

Parenting styles

[Psychology](#), [Child Development](#)



Parenting Styles and Child Development Jason N. White What are we supposed to do? All of us spend our young lives educating ourselves in reading, writing, and arithmetic. As well, many of us spend our young adulthood in college learning to become doctors and lawyers. Yet, the most long lasting, and in many ways, most rewarding job some will ever have is raising strong, intelligent, and well-mannered children. As always, this is easier said than done. Generally, a parent wants their kids to be better than they were. As parents, we try hard not to make the mistakes our parents made. Before they are even born we have dreams of what they will do and who they will become. Couple with those dreams, parents have to make life-changing decisions before birth such as working or staying home, public school or home school, and permissive versus strict parenting. Of all the decisions made, the last will have the most critical impact on a child. Our attitudes toward raising children, the overall pattern of interactions, are what shape a child's behavior in their early years. In 1967, a researcher of Human Development, Diana Baumrind, developed a theory that provided a broad insight into parenting style by categorizing it in three ways. However, according to Nancy Darling, PhD, MS, there are two points to consider when understanding Baumrind's theory. One, parenting style is meant only to describe normal variations in parenting. Variations such as neglect or abuse are not considered within Baumrind's theory. Two, the theory of parenting style revolves around issues of control. There are many variations between parents on how, and to what extent, they exert control over their children; however, " it is assumed that the primary role of all parents is to influence, teach, and control their children."(Darling, 1999) Variations will be discussed

in more depth later. There are also two important elements to parenting styles. Baumrind terms these parental responsiveness and parental demandingness. Parental responsiveness is focused on parental support and warmth, to what extent that support is given, with intent to " foster individuality, self-regulation, and self-assertion" (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62). all the while remaining compliant to the child's special needs. Parental demandingness is simply behavioral control, or the parent's " disciplinary efforts". Originally, Baumrind had segregated parenting style into three basic categories: permissive, or indulgent, authoritarian, and authoritative. However, recently this has been revised to include uninvolved parents. These parents are low in both elements, responsiveness and demandingness; though, outside of any extreme cases, Darling states that these parents fall within the normal parameters. Being that Baumrind's theory precludes that the parents must be involved to fall within the categories, I cannot see the need for the last category, therefore it will not be discussed here. Briefly, I will discuss each of Baumrind's categories. Though these are important to understand, their effect on children are very important to note. First, indulgent parents " are more responsive than they are demanding. They are nontraditional and lenient, do not require mature behavior, allow considerable self-regulation, and avoid confrontation" (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62). Because these children are under regulated, due to the parent's avoidance to confrontation, they are rebellious and defiant when desires are challenged. They give up more readily when challenged. It is suggested that these children are prone to antisocial behavior. Authoritarian parents are " obedience- and status-oriented, and expect their orders to be

obeyed without explanation" (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62). A typical response from a parent of this type is, "because I said so." These children generally do well in school and are not likely to indulge in antisocial behavior. The price for that is poor reaction to frustration. Boys will be likely to become hostile and girls will simply give up. Many times these children are anxious and withdrawn. With a parent that controls by fear without explanation, it's easy to see how a child can become frustrated. The last, authoritative parents "monitor and impart clear standards for their children's conduct. They are assertive, but not intrusive and restrictive. Their disciplinary methods are supportive, rather than punitive. They want their children to be assertive as well as socially responsible, and self-regulated as well as cooperative" (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62). Both demanding yet responsive, these parent's children tend to fare better throughout childhood. Many adults are reluctant to give children any credit when it comes to reasoning ability and understanding the logic behind a parent's reaction. Because of this, they either refuse to explain, like the authoritarian, or simply avoid reacting at all, like the permissive. If the child sees control that is fair and reasonable, they are more likely to internalize it and comply. Parents who are consistent with their standards while being caring provide the child with a model of emotional self-regulation, emotional understanding, and social understanding. A parent who provides warmth and rationale make better use of disapproval because they have been caring utilizing praise when the child strives to meet expectations. Parents should make demands to fit the child's ability to take responsibility for their actions. Doing this the child learns that they are competent and can do things for themselves. This fosters high self-

esteem and emotional maturity. "How about children's styles?" (Goodman, 2001) A very interesting question. Certainly there is more to parenting than simply the parent and how they choose to raise their child. Parenting involves communication which means that the child's response to parenting is only one half of the equation. According to Doctors Goodman and Gurian, parenting is a dynamic, interactive situation, and children also have styles and temperaments that in turn affect their parent's styles and elicit different responses. Temperament is a child's preferred style of responding that is apparent as early as infancy. Researchers have defined three broad styles of temperament. There are easy children who are calm and happy and do not upset easily. Difficult children are fussy and easily upset. Generally a difficult child has strong reactions to new situations. Slow to warm up children are relatively inactive and fussy. They may react negatively to new situations, but become more positive with experience. Despite temperament, it's the "goodness of fit" (Goodman, 2001) between the mother and the caregiver that's important. The behavior of one influences the response of another. It is impossible to narrow down human interaction to a series of styles that involve one-way interaction. When we, as adults, speak to each other, it is a process that involves active, or inactive, listening and language with the intent to come to an understanding over whatever issue(s) are discussed. From birth children are able to communicate in some form, whether spoken or action, and those communications are responses based on the words, actions, or temperaments of their parents or the people around them. Though Baumrind's intent wasn't to oversimplify the parent/child interaction, there is certainly more to parenting than parent to child communication and

control. However, as is Baumrind's intent, parenting style is still an excellent indicator of child well-being across a wide array of social environments and diverse communities. In a study based on a larger project on family stress and children's development, Tiller was looking at the relationship between parenting styles and children's cognitive development. Current findings indicate that " parenting styles are not better predictors of children's cognitive ability than family socioeconomic-demographic characteristics."(Tiller, 2) In her finding she indicated the results of her study to be inconclusive due to the mixture of expected and unexpected results. Although I don't question the validity of the study, a question that should be raised concerns the parent's station in life. Wouldn't a family's socioeconomic-demographic characteristics help shape parenting styles? She admits the need for more research, including the need to study mothers and fathers separately. I think that we can agree that parents should be on the same sheet of music concerning their children, but the differences between two people are unavoidable. It is reasonable to assume that two different people will yield two, at least slightly different, parenting styles. Other factors that Tiller mentions as being effective toward child outcomes are parent's work, schedule and type, and the quality of the marriage. Another factor of note is the child's characteristics. I discussed earlier of Goodman and Gurian's article involving child temperament as a factor of parenting style. Tiller admits a possible flaw because the study focused on parents and not the children. " Perhaps, child characteristics, such as temperament and resiliency, are a more significant influence children's cognitive ability than parenting. To the point, though the study found no conclusive data that

showed parenting style as an indicator of a child's cognitive development, other findings caused other questions to surface. Though Tiller mentions only the possibility, I believe this statement to be true: " It could be that parenting style has a greater and more direct influence on other aspects of children's development such as social and emotional development rather than cognitive development."(Tiller, 12) To add, according to her, though cognitive development may not be directly effected, it " is mediated by other areas of development or even child characteristics."(Tiller, 12) I understand these other areas to involve parenting styles and child temperament. One last issue that needs to be addressed is parental development. Though research seems to be scarce, it is something that is recognized by many. A non-profit organization out of Minneapolis, Minnesota, called MELD, has a program involving parental development in the context of building a stronger society. Some colleges offer classes dealing with parental development. There is certainly room for study in this area. Parents change during their lives as well, and although the change isn't as significant as a child's, it still may have an effect on the child's development. Parent's may change jobs or actually experience what sociologists call upward mobility. As financial stability becomes less of a stressor, so does the parent's outlook. Trauma in a parent's life, such as loss, or even becoming handicapped, has a profound effect on the human psyche. That sort of emotional change is sure to have an effect on the child as well. The " mid-life crisis" is another possibility. Parent's can tend to be more self-centered during this time leaving a child wondering what their place is. Based on my limited searching, this is an area of development that has rarely been addressed. The knowledge gained from

this may help further our knowledge concerning parent/child relationships and child development. Baumrind's research provided excellent insight and a broad indicator of child well-being in terms of emotional development. Other research has suggested that parent-to-child modeling isn't the only factor. Good communication is accomplished by active interaction from both parent and child, so child temperament plays a significant role. In simple words, the behavior of one influences the responses of the other. Also, there seems to be the possibility that, though parenting style may not directly affect cognitive behavior, it may mediate it along with other factors. Lastly, parental development is an understudied aspect of child development. It seems to me that changes in a parent's life may influence their parenting style as well. Works Cited Baumrind, Diana. " The influence of parenting style on adolescent competence and substance abuse." *Journal of Early Adolescence* 11. 1 (1991): 56-95 Darling, Nancy, PhD. " Parenting Style and Its Correlates." *Practitioner. March 1999. Health.* 15 Nov. 2005. <http://www.athealth.com> Goodman, Robert, PhD. " Parenting Styles/ Children's Temperaments: The Match." *About Our Kids.* 21 Feb. 2001. NYU Child Study Center. 15 Nov. 2005. [www. aboutourkids. org](http://www.aboutourkids.org)