



## Resource Article

### Inside this edition Understanding Different Parenting Styles

In this KIT newsletter, we will learn about how mother and father parenting styles impact children. As we discussed in our last newsletter, there are three parenting style typologies:

- authoritarian (low nurturing/ high control)
- authoritative (warm & responsive as needed/ respectful control) and
- permissive (high warmth/ low control).

Take a moment now to think about how these parenting styles in mothers and fathers affect children. Do you think children behave the same or differently if one typology is a mother instead of a father, or vice-versa? What if the parents have different styles? How might that impact children?

The majority of research about early parent-child relationships has focused on the mother-child dyad.

In general, research has found that the authoritative parenting style leads to positive outcomes for children, academically and socially. Researchers are beginning to explore the role that fathers play in child development. This is an important shift due to the increase of father involvement in caregiving. In North America, statistics indicate that fathers are more involved in primary care activities as compared to a decade ago.

Rinaldi and Howe (2012) state that fathers who reason with their toddlers, support them in autonomy, and show warmth (i.e. authoritative) may encourage prosocial behaviors, such as following rules and cooperation. On the other hand, fathers who are verbally hostile or do not reason with their toddlers (i.e. authoritarian) may influence problems in externalizing (e.g., argue, have poor self-control, break toys) and internalizing behaviors (e.g., anxiety/worry, be clingy or shy with adults). Rinaldi and Howe (2012)

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further state that permissive parenting by mothers and authoritarian parenting by fathers can be predictive of externalizing toddler behaviors.

When taking into consideration parenting styles, it is important to consider a family's cultural background because it may affect the role that mothers and fathers play in child rearing. Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Metindogan, and Evans (2006) studied the parenting styles of Caribbean immigrants and the link between their parenting styles, academic skills, and social behaviors of their kindergarten-age children. In this study, a father's authoritarian parenting style negatively impacted academic skills (e.g., vocabulary skills) more so than if a mother had an authoritarian style. On the other hand, a mother's authoritarian parenting style negatively impacted a child's social behavior (e.g., self-confidence). As in Rowe & Howe (2012), Roopnarine et al. (2006) also found that a father's authoritative style was

positively correlated with prosocial behaviors. There is limited research on the topic of how mother and father parenting styles affect children differently. The limited available research suggests that an authoritarian style by either parent has negative impacts on children's development. In contrast, an authoritative parenting style by either parent is associated with positive outcomes.

There is so much more to understand about this topic, such as applying this topic to parents that do not live together, same-sex parents, and children raised by family members (or other adults) that are not biological parents to name a few. In providing services and working with families, we may see similar patterns or observe different patterns for a variety of family structures that have not been systematically studied. It is important to share our provider experiences to help support families and children in early intervention.

Rinaldi, C. M. & Howe, N. (2012). Mothers' and fathers' parenting styles and associations with toddlers' externalizing, internalizing, and adaptive behaviors. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 27(2), 266-273.

# What do the data say?



## Elephants, helicopters, tigers and more. What do these have to do with parenting?

Over the years different parenting approaches have emerged and they come with some interesting labels. Descriptors used to depict these different parenting styles include, dolphin helicopter, lawnmower, and more. But what do they mean in terms of parenting characteristics?

In an article titled “Helicopter, free-range and other parenting styles, Danny Huerta defined what these new wave parenting styles mean. As you review these parenting styles and characteristics think about the ups and downs associated with each one.

- **Dolphin Parents:** Not unlike the disposition of dolphins, these parents are playful. They value family time and good relationships among family members. They value balance between being firm yet being flexible.
- **Elephant Parents:** Similar to the personality of elephants, these parents enjoy very close connections and emotional security among family members. These parents believe in the importance of nurturing, protecting, and encouraging their children.
- **Free-range Parents:** Child independence is an important value for these parents. Children are allowed and provided the freedom to figure things out for themselves without particular guidance or limits.
- **Helicopter Parents:** Like a helicopter, these parents tend to hover over their children with a focus on keeping their children safe and helping them avoid unnecessary risks.
- **Lawnmower or Snow-plow Parents:** Somewhat

like the functions of these machines, these parents make efforts to clear the way for their children. They like to minimize challenges or obstacles that might get in the way of their children’s success.

- **Tiger Parents:** Being authoritarian is descriptor applied to tiger parents. They might be directive or protective, but they are in control. They focus on excellence with high expectations and clear demands for their children.

While a particular parenting style might resonate with a parent, the plethora of parent-child actions, interactions, and reactions that occur on a day to day basis might require a tiger, a dolphin, and a lawnmower for example. A parent might even have helicopter days and free range moments while striving to be like a dolphin parent.

Parenting is not easy and each of the different parenting styles have varying degrees of benefits and drawbacks. Factor that with the unique characteristics of individual children, parents, and circumstances and it is easy to see how impossible it would be to define one parenting style as the right one. In fact, what seems right for one parent and child might be entirely different for another child and parent.

As early intervention providers enjoying the opportunity to work with a variety of parents, it’s useful to be aware of different parenting styles and their influences on child development. It can also be a helpful conversation to have with parents. How would you describe your parenting style? How similar or different are yours and your spouses styles? These are two possible questions to get the conversation going. What other questions might you ask to understand a parent’s style?



# Consultation Corner

## Differences in Parenting Styles and the Challenges for Early Intervention

Sharon W. Cooper, MD, FAAP

What should you do when parents don't agree with each other's parenting style? This situation is not terribly uncommon, and it affords an opportunity to introduce new concepts as "additional tools in your toolkit" to assure the safest and most nurturing environment for children. Research in cultural competence has revealed that advice spoken to assure a positive and healthy outcome is accepted much more effectively than warnings and criticisms of existing practices.

Once affirmation of good parenting practices has been given, exploring the potential harmful parenting behavior is in order to make sure that parents understand the risks of certain parenting styles. Parenting style differences can become major points of contention and require careful, tactful and often gradual navigation.

Child safety is the most critical topic to address when parenting styles are different. Describing risky parental behaviors observed in other settings is one way to begin the dialogue. Particularly when children have developmental differences, often more supervision is necessary. A parenting conflict can arise when one parent feels that the age of the child should decide what they should be allowed to do, as compared to the skills that the child demonstrates. Often the parent who has the

most exposure to the child has the most realistic expectations for the child and this can become a point of conflict as the other parent begins to believe that developmental problems are a result of the primary caregiver's behaviors.

The Nurturing Parenting Program® cites parental misconceptions as an important consideration in the prevention of child neglect or maltreatment. This program is used in numerous home visitation curricula around the US. There are five parental misconceptions which need to be addressed in preventing child abuse or neglect. These misconceptions are:

1. Unrealistic expectations of children
2. Parent child role reversal (i.e. the parent feels that the child's behavior should be for the care and nurturance of the parent rather than vice versa)
3. A lack of empathy for the child
4. A need for power and control
5. A vested belief in the value of punishment

The first two misconceptions contribute most often to poor supervision and possible neglect of children and the latter three are more commonly associated with the risk for physical abuse. The risk of sexual abuse, psychological/emotional abuse and exposure to intimate partner violence may involve any or all these

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misconceptions. Most early intervention professionals would likely discount any risk for child sexual abuse in the zero to three population, but data from online sexually abusive images of children reveals that 12% reveal sexual abuse of infants and toddlers.

Parenting entails numerous components of consideration: structure, feeding, the ambient environment in the home, bedtime and co-sleeping, discipline and many times the role of past childhood adversities in each parent's life are only a few factors.

One strategy to consider when parents don't agree is to invite (one parent at a time) conversations regarding how each parent was raised in their perception. Asking each parent what they felt worked well and what didn't can open a discussion on what they might want to "discard from their toolkit", now that they can make their own choices. Allowing parents to talk without interruption or a judgmental body language is essential. Some parents might be more forthcoming if this conversation is outside the presence of the other parent. These conversations can really help one to understand how much children learn what they see and how different customs in the families of origin can clearly be the source of conflict.

As in many situations, people don't change overnight. There are no easy answers in this type of conflict, but an age-old strategy might include "rewarding/complimenting"

positive parenting styles and ignoring (at first) negative parental behaviors.

Gender differences can also at times cause one parent to assume that the intervention professional will automatically "side with" the same gender parent. This does happen at times and professionals should use concrete strategies to avoid communicating this perception.

Reminding parents that one of the reasons many parents unite is because they see their differences as assets in the relationship. Encourage parents to talk about their differences outside the presence of the child if there is a risk of "heat of the moment" emotional verbal responses that could cause fearfulness and possible anxiety in the child.

The intervention professional can and should work on one parental behavior at a time, so that there can be success noted and reinforced over time. The Centers for Disease Control and Injury Prevention cites that to achieve the best outcomes for children to thrive requires prevention considerations at the levels of the child, the family, the community and society. Our goal will always to be sure that we can help parents find common grounds of agreement in parenting styles that will assure that their child will live in a safe, stable and nurturing environment.

Learn more about the Nurturing Parenting Program online at  
<https://www.nurturingparenting.com/>



## On the WWW

The WWW link this month is a Zero To Three resource highlighting parenting behaviors that facilitate positive parenting. It was written by Parlakian, MacLaughlin, & Kinsner (May 2018) and is titled “Nine Elements That Power Positive Parenting”. It is a relatively quick read, but includes nine powerful points about positive parenting, such as number one “Imagine your child’s point of view, especially during tough

moments.” Knowing, observing, and commenting on any one of the nine points, during contacts with families, can reinforce these positive parenting behaviors and help families recognize them too. The resource is available at: <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/2198-nine-elements-that-power-positive-parenting>



## Continuing Education for KIT Readers

The Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) is offering a continuing education opportunity for KIT readers.

In line with the focus on **Understanding Different Parenting Styles** readers are invited to receive continuing education contact hours for reading the monthly KIT publications (July through October 2019) and completing a multiple-choice exam about the content covered in these KITs.

KIT readers will receive the exam for this series in November 2019. There is no need to register for the CEUs. Rather, if you are interested, complete the exam online at [www.edis.army.mil](http://www.edis.army.mil)

Upon successful completion of the exam, you will receive a certificate of non-discipline specific continuing education contact hours.

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are online at  
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*Thank you for your continued interest in the KIT.*

