

Finding Your Parenting Style

- *Am I being too strict with my kids?
Or do I let them get away with too much?*
- *Should I be less protective of my son?
Or will he get hurt if I don't keep a firm grip on him?*



These are very real questions to most new parents. Even many experienced parents never feel completely comfortable about how they are raising their children.

Part of the reason for this discomfort is that parenting styles are in a state of fluctuation. Today, parents may raise their own children one way, but see and hear about many other approaches in the homes of friends, on TV, in books and magazines, and in classrooms and parent groups.

No wonder many parents are confused.

A two-sided story

Children can and do thrive under many different styles of parenting. The choice of an effective style is not a matter of "either/or," but of finding a comfortable balance.

One of the concerns many parents have, for example, is whether to take a permissive or protective approach toward raising their children. Actually, you should do both.

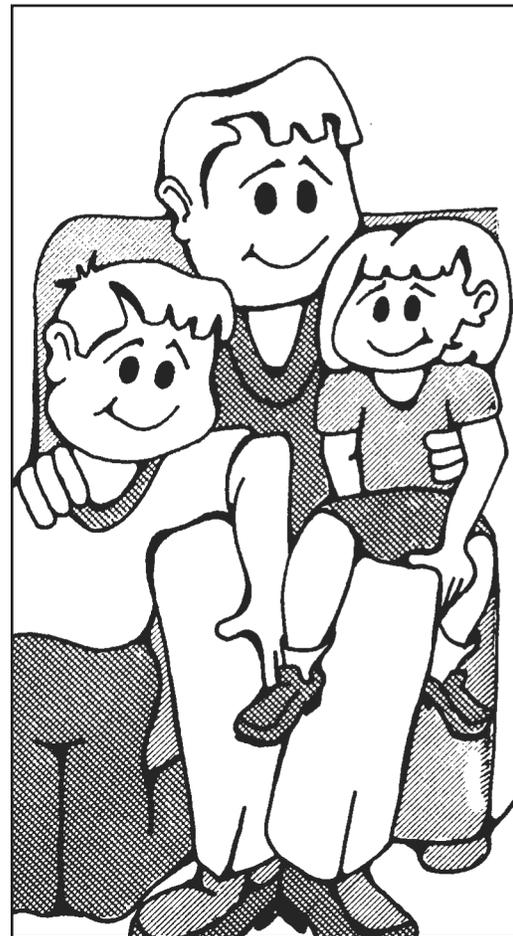
On the one hand, children need freedom. They need to be permitted to:

- Explore the world
- Use their senses
- Move about freely
- Make mistakes

Opportunities like these give children room to grow and develop.

And on the other hand, children need limits. They want:

- Guidance
- Advice
- Responsibility
- Routine



By protecting your children from hurting themselves and others, you help them feel secure. But too much of a good thing can be harmful.

Too much freedom overwhelms children. When parents let children do anything they want, children feel abandoned. They think that their parents don't care about them. Such indulged children often become self-centered and demanding, and have trouble getting along with other people.

Too many limits smother children. Parents who do everything for their children interfere with their growth. If children never learn how to take care of themselves, they are more likely to get hurt when their parents are not around. Overprotected children can become passive, dependent, and even resentful and hostile.

In other words, freedom does not mean license, and protection does not mean imprisonment.

H E L P I N G • C H I L D R E N • G R O W

Between the extremes



How you raise your children will depend on you, your children, and the situation. Some parents feel comfortable with parenting styles that others find too tight or loose. Some children can handle more freedom and responsibility than others. And some situations need more control than others.

There are few absolutes when it comes to parenting styles, just these general guidelines:

- Give your children permission to grow and protection from harm.
- Stay away from extremes of overprotection and overpermissiveness.
- Strike a balance that is comfortable for you and your child.

Just where you are between the extremes is not so important. What is important is that your style of parenting be reasonable and motivated by love and respect for your child. Between the extremes are approaches that make room for both your sanity and your child's growth.

Finding your balance

Steering a clear course between being too indulgent and too restrictive is usually a matter of common sense. Each situation below describes one approach that is clearly too permissive, one that is too protective, and one that strikes a balance between the two extremes.

Your 3-year-old sometimes gets hungry between meals.

- *Too protective:* Under no circumstances can she eat between meals.
- *Too permissive:* You let her help herself to anything, any time.
- *A balanced approach:* You make a special box of cheese, fruits, and vegetables she can help herself to when she gets hungry.

Your 5-year-old wants to choose his own clothes and dress himself for school.

- *Too protective:* You choose his clothes and dress him to save time and make sure he gets everything on right.
- *Too permissive:* You let him wear anything he wants, even if it's very inappropriate, and leave him to dress himself, even if his shirt is inside out and his shoes are on the wrong feet.

- *A balanced approach:* You give him a choice of two or three items each day and leave time for him to dress himself, standing by to help if he wants it.

Your 3-year-old starts to quarrel with his best friend.

- *Too protective:* At the first sign of disagreement, you intervene, separate the children, and send the friend home.
- *Too permissive:* You leave them to solve things themselves, even when it turns into a fistfight in which one child is clearly the loser.
- *A balanced approach:* When you hear the children arguing, you stand by to see if they can resolve their disagreement without force. If they start hitting each other, you put a stop to their fighting and help them talk things out.

Your 5-year-old hates to go to bed.

- *Too protective:* You insist on lights out at 7:00 p.m. every night.
- *Too permissive:* You let her go to bed whenever she wants. You usually end up carrying her to bed every night.
- *A balanced approach:* You set a regular bedtime when she must go to her room. If she isn't sleepy, she can look at books in bed for a while, but she must stay there.

Your 3-year-old wants to go on the playground equipment by himself.

- *Too protective:* You don't let him on any equipment for fear he might hurt himself.
- *Too permissive:* You let him go to the playground by himself and go on anything he wants.
- *A balanced approach:* You always accompany him to the playground but let him go on anything that he can manage. You watch in case he runs into trouble.

Your 9-month-old is at a stage where she is into everything.

- *Too protective:* You keep her in a playpen all the time.
- *Too permissive:* You let her crawl around everywhere on her own.
- *A balanced approach:* You remove breakable and dangerous items from certain areas of your home and let her crawl there, keeping an eye out just in case.

Reprinted from a University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service publication and adapted for use in Oregon by Cindee M. Bailey, former Extension child development specialist, Oregon State University.

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