



Setting the Boundaries

Different parenting styles and the importance of giving our children security

When we have children, one of the last things we may think about is what style of parenting we want to adopt. Many of us just fall into a particular style of parenting without thinking about it, and sometimes we make it up as we go along, but that doesn't necessarily mean that it's right.

There are three main parenting styles to consider as we decide how to set those all-important boundaries, and for each of our children one method may be better than the other.



Authoritarian

Parents who are authoritarian know how to put their foot down. Typical comments to the children are "Just do it!" or "Never mind 'Why?'. It's because I said so." If this family were the army, these parents would be the sergeant majors. They expect their orders to be obeyed instantly and don't encourage discussion.

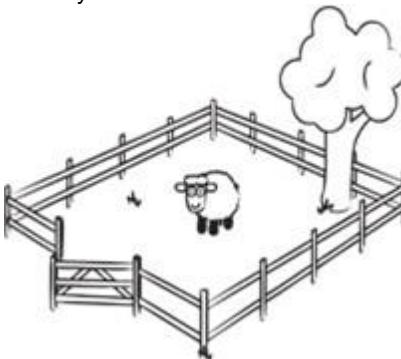
Permissive

These parents are, in some ways, the opposite of the authoritarian type. They do not like either setting or enforcing boundaries, and they back away from confrontation. They are often warm and accepting of their children, but rarely demand high standards in behaviour. If the child of an authoritarian parent left his chocolate wrappers and trainers on the floor in front of the television, they might expect to be yelled at. The child of permissive parents, however, would expect that their parents would probably clear it all up after them.



Authoritative

These parents believe that boundaries are important, but are careful not to back themselves into a corner over things that don't matter. They are unlikely to hit the roof over minor issues, but on the other hand they will be very firm over things like curfews or homework. They take time to explain why the rules they set are important and are prepared to listen to an opposing view. Their children are encouraged to be independent, and know that they are accepted and loved, but equally know that Mum and Dad are not an easy touch.



Most people would agree that authoritative is the most effective style of parenting, so let's spend a little more time on it. With the authoritative parent, the child knows that they are loved and affirmed. They often hear the parent say, "I love you" or "Well done". Even if the child is testing, the parent looks for ways that they can affirm them. In short, the child is secure in the knowledge that although their parent has wishes for them, perhaps in terms of behaviour or achievement, they are loved unconditionally.

In the home, there are as few rules as possible, but the child knows that the ones



that are in place matter and that breaches of them have consequences. Many of the rules have been agreed between the family members. With this style of parenting, even though your children's characteristics and personalities may be different, try to keep the rules and style similar or it may cause problems between siblings further on down the line.

A matter of security

Every parent will have their own views on discipline, but enforcing the rules is not just about discipline; it is a matter of security. There is no faster way to breed insecurity in a child than for them to believe there are no boundaries – and that even if there are, nobody cares if they are crossed.

A blind man was walking along a long hospital corridor. He was tapping his white stick against the wall at the side of him. After a while he stopped tapping – he knew where the wall was. But when he had gone almost the whole length of the corridor, he reached out with his stick again and tapped it against the wall a few more times. He needed to test that the wall was still there – test where the boundaries were. Our children, too, will test the boundaries – push against them every now and then to check that they are still there. They will actually feel more secure knowing that they are in place.

It is often exhausting, frustrating, and sometimes needs a great deal of persistence and patience, but teaching our kids that boundaries matter is one of the major jobs of every parent.



Care for the Family's aim is to promote strong family relationships and to help those who face family difficulties.

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