in place for irresponsible or unacceptable actions. However, parents who use their children’s misguided choices as opportunities for discussion, learning, and growth will go far in maintaining open communication with them.
- In our children’s *on-line lives and relationships*, it is mandatory to implement a [Family Online Safety Contract](#). This should begin when our children are very young and continued through high school. With this contract in place, our children have a clear understanding up front of their expectations for usage and safety and of our plans for monitoring and supervision.
- Just as in their real life experiences, as children mature and demonstrate responsibility, [Family Online Safety Contracts](#) can be adapted. And, if on-line behaviors become inappropriate or unsafe, contracts provide support to parents in amending their children’s on-line freedoms.

For more helpful parenting information, please visit the [Cyber Bullying Tab](#) at [Holli Kenley](#).

- Whether it is in our children’s *real life or on-line life*, if parents want to embrace a more Proactive Style of Parenting, it is never too late. However, it is important to communicate with our children about any new changes in our parenting. We must also be willing and ready to explain why we are taking on a more proactive role in their lives.

In closing, parents and guardians, contrary to what we often hear from outside sources as well as from our own children, we have the opportunity to be the most significant influence in our children’s lives. How we chose to parent them, how involved we decide to remain in their lives and for how long, and to what degree we maintain a vigilant commitment in support of their well-being – all of these factors will be a strong contributor to their safe navigation through the social dangers of our time and to their overall development.

Proactive Parenting isn’t about restricting our children’s freedom...

It’s about safe-guarding their lives and building trust as they experience what it means.

