

# What kind of parent are you?

Parenting styles are as unique as the people behind them. We've all recognized the differences between ourselves and our friends. And we've all observed just how different one person's home life can be compared to another.

The truth is that just as our personalities are diverse, so are our parenting styles. Some parents are more laid-back than others. Some are passionate about sporting activities, while others encourage creative pursuits. For some, self-discipline comes relatively easily, and for others, getting dinner on the table is a major achievement! Often parenting requires us to develop a whole range of new skills.

No-one ever had a child simply because they wanted to put a career on hold and do more housework, did they? But the reality is that our priorities do change after children and, with the busy lives we lead, we tend to adopt a "default" parenting position. We just hope our styles are productive and nurturing – yet so often we surprise (or disappoint) ourselves.

But no matter who we are, or what the personalities of our children are like, there are some distinct parenting styles that tend to emerge, and there are guidelines we can all learn from.

## What's my style?

It's been said that when you set out to parent, you base your approach on either giving your children every opportunity you had, or every opportunity you didn't have- two approaches that seem simple, but actually have profound consequences.

In her book, *Raising Girls*, Gisela Preuschoff suggests a series of questions to ask yourself to explore how you feel about having (and raising) a child.

Some of them include:

- Which qualities do you like in girls/boys?
- Which qualities do you like in your child?
- What do you wish for your daughter/son?
- What aspects of his/her life are you happy about?
- How do you feel about the way you were parented?
- What would you do differently?

The answers help us to see how we are affected by our own experiences, and how the culture we know infuses us with values, attitudes and beliefs. A lot of

our ideas have been with us for so long, we've forgotten where they came from. Another factor is the impact that your own birth order can have on your parenting. In his book "Why first borns rule the world and last borns want to change it," Michael Grose dedicated a chapter to the topic. He says there tends to be three styles: authoritarian, permissive and democratic (authoritative).

### Authoritarian parenting tends to be:

- High in rules and routine
- Low in consultation & choice
- Inflexible
- High in criticism
- Low in 'training' the child

Possible outcomes of this style include:

- Children obey the rules, but can become dispirited, inviting more rebelliousness or resistance in the adolescent/teenager years.
- Children can reject parental values if they are too rigid.

### Permissive parenting tends to be:

- Low in rules and routine
- Low in consultation
- High standards, & a 'warm' approach
- High in praise
- Low in 'training' the child
- Leads to 'friendship' with their children

Possible outcomes of this style include:

- Children may lack the security that limits provide. They don't develop self-control.
- Children may not respect adults and have little regard for rules.
- May lead children to be manipulative, or have a selfish attitude to life.

### Democratic (authoritative) parenting tends to be:

- High in rules, but flexible in execution
- High in consultation & choice
- High in standards
- High in warmth
- High in training & teaching
- High in encouragement

Possible outcomes of this style include:

- Self-esteem is developed through clearly defined limits and warm relationships.
- Children tend to show more of an interest in parents' and family values.
- They tend to fit in better at school and are often less affected by peer pressure.
- As teenagers they tend to have stronger relationships with their parents.
- They develop a strong sense of self-discipline and self-control.

### Which generation are you?

We've all come across the term 'generation gap' and we've probably also heard media discussion saying that children are growing up faster today; that 40 is the 'new' 30; and that parents now have different expectations when it comes to work and family life.

Baby- Boomers and members of Generation X,Y, and Z, have differing cultural expectations of parenthood. The generation you're a part of, the childhood you had, and the way you were parented, can influence your own parenting style.

My husband and I were parented by Baby-Boomers. Post-war/1960s Australia (when the baby – boomers were growing up) was a lot different to the Australia I knew in the 70s and 80s. And those decades were significantly different to the life our children are experiencing now.

Michael Grose says that Generation X parents tend to be concerned about a range of issues. They want to be the best parents possible, make sure their children are always safe, give their children the best start in life and, as a result, are continually assessing their 'performance' as a parent, rather than simply enjoying the pleasure of parenting.

The concerns we have (or don't have) influence the parenting style we adopt. For Baby-Boomers, the issues were different – roles tended to be more traditional, then women started sustaining their careers; separations and divorce became more acceptable ; work-place arrangements were less flexible- but no less important.

There may not have been the 'internet' when I was growing up, but the world was increasingly global, and that created expectations for me as a young person.

My children have grown up with websites, after-school activities, pre-school and regular café outings. Why? Because they're available, we think it's important, and we're trying to strike a balance as a family- and this is the 2006 world we know. In a way, we can't help it.

### We're doing our best!

The families we create, the parents we become, the lives we lead, are factors that create a unique design for us. Hopefully it increases the likelihood of a positive result! We want to look back and say that we really did our best, and we truly enjoyed helping our children grow up to become well- adjusted, intelligent, inspiring adults.

### Good Parenting isn't easy.

Good parenting techniques often reflect on the health of our families. In her book *Change*, Alison Haynes says that there are characteristics in happy families (note: they're not perfect, they're happy!) that keep coming up. The list of 'Healthy Family Ingredients' includes:

- Good communication
- Appreciate each other
- They express affection
- Parents guide and limit their children's behaviour
- Parents love, respect and support each other
- They limit television time
- Happy families have their own values, beliefs and rituals
- They have fun and spend time together regularly

You can add to this list a point made by Michael Grose that it's important to "communicate to children that they belong in their family unconditionally, rather than as a result of the attributes they have." They may be good at sport, they may remember to clean their room- but that's not why you love them. You love them because they are yours. If they forget to do something, or display inappropriate behaviour, we don't want them to think: "I'm not good enough as I am"; we want them to realize they are always loved. Sometimes I say to my kids: "It's really hard being 6(or 4), isn't it? Then when I don't know what to do in a situation I say: "It's really hard being 33". They think that's pretty funny, and it makes me feel better because I often don't have the answer on the spot; I need time to consider it. I don't think there's anything wrong with children knowing that grown-ups are learning new things every day, too!

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