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# “Ask the Shrink...”

*Response by Dr. David Swanson  
Psychologist*

**Question:** “Are there different types of parenting styles? And if so, what is the best approach for me to use with my child?”

K.W., Calabasas

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Dear, K.W.,

Indeed there are different parenting styles. The three most often referred to are the (1) Authoritative, (2) Authoritarian and (3) Permissive styles.

The **Authoritative Parent** can be firm and demanding of appropriate behavior on the part of their children. They can also be warm, rational and receptive. The Authoritative Parent places a value on verbal give and take but values discipline, self-reliance and uniqueness.

**The Result:** Children who are raised using this style of parenting tend to be independent, self-controlled and socially responsible. They are also exploitative and self-reliant.

The **Authoritarian Parent** exerts strict control and can be quite critical of the child’s behavior and attitudes. These parents possess ironclad rules and often rely on physical forms of punishment. The Authoritarian parent allows for very little verbal give and takes and often seems less warm and more emotionally detached.

**The Result:** Children who are raised using this style appear withdrawn and distrustful of others. They often seem discontent as well.

The **Permissive Parent** is non-controlling and non-demanding. This parent rarely gives a punishment or uses any power they may have. The Permissive Parent usually relies on reasoning to instill change in their child’s behavior and is often viewed by others as warm and accepting.

**The Result:** Children of the Permissive Parent are often seen as lacking in self-reliance. In addition, these children fail to learn boundaries observed by other children of their age and are perceived as lacking in self-control. Lastly, these children tend to lack exploitative tendencies.

*So what does all of this mean?* Although there are different styles of parenting, you need to act in accordance to what feels right in your heart. If not, your children will pick up on your reluctance and challenge your limit setting. In addition, fickleness on your part can lead to anxiety on your child’s part. Assuming you have your child’s best

interest at heart and have an ability to know when you may have made a mistake, you should trust your instincts. Children do need firm limits and boundaries and they do need to know that consequences are not only fair but predictable. Consequences born out of parental anger or frustration are never a good idea.

I often tell parents in my private practice that we should always strive to see the good in our children. Offering them praise and encouragement can go a long way towards building self-esteem. The only time we will need to be punitive in our parenting style is when our children are not acting appropriately. During these times, we should strive to set a limit and follow through with either praise for responding to the limit or a punitive consequence for failing to respond.

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