To build strong parenting partnerships it is important for couples to understand and manage their differing parenting styles. "Parenting styles" refer to how parents teach, influence, and socialize their children. The concept of parenting styles includes two key elements of parenting: parental responsiveness (i.e., warmth or supportiveness) and parental demandingness (i.e., behavioral control).1

**Parenting Styles**

There are four primary parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, indulgent, and uninvolved. For years, researchers have used these parenting styles to predict child well-being; specifically academic performance, psychosocial competence, and social competence.2

- **Parents with an authoritative style** demonstrate high warmth and high control. “They monitor and impart clear standards…They are assertive but not intrusive and restrictive. Their disciplinary methods are supportive, rather than punitive.”3 This style is generally linked to children who are happy, capable, and successful.4,5

- The authoritarian style is high in control but low in warmth. Parents who use this style are “obedience- and status-oriented, and expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation.”6 Children raised by authoritarian parents are generally obedient; while lower in social competence and self-esteem.7,8

- **Indulgent parenting** is high in warmth but low in control. These parents are more “responsive than they are demanding.”9 Indulgent parenting styles are generally linked to children who have more problems with authority, have less self-regulation, and poorer school outcomes.10,11

- Parents with an uninvolved style provide low warmth and low control. This style is generally linked to children who lack self-control, have low self-esteem, and are less competent than their peers.12,13

### Figure 1: PARENTING STYLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WARMTH</th>
<th>CONTROL</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Authoritative (democratic or balanced)</td>
<td>High Warmth</td>
<td>High Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indulgent (permissive or nondirective)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Authoritarian (strict or controlling)</td>
<td>Low Warmth</td>
<td>Low Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uninvolved (neglectful or dismissive)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why Parenting Styles May Differ

Parenting styles can be influenced by numerous factors, including one’s culture, family of origin, education, and personality. Style may also be influenced by the age of children, family size, biological relationship and family structure. Particularly when parents have different preferred parenting styles, it is important for couples to work together, to support one another, and to not confuse their children. For example, an indulgent parent may want to give children money for doing chores around the house. However, this could create contention if the other parent feels housework should be an unpaid expectation.

Spillover

Positive aspects of the couple relationship appear to promote positive parenting and negative aspects of the couple relationship appear to promote negative parenting. 21

Tips and Resources to Help Couples Build a Strong Parenting Partnership

Professionals, and other interested parties, who work with parents can help cultivate strong parenting partnerships. The following is a sample of activities to consider:

- Encourage healthy parenting styles. Some parents, because of their upbringing, may not know what healthy authoritarian parenting looks like. Those who work with parents can encourage and reinforce healthy parenting practices and skills such as consistency, monitoring, and warmth.

- Offer, or connect parents to, parenting education courses. Parenting education encompasses opportunities to expand “insights, understanding and attitudes and the acquisition of knowledge and skills about the development of both parents and of their children and the relationship between them.” 14 Particularly for adoptive, foster, or first-time parents, parenting education can expose individuals to helpful information about child development, parenting styles, discipline, and effective parenting behaviors (view resources at CYFERnet, www.cyfernet.org).

- Offer, or connect parents to, healthy marriage and relationship education courses to reinforce or strengthen their relationship as a couple and/or co-parenting team. These courses are voluntary opportunities to learn healthy relationship skills and knowledge such as communication and conflict management. A summary of healthy marriage and relationship education and associated programs around the country is available at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Healthy Marriage Initiative website, http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/index.html.

- Facilitate parental partnership development. In social services, it is not uncommon, for males and father-figures to feel excluded. 15 Professionals should encourage both parents to engage in discussions and decisions about parenting. 16

- Remarriage and stepfamily dynamics may introduce additional adults whose input and participation should be considered. In strong parental partnerships, all caregivers could be encouraged to work together for the good of the children.
Conclusion

Children who experience high levels of parental conflict tend to have more internalizing and externalizing behavior problems (e.g., depression, aggression, lower academic achievement). Because conflict between parents can have a negative “spill-over” effect on children, parents should strive to work as a team. Parenting styles are changeable and parents can learn and adopt parenting styles and behaviors that facilitate healthy relationships and positive child well-being. Strong parenting partnerships not only benefit the child, but can also reduce stress on the parents as they transition into new relationships and stepfamily situations.

Notes


5 See note 2 above.

6 See note 3 above.

7 See note 4 above.

8 See note 2 above.

9 See note 3 above.

10 See note 4 above.

11 See note 2 above.

12 See note 4 above.

13 See note 2 above.


18 Ibid.

See note 1 above.

See note 19 above.


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