Managing Differences in Parenting Styles

The Four Parenting Styles

Parenting style has two main components. One is the degree of control a parent attempts to exert over the child. The other is the amount of warmth and affection a parent shows. Researchers often divide parenting style into four categories. Those types, and how each might handle a child having a tantrum, follow:

**Authoritarian**
An authoritarian parent might respond to a child having a tantrum with punishment or yelling. They would not likely wish to understand why the child had the tantrum or address the child’s feelings about it.

**Authoritative**
An authoritative parent might respond to a tantrum by setting clear boundaries about what is and is not acceptable. They may then remove the child from the situation that triggered the tantrum and discuss the child’s intense emotions.

**Permissive**
These parents show plenty of love and affection but enforce few boundaries. A permissive parent might not respond to a tantrum at all or by giving the child the thing that sparked the tantrum in the first place.

**Uninvolved**
Neglectful parents don’t enforce clear rules. They may display little or no interest in the child. An uninvolved parent might not notice a tantrum or be somewhere else when a tantrum occurs.

Conflicts Over Parenting Styles

At some point most couples are going to differ on how to approach parenting. At times, one parent might think the other is too harsh. Other times, they might think they are being too lenient. Several factors influence the ways in which we parent, including our own upbringing, family structure, ethnic and cultural background, temperament, and our individual parenting skills and knowledge.

When parenting styles clash, children get inconsistent messages from their parents, which can cause confusion in children about how to act and what to expect in response to their behavior. Differences in parenting style may also increase conflict in a relationship, but it is possible for parents to get along and send a consistent message to children even when their styles conflict. In fact, different parenting styles can even complement one another.
How Conflicting Parenting Styles Can Affect a Relationship

Any difference in parenting style can lead to conflict. Even two parents who share a similar style may argue. For instance, two authoritative parents may agree on the importance of rules and affection. But they may disagree about what this means. Are time-outs acceptable? At what points should a child be rewarded or punished? Which behaviors are forbidden?

Significant differences in parenting style can be even more challenging. Some common clashes include:

**Authoritarian vs. Authoritative**

These parents may disagree about how much affection to give. They may argue over whether to punish a child, when, and how severe the punishment should be. These parents may also disagree about whether to give rewards for good behavior.

**Authoritative vs. Permissive**

Permissive and authoritative parents may agree about the need for love and affection, but may have strong disagreements about which rules to enforce and how to enforce them.

**Authoritarian vs. Permissive**

Authoritarian and permissive parents may disagree over when and whether to punish children. Permissive parents might even view authoritarian parents as abusive. Meanwhile, authoritarian parents may see permissive parents as neglectful.

**Tips for Getting Along When Parenting Styles Differ**

Parenting can be exhausting and emotionally intense work. Some people derive much of their self-image from their role as parents or from their child’s behavior. When parents disagree, they may feel angry or misunderstood. Arguments can make it difficult to present a united front. They may even lead to problem behavior in children. A few strategies may help:

- **Explore how your parenting styles complement each other.** For example, a permissive parent may help an authoritarian parent be more affectionate. Meanwhile, an authoritarian parent may support a permissive parent in setting boundaries.

- **Don’t undermine one another.** Parents must present a united front. Unless a child is in danger, it is best to discuss conflicts later. Support your partner’s parenting decisions even when they are not ones you would have made.

- **Learn about parenting together.** Read parenting books, join a parenting support group, and/or attend a therapy session together, selecting parenting experts you both trust.

- **Develop a set of family rules on which everyone can agree.** For example, two parents might agree that spanking is never acceptable. They may decide children must lose privileges or face another penalty if they hit others.

**LET US HELP!**

We can provide one-on-one support, and we also offer parenting workshops. Scan the code to the right or go to [bit.ly/ccafamilies](http://bit.ly/ccafamilies) to get in touch!