

Co-Parenting for Domestic Violence
Class Thirty-one,
Parenting Styles and How They Help or Hinder

by Yvonne Sinclair

We learn to parent in our family of origin where we grew up. Sometimes we are happy with our childhood and how we were parented and sometimes we hated it. If you were someone who hated your parent's style of parenting, you may have told yourself you would not "do" that to your children. When the chips are down, if you have not given yourself other options or tools, you will revert to the same methods your parents used. This happens because that is all you know.

This class will offer new effective parenting tools. The tools are nurturing and teach your child instead of punishing. As co-parents it would be wonderful if you parented just the same, with the same rules and structure. That dynamic is extremely rare, however.

You may have implemented different parenting styles while living together and now that you are apart those differences are most likely enhanced. Your child/children will be the ones who have to adjust to the different rules, structure, and routine in each household.

I once heard a story of divorce that told of the children staying in the house, both parents getting their own homes/apartment, and the parents were the ones to shuffle back and forth. Not very practical, but the parents are the ones who want to leave. The children are not to blame, so why are they the ones to do the shuffling back and forth from one home to the other? Whatever you can do to ease this stress will assist your child in adjusting. Criticizing the other parent's style, routine, or patterns will not help your child become secure.

I sometimes suggest an imaginary, or real if you wish, hat for each house. So when the child walks through the door of Dad's house they, figuratively, put on "Dad's house hat." The same is then true at Mom's house.

When step parents are introduced a whole new set of issues usually appear. Words like "you're not my Mom/Dad" are common. Parents need to chill with this and calmly advise the child that the step parent is the "Mom/Dad" in that household. Keep communication lines open, allow expression of feelings that is appropriate, and give your child a little time and space. Do not allow abusive statements or behaviors.

Let's review some different parenting styles. We are going to list them into three categories.

Democratic

Authoritarian

Permissive

“Permissive” parenting permits the child to be in charge of themselves. The child does not feel “free” but fearful. The child is without security. Even if the parent sets limits they give in to the child's whims and wishes. Parents are afraid if they discipline the child will not love them. Parents in this situation are often still overly involved with their parents. The parent may actually rely on a grandparent to discipline their child. Permissiveness often is alternated with efforts to be authoritarian. Parents become overwhelmed, feel out of control, and have outbursts of anger. Permissive parents often present no values or standards of conduct for the child to follow.

“Democratic” parenting helps the child develop a control of their own. This control is in place even if the external parent control is not present at the time. Limits are enforced by parents only as family guideline, and the child has a say about the limits. There is communication and discussion. All family members have responsibilities and are given age appropriate chores. Chores that everyone hates are rotated among all family members. Parents act as leaders or guides, not dictators. Change is seen as enriching and is not threatening. All family members are of equal importance to the family's happiness and all feel mutually respected. Person, belongings, and space are respected.

“Authoritarian” parenting constantly monitors the outside limits they oppose on the child. The child's need is low priority. Children are seen not heard. Parents have a tendency to distrust each other and do not display a healthy level of respect for each other. The children are treated in the same manner. One parent, often the father, is the absolute final word and authority. “Wait until your father gets home,” is often heard. There is no questioning his decision. Children obey the rules while they are seen, but often ignore them when parents are out of sight. Rules are rigid and arbitrary, there is not a consistency. Rules are often attached to moral issues. “I'm your mother, how could you do this to me?” Parents and usually the children look at the world as a frightening place and expect the worst at all times.

What type of parent have you been? The Authoritarian and Permissive parenting styles do not give the child the security and feeling of love and nurturing that is best. If one of those has been your style, take steps to move into the Democratic parenting style.

The more secure the child will feel the less behavioral problem you will encounter. Misbehaving is often the way a child solves a problem they are facing. For instance, saying “I hate you” solves the problem of needing to listen to what you say, or pay attention to what you want them to do, or change their behavior. If they hate you...no need for more-done!

As parents we play a lot of roles. We are commander in chief, taxi driver, nutrition expert, cook, dog/cat caretaker, fashion consultant, soccer/karate/gymnastics support, consoler, nurse, listener, teacher, and on and on. The way we address and carry out the roles will either help or hinder the child. If the commander in chief is over controlling and demanding it will be a negative experience for the child. If the consoler treats the child as if he should not take his own feelings seriously, damage will be done. Instead of teaching have you been a know-it-all?

Later in the course we will discuss communication styles that keep the doors open and some that help you avoid the power struggles. As a co-parent it may be unnerving to try on a new parenting style. You may be afraid of being criticized or belittled for trying a new way.

During the time of separation and getting settled into a different routine, your child will need support, structure, and security. This is a time when the best manipulative behavior will exhibit itself, so be ready with comebacks to put the child in a secure place. “Mom lets me do that,” can be answered with, “whose house hat do you have on now?” instead of “I don’t give a **0%#@ what your Mom lets you do!”

Children have a tendency to push and push and push to see if you are still there. So if the same consequences happen for the same behavior, each and every time, the child gains a feeling of security. Sometimes the misbehavior is a way of saying “I need more of you, I need a hug, and I need you to spend 10 minutes twice a day just with me.” Give a hug a try instead of a holler.

Logical Consequences for Misbehaviors.

I would like to discuss some ways to deal with your child’s misbehaviors that would be in the democratic style of parenting.

1. Child does not come to meal when called.

If a toddler, matter-of-factly bring him/her to the table to eat. If a tantrum happens, remove the child to a safe place. With a preschooler set a timer for time out. One minute per year is a good rule. And time out does not start until it is quiet. If he/she is not at the table she is not served. Meal is left on the plate (refrigerated if necessary) and offered when child states they are hungry.

2. Does not pick up toys when asked.

Next activity is delayed until toys are picked up. The younger the child the smaller the task needs to be. Parents can help with smaller child or suggest one step at a time.

3. Demands attention.

Adult ignores and leaves the room.

4. Causes a disturbance while shopping.

Parent and child leave the store, and child is not taken on next shopping trip. Child gets to try again on the second trip to a store.

Use your imagination and create the logical consequences for any situation.

Remember you cannot make your child do anything, so make it uncomfortable for them not to do as you wish.

Active Ignoring

One method of discipline that usually works to eliminate unwanted behaviors is to ignore the behavior. When you use “active ignoring” it is as if the behavior did not and is not happening. It is not mentioned before, after, or during. No comments, such as, “now wasn’t that better?” are ever made. Your facial and body language must match the fact you are not acknowledging the behavior.

Pick a behavior you would like to eliminate. Focus on telling yourself to relax, have no eye contact with your child, do not smile at them, speak to them, or touch them.

Know the behavior may increase for a while as they try to pull you back into your old responses. If the behavior becomes an abuse, consequences must be given. When you succeed give yourself praise and a reward.

Barbara Rowley has created a list of “quicky rules” that work great. Give them a try and see if they will work for you. They work better for younger children than adolescents.

1. You can’t be in the room when I am working, unless you are working too. The goal of the quirky rule is to get your child to help or stop bugging you while you do chores.

2. I don’t work past 8 pm. This is a long shot with older children, but they are told the US department of labor has a new law that parents cannot work past 8 pm. All bathing, story ready, water drinking, snuggle time must be complete by then. The goal for this one is to ease the regular bedtime wars.

3. You get what you get and you don’t throw a fit. The goal of this quirky rule is to eliminate the repeated please, please, please when the child is told no.

4. Take that show on the road. The goal of this one is to create peace and quiet. For the irrational and long-winded whining jags – the statement, “I am ready to listen when you are ready to talk,” is said just before the parent leaves the room.

5. We don't argue about money. The goal here is to short-circuit begging and pleading for stuff. It works both ways though, when your child wants to spend their own money, you are then not to lecture on potential mistakes and give advice.

6. I can't understand you when you speak like that. Stopping whining, screaming, and rudeness is the goal here.

7. There's no such thing as boredom. The goal is to prevent your child from saying "I'm bored," and teach him/her to entertain themselves.

Democratic parenting works much more efficiently, you work less hard, and get better results. Give it a try.

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