

## Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

# What is your Parenting Style?



BY KIM DeMARCHI

Most parents use one of three common parenting styles, or perhaps a blend. What form of discipline do you most often use and is it effective? More than just being effective with

behavior, is it effective in building the kind of relationship you want with your children? The three parenting styles are: autocratic, permissive, and democratic.

**Autocratic:**

- Excessive control
- Order without freedom
- No choices
- “You do it because I said so.”

**Permissive:**

- No limits
- Freedom without order
- Unlimited choices
- “You can do anything you want.”

**Democratic:**

- Kindness and firmness at the same time
- Freedom with order
- Limited choices
- “You can choose within limits that show respect for all.”

Autocratic parents use force as the discipline tool to manipulate their children to do what they want. Force includes: guilt, threats, punishment, grounding, spanking, sarcasm, criticism, intimidation, humiliation, withdrawal of love, commands, and bribes. These forms of force motivate through fear. Using fear as a motivator causes children to protect themselves by lying or blaming others. The child's behavior is controlled by an outside force, rather than by the child's own sense of what is right or wrong. I'm sure there are some readers who

are saying to themselves, “But it works! My child stops doing what I want!” I absolutely agree with you that it “works”, but for the moment. It's effectiveness for the long haul is what I encourage all parents to contemplate.

On the flip side of autocratic parents, permissive parents give a tremendous amount of freedom... too much freedom. There aren't boundaries, limits, curfews, dress codes, chores or expectations. Permissive parents have a very difficult time setting clear limits and will avoid conflict at all costs. They want to be the fun, cool, liked parent. Permissive parenting may take the form of not caring about a child's grades, or who her friends are, or where she is, or what time she gets home. Despite the fact that permissive parents love and care about their children very much, this approach actually makes the child feel like you don't care. As a result, many seek care, concern and attention from their peers, when really what they want is to know you care by setting some limits and guiding them. Being permissive and indulgent with children often times causes them to disrespect the parents over time, and eventually leads to bigger problems.

If not autocratic, and not permissive, then what? Democratic! This approach is most definitely the most time consuming and requires the most effort, but the most rewarding for both children and parents. Democratic parenting is both kind and firm... kind out of respect for the child, firm out of respect for the parent. Kindness is not seen in autocratic parenting and firmness is not seen in permissive parenting. Mutual respect is a major part of democratic parenting. You seek to understand rather than judge. You

love unconditionally. You motivate children by paying attention to feelings, needs, and wants. You help the child learn self responsibility, and to listen to their inner moral compass.

Democratic is the sweet spot between autocratic and permissive parenting. It's having high expectations and limits, combined with warmth and support. Parents with this style help their children learn to be responsible for themselves and to think about the consequences of their behavior. With this style, you tend to provide clear, reasonable expectations and check to make sure your child follows through. Democratic parenting focuses on positive encouragement and appropriate expectations for the child. This discipline style recognizes that children are equal to their parents. Not in sameness of intellect or experience, but in their value as a human being. Children should be treated with respect and parents balance their freedom with responsibilities. This is accomplished by setting limits, providing choices within those limits, employing kind, but firm discipline and focusing on solutions, not punishment and rewards. It IS possible to be both firm and kind!



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