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Parenting styles : what do parents really know?

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Parenting Styles: What do parents really know?

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Abstract

Through this project I have enlightened parents on the four classified parenting styles. I have found that there is a wealth of information on parenting styles in the United States, China, and Europe; yet it is not a well known subject.

Throughout this paper there are examples, benefits, and disadvantages of the different parenting styles. Fifteen parents attending Sunny Sky's Children's Center completed a survey pertaining to their knowledge of effective parenting and parenting styles. As an action towards this project and at the request of parents participating, I prepared a packet of information on the subject of parenting styles. Included in this packet are characteristics, benefits and disadvantages of each parenting style.

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Parenting Styles: What do parents really know?

Setting The Stage

You are the teacher of a fifth grade class. There is one child who is socially withdrawn and seems to be having a lot of problems connecting with his peers. Across the room is another child who is very confident in everything that he does and is considered to be fairly popular with his peers. The child who is withdrawn is having academic problems and gives up easily. In contrast, the socially competent child seems to grasp new concepts with ease.

A few weeks later on a Monday morning, you hear your students talking about their previous weekend. The child who seems to have everything going for him is complaining because his parents would not allow him to stay out past 8:00 p.m. on a school night, he is frustrated because he feels as though his friends have a lot more leniency when it comes to curfews. The other child is not necessarily bragging but telling the children around him that he had no curfew, could go where ever he pleases and without checking in. He also adds that his mom is never home and when she is, she seems to be preoccupied with her own life, leaving him to take care of himself in addition to his five year old sister. As his fifth grade teacher, you are noticing the difficulties he is experiencing; you try to contact his mother in effort to help, you cannot get a hold of her by any means. After hearing about his lack of supervision and your experience with not being able to contact her, you figure out that this is probably not the best environment for this child, what do you do?

As his teacher, you decide to go to the principal with this information. After explaining the situation and expressing your concerns, she brings in the school psychologist to speak with the child. Seeing as she has experience with situations similar to this, she explains both to you and the principal of the school that she feels that this child is being neglected. She also explains to you that there are various forms of neglect and not all of them tend to be visually apparent. She shows the two of you a table explaining parenting styles as

having four categories. Through looking at this table, you can see the four different parenting styles based on high and low warmth and limits (Cobb, 2007). You can pin point that, based on what you have heard in your classroom, the first child has come from an authoritative parenting style in contrast to the child who comes from the neglected parenting style. By understanding the four basic parenting styles you are in a position to recognize and help a child who needs it most.

TABLE 1
PARENTING STYLES

	LOW LOVE	HIGH LOVE
LOW LIMITS	Neglect	Indulgent
HIGH LIMITS	Authoritarian	Authoritative

What is the Problem and Why is it an issue?

Much of what parents know about child rearing comes from the way they were raised, their culture and their age at the time they become parents. Many parents I have talked to feel that they have done something wrong as a parent at one point or another. It is my goal to find out what the majority of parents feel is effective when raising their children. By pushing a consideration of this information, I hope to ease the worry of some parents by showing them various parenting opinions. This information given by parents with children within the same age brackets may ease worries and give new alternatives to try.

Local. In Monterey County the cost of living has risen dramatically, making it nearly impossible for one parent to stay home with the child all day long. It is difficult for many people to balance their family and work lives. By the time the average parent gets home from work they are tired and still have to make dinner and fulfill their familial duties. Under this type of pressure, it may be easier to give a child what s/he asks for rather than arguing. Although it is easier not to fight with your child, no matter what age, it creates a pattern of inconsistency.

Authentic. The four parenting styles are not widely known about. By understanding the characteristics of each of the four parenting styles (neglect, indulgent, authoritative, and authoritarian) parents may be better equipped to recognize their own weaknesses enabling them to mature their ways of parenting (Kagen,1998).

Urgent. This is an urgent affair because the older a child gets, the harder it is to establish discipline and/or consistency (Santrock, 2000). The children that I work with and the children that are enrolled in Sunny Sky's Children's Center are all five years old and younger; it is much easier to implement change at this point than it would be at a later time.

Personally meaningful. This issue is personally meaningful to me because I work closely with children ages 0 – 5 and their parents. In the past few

years I have seen more examples of these parenting styles than could be illustrated in a book. It was not until I was in my Adolescence class a couple of semesters back, when I learned there were classifications for the different ways of parenting that I had been witnessing.

Who is impacted negatively by the problem? The children of neglectful and indulgent parents are the ones that are impacted negatively by this problem. The parents themselves may be impacted as well. When boundaries and consistency are not enforced there is a constant state of stress within the household. Indulgent parents may feel as though their child does not respect them and that the child holds the control. The child of neglectful parenting will not know self worth, boundaries or in many cases love.

Who benefits and or accrues privileges because of the resultant problems?

Neither the child(ren) nor parent(s) will benefit from the problems previously identified. This is a lose, lose situation for all parties involved even if it does not seem like it at the time. Without consistency, a household may be in a state of conflict until the child's requests are given into.

Who has the power to make changes in the situation? All parents and/or guardians have the power to make any necessary changes and/or improvements to their parenting. By educating parents about parenting styles, as well as the benefits and disadvantages of each, they will be better equipped to make the necessary changes as they see fit.

The Research Literature

On an international level, studies were conducted to examine parenting styles and mother-child interaction. Questionnaires were distributed to 97 Chinese mothers (Xu, 2005). The mothers were asked a variety of questions including the following: what they perceived their parenting style to be, parenting stress, sources of social support, etc. Through this study it was found that Chinese cultural values, when adhered to by the parents, were more likely to qualify as authoritarian or authoritative parenting styles. This reflects upon what I

stated earlier, that the way a person is raised along with culture carries over to the next generation influencing the way a child is raised.

In a related study, cultural conflict and adolescent perceptions of parental warmth was looked at. Included in this study were 184 Chinese American and eighty European American adolescents (Wu & Chao, 2005). Through this study, it was discovered that Chinese American adolescents' cultural influence exceeded their perceptions of parental warmth growing up at a higher rate than for European American adolescents. This is yet another example of how culture and parenting places great bearing on the development of a child. A few adolescents stated that their parents were warmer than necessary. This had a positive consequence throughout their development.

Private Organization in the United States. There is an organization known as Foundation of Family Values (www.fofv.org, 2007). The goal of this organization is to support the well being of all families; it does not exclude or discriminate towards political, religious, sexual preference, SES or race. Anybody and everybody is welcome. FFV uses values to enhance the family lives of others through the following categories: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identities. As an avenue for enhancing the family lives of others they also offer parenting education, parenting support groups, counseling services, resources and links. What I like best about this organization is that it respects cultural diversity, they do not gear discussions or help to a specific ethnic group, there is something for everyone.

This is a place where a parent could go to better themselves as a person, mother, or father. This organization has parenting classes, parenting support groups, counseling, as well as a wealth of other services. The parenting classes are a resource for those who wish to learn more about parenting and enhance parenting skills/effectiveness. The parenting support groups are a place that would allow parents to toss around ideas and share experiences as well as vent when needed. Lastly, the counseling portion of this organization is there to help individuals as well as the family as a whole to get them through difficult times.

In the Educational System. At an educational level, studies (Marc, 2008) have been conducted to decipher the relationship between childhood parenting styles and college success. It was interesting to find that a father's authoritative parenting was linked to a decrease in a college students' anxiety level, whereas a mothers' authoritarian parenting during childhood led to an increased amount of anxiety. In addition, a father's authoritative parenting, a mother's authoritarian parenting, the college student's anxiety level, and motivation were all related to the college students' grade point average. The motivational level of the college student also played a role in the relationship between their anxiety and grade point average. Upon completion of this study, it was discovered that college students show improvements in their school performance according to the parenting they received as a child. By raising a child using the above styles in parenting, the result is an independent, self confident, well rounded person. A parent using these styles may help their child enough to get the task at hand accomplished but does not do it for them. Using the scaffolding technique, which is a characteristic of authoritative parenting, allows the child to learn but at the same time remain self reliant. By observing the results of the above study, it is proven that the parenting received during childhood has great bearing on the person that child will become later in life.

Methodology

Context. Sunny Sky's Children's Center is located within a community college. While the children's parents are furthering their education, the children attend a day program. The ages range from 8 weeks to 5 years old. Within this center is a variety of cultures, some include Asian, Caucasian, African American, and Hispanic. There are infant, toddler and preschool rooms available. In each of the rooms there are 15 or fewer children with two staff members.

Participants. My sample included 15 parents who have children attending Sunny Sky's Children's Center. All questionnaires were filled out during a regularly

scheduled Friday parent meeting, which was held in a classroom at the Children's Center. The only requirement for filling out my survey was that the parent has at least one child enrolled at the time that the survey was distributed.

All volunteer participants had the choice whether or not to participate in this research project. Those who chose to participate were not required to answer any questions that they were not comfortable with. I informed them that no real names or identifiable information was going to be used for the duration of this project. They were also informed that if any names or identifiable information were written on the forms, it would not be included in my report.

Survey. The questionnaire was completed by volunteers during a regularly scheduled parent meeting at Sunny Sky's Children's Center. It took the parents approximately twenty minutes to complete. The survey consisted of the following questions:

1. What do you think it takes to be an effective parent? Why?
2. What do you believe your current parenting style is? Why?
3. What would you like to learn more about when it comes to parenting?
4. What is your biggest challenge in parenting?
5. What should be done to help parents become more effective?
6. What could I do to further your knowledge of parenting styles?
7. Is there anything else you would like to say about effective parenting and/or becoming a better parent?

Data Analysis. Completed surveys were read several times until emergent themes were identified.

Results

The first thing that I found was that not only do many parent not know about the four classified parenting styles (1 out of 15 surveys), but they were in agreement that one of their biggest parenting challenges is discipline. Of the

parents who stated discipline was one of their biggest challenges, most were not sure if their current forms of discipline were effective. The other theme I discovered was that nearly all the parents felt that in order to be an effective parent there needs to be love, consistency, patience, boundaries and respect. By being consistent, children know what to expect. If there is a lack of consistency it causes confusion and a sense of uneasiness because the child does not know what to expect. Patience is needed because children do not grasp concepts or perform daily tasks as quickly as adults. If there is a lack of patience this may hinder their child's willingness to try new things. Respect is necessary; children are not "along for the ride." Showing a child respect will give him/her a lasting sense of self worth.

I have discovered that most parents that I have talked to are unsure if they are doing things correctly when raising their child(ren). All, at one point or another, have second guessed whether what they are doing is the right thing. Between doing research on this topic and reviewing the results of the survey, I have come to a couple conclusions. The first is that parents may be feeling trapped and restricted by what they are allowed to do with their children when it comes to discipline. As of right now, parents are being told that it is not right to hit a child. What they are not telling parents is that there is a difference between abuse and spanking. I feel that this has really restricted what parents feel that they can do. As of right now, it is nearly impossible for only one parent to be working to support the family. The majority of the time, both parents are working one if not two jobs to make ends meet. If you take work in addition to raising children and keeping up with familial needs, it does not leave much time for anything else. By this I mean that by the time the average parent(s) get off work, it is time for dinner, clean up, put the kids to bed, etc. This does not leave much time for being consistent. The average child attends daycare or a day program of some sort due to the fact that their parent is working to keep up with bills. By leading such a busy life style it is sometimes easier to give in to a child's request or to pick and choose battles than to fight with them.

What could or should be done about the problem?

By collecting these responses, I am able to pass out an informational packet to these parents. The information to be distributed includes a parenting styles diagram, explanation of the four parenting styles (neglectful, indulgent, authoritarian and authoritative), and examples to further their understanding. The most helpful pieces of information included will be the benefits or disadvantages to the child for each parenting style.

Before any action could be taken and for it to be effective, I had to decipher what information to put into the packets based on parent response. I wanted to give parents an understanding of parenting styles that they did not previously have. I also needed to review the surveys and find what the parents wanted to know about. Once this had been done, I was able to put the packets together with the information I wanted to share and the information that the parents wanted to know about. Once these steps had been completed, I needed to speak with the director that I have been working along side and get her input on how to disperse the information.

Description of Justification of Action

What am I going to do? On my survey, one of the questions asked what I could do to further their understanding of parenting styles. A number of responses asked for more information pertaining to parenting styles. Based on the information I have received from the fifteen parent participants, I have created a packet of information to distribute. Included in my informational packet is a parenting style diagram, characteristics of each of the four parenting styles (neglectful, indulgent, authoritarian and authoritative), and benefits and disadvantages pertaining to each styles described. By being given this information, parents are able to see where they are in their parenting and if they feel they could improve, it will give them a good starting point.

Action Documentation

My action was carried out at the same place that I distributed the surveys, Sunny Sky's Children's Center. Since information was asked for by most parents who completed the surveys, that is what I did. "Parenting Styles Defined"¹ is to be taken to the Center. I feel that the information provided on my behalf will be most beneficial to the parents who asked for it but there are enough for all parents who have children attending the center.

How? I am in contact with the director of Sunny Sky's Children's Center to find the best way to distribute the informational packets. How it is carried out is going to be based on what she feels is best suited for the parents. She mentioned to me that not all parents stay very long when dropping off or picking up their children whereas others may stay for a few minutes to talk. Based on the time factor I think it would be best to leave them in their children's cubbies or folders.

Critical Reflection

Strengths and weaknesses in action taken. My greatest strength in what I have done is that I have personal experiences with children and observed interactions between children and parents. I was able to use my observations of various parenting styles along with research to create examples for an in depth understanding. By observing parent/child relationships and a parent's response to their child's wants or needs, I am able to offer suggestions when asked. It is through personal experience that I have been able to find out what works and what does not work in various situations.

One of my greatest weaknesses in life and in the context of this project is the fact that I am hesitant at times to voice what I think or feel because I do not

¹ Located in appendix

want to offend anybody. I believe that I could have taken a more proactive stand in my action had I been able to get over this for this project. I think that this is part of the reason that I did not lead a discussion in addition to the informational packet; I think that some of the questions asked on the survey could have been discussed in a group and talked about in the context of parenting styles. It would have been beneficial to look over the survey and packet together and proceed with an open floor of questions, comments and group discussion.

What would I do differently next time and why? If were to do this again, one of the biggest changes I would make would be to lead a discussion around the topic. Do not get me wrong, I would still pass out this packet but I think it would be beneficial for parents to toss around ideas about what had or had not worked for them in the past. It also gives a sense of comfort to know that everybody in that room has gone through most of the same challenges; this may help them open up and be more open to suggestion. Another advantage of a discussion session is that parents would get to meet each other. It is far too often that parents get off from work, briefly pick up their children and return home. By meeting other parents there is a new support system at their disposal.

Next Steps. My next step is going to be checking back in at Sunny Sky's Children's Center to ask about the information they received from me. I would like to know what information was most helpful and what they would like more information on. After reading the packet and possibly implementing some changes, some questions may arise or need clarification. By checking back in and finding out what they need, I will be able to assist them in finding the information they are requiring at the time.

On Lessons Learned

About Myself. Through the semester and working side by side with people on this project I learned quite a few things. First, I am pretty shy; I got over that one very quickly in this class. I found that my classmates and I were all in the same boat and nothing I said or thought was that different from what those

around me were thinking or feeling. Second, I learned to pace myself for this class. There were times when I felt that I had been working for an eternity and did not seem to be making much of a dent, it was those time that the best thing I could do was to walk away and come back in an hour or two. I have always been more than willing to help anyone around me, I learned through this class it is perfectly fine to ask for help or suggestion.

Working Toward Change. I work with children on a constant basis, so I never expect things to happen instantly. What I did learn was that change is always a work in progress and need to be modified from time to time. By researching for this project I have gained a deeper understanding of the four styles I have discussed. Through this project, the way that I view interactions between parent and child has changed, I expect it will keep changing. I found that in addition to giving my opinion when it is asked for in our daycare, it is important to introduce the parents to each other so that they can talk as well. Our daycare as a whole has turned into a large support system for each of our parents.

Teaching and Learning. When comes to learning, I have learned to teach through example and suggestion. I learn this each and every day from school, working with kids and interacting with parents. As frustrating as school can be I know I am learning more through suggestion and scaffolding than I would if someone had shown me step by step. I have learned that there is nothing wrong with trial and error either, I use that quite a bit! As for teaching, I try to do it the same way that I learn. I know that I am not doing anybody any favors by doing something for them; I suggest and try to set examples. I teach the same way that I have been raised in school and at home: setting examples, asking for help when you need it, it is ok to be frustrated, and sometimes it is best to walk away and come back with a fresh pair of eyes. I do not point out the obvious, it is not helpful to anybody. I coach, guide, and leave certain lessons to natural consequence, sometimes it is the only way.

Fulfillment of Major Learning Outcomes. Through the completion of my capstone project, Parenting Styles: What Do Parents Really Know?, I fulfilled

three major learning outcomes: Cross – Cultural Competence, Ethical Reflection and Social Responsibility and Subject Area Emphasis, Human Development. The first MLO completed throughout this course was Cultural Competence. When conducting my study I did not ask for any information other than responses pertaining to current parenting styles. Through my research and classes taken at CSU Monterey Bay I have discovered that culture plays a large part in the way that a person raises a child. Ever heard the quote, “It takes a village to raise a child.”? This rings true in every way. The way a child is raised by their parents is shaped by their culture, community and the society they live in. Without the input of culture and generation there would be nothing to raise a child with. I have also found that it is extremely important to show respect and interest in every culture you encounter with children and/or their parents. Culture is a child and parent’s past, present, and future; the cultures we see around us today are what is going to shape the next generation, without it we would not be a diverse society.

The second major learning outcome completed throughout this course was Ethical Reflection and Social Responsibility. It was through this capstone project that I learned a greater understanding of self discipline, reflection on what I have done and learned how to do it better the next time, working as a group, awareness of the society around me and the people within it, and most importantly community based learning. It is through cultural understanding that I am able to work well with my peers in school and the children I serve in our daycare. Without this basis to go on, I would not be as able to adjust what I do to the person it fits best. For all capstone students, community based learning is the fabrication of the project. It is through this type of learning that we got most of our understanding of what was going on around us. It was also through community based learning that we were able to complete our projects.

Last but not least, the third MLO completed was Subject Area Emphasis, or in my case a minor in Human Development. Had I not chosen the minor of Human Development, I never would have stumbled upon the subject of parenting styles. Also through declaring this as my minor and attending a variety of classes gave me a broad understanding about people as a whole, children,

adolescents, and adults. It taught me the different ages and stages, various challenges, development of the body and mind, and much more. Without these concepts I would not have a deep enough understanding to work efficiently with children or to have enough information for this project. Throughout this semester I have used so many concepts learned from different HDEV classes and it has helped me tremendously. I think that it is also these concepts that allow me to work with children and with their parents.

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Appendix

	LOW LOVE	HIGH LOVE
LOW LIMITS	Neglect	Indulgent

HIGH	Authoritarian	Authoritative
LIMITS		

When studying the subject of parenting, there are four recognized styles. These four styles are based on the above diagram displaying levels of love / warmth and levels of standards / expectations / limits, ranging from high to low. The characteristics of a neglectful parent would be based on having no limits or low limits in addition to low love / warmth (Cobb, 2007). When the word neglect is heard, it is also visualized as inadequate, not caring and unable to meet the basic needs of the child (ren). When people come from a home of neglectful parenting styles, it traditionally transforms into a vicious cycle into the next generation. Some examples of *neglectful* parenting would be as follows:

1. Withdrawing requests to the child and removing his or herself from the situation at hand when requests are not met, which is normally what the child had wanted as a result, to be left alone.
2. Attempts of gaining control but by non-effective means such as instantaneous yelling at a child to pick up their toys followed by throwing them all in the garbage because it was not completed quickly enough.
3. A child ignoring or promptly / aggressively arguing in response to most things.
4. A child gaining control over the parent shortly after learning how to "get their way".
5. Parent gives up or abuses the child in frustration.

The next parenting style is based on high love and low limits, it is referred to as *indulgent*. Parents of this style are very intuitive to their child's emotional development but have a difficult time setting limits or enforcing limits. One of the

biggest red flags of this style is inconsistent discipline. For example, a parent walking into the bathroom to find their child cutting their own hair, the parent may then take him or her to the barber to get this fixed or fixes it themselves. The next time this happens the parent may just let them continue with cutting their own hair because they do not want to dishonor the child's attempts at self reliance. Parents teach right from wrong with their children with attachment and bond as well as reason and explanation. These children do often comply with the requests of their parents due to this relationship as well as the fact that kids do want to please their parents.

In contrast, there are many downfalls to this style of parenting. It is the weakness and downfall of this parenting that usually makes this style ineffective. As I mentioned above, indulgent parents are inconsistent. In time, children will learn to manipulate their parents in order to get their way and since their parents are so in tuned with their child's emotional development, they let them. In a sense, these parents do reinforce this manipulation; in turn, this gives the child an inaccurate sense of control over their parent which increases their manipulative behavior. Aggressiveness and assertiveness is often confused by these parents. One of the major consequences of this parenting style is that the parent will begin to feel as though they are a slave to their child because of the number of things that they do for them as well as the lack of respect being given by the child. This in turn causes the feeling of resentment and in some cases can turn into verbal abuse, which has been documented as a common trait among indulgent parents.

The **authoritarian** parenting style is characterized by the high limit but low love combination; it can resemble a sergeant in the army. By no means am I saying that an authoritarian parent does not love their child; they do love their child but their priority is active discipline and not relationship discipline. Children that come from homes of authoritarian parents may feel that they had a close or

warm relationship with their parents but at the same time may not feel like they can go to their parents for empathy or advice. Authoritarian parents place a high value on obedience and respect, rules and chores are not to be negotiated. They may also believe in family rank or hierarchy with dad being the head of household, then mom and lastly the children.

This style of parenting can be perceived as abusive in today's society, it is not. Limits are set high and firm. In turn, the children do obey and respect their parents. The fall back of this parenting style is that discipline and punishment get confused. Punishment is an external force, such as spanking. Discipline is a combination of internal and external forces. A parent who uses punishment as a means to obedience will succeed with their child as long as the parent is present; however, when the parent leaves the house the threat is gone leaving the child to do what they want in an exaggerated level. Since discipline is internal and external, even when the parents are not present, the child will traditionally still follow the rules. Due to the mix up between discipline and punishment, spanking is often used as a method in attempt to achieve obedience. This has been proven ineffective because when the threat of being spanked is present, the children will do what they are told but when the threat is gone, will do what they please. This in turn causes confusion to the child when deciphering right from wrong, it is based on threat or no threat.

The last style of parenting is known as **authoritative**. This style of parenting is achieved when there is an equally high level of love and limitation. Other characteristics of this style would include the parents and children having an equal understanding of dignity and necessity but not equal in terms of responsibility and decision making. Authoritative parents have an understanding of the following concepts:

1. It is the parents' task to model right from wrong verbally and through action.
2. Discipline and punishment are two different things.
3. Placing blame or shame on a child is in no way acceptable.
4. Encouragement is necessary for a child to try new activities.

5. Children need to be taught how to problem solve, it is not pre-wired.
6. Discipline is used as a tool in teaching and guiding; it is not a means of punishment, manipulation or control.
7. Consequences are necessary and certain amounts of frustration are O.K.

In the end, this style of parenting teaches independence, responsibility as well as consequence. These parents present their child with expectation not demand and in turn receive compliance and respect. Through their methods authoritative parents teach their children to “treat others as you would want to be treated”. Realistic standards are set; this is the balance that ensures a confident, self reliant, socially competent, and responsible child.