

What's Your Style?

11/16/2022

Lisa here. Parenting styles have been studied for decades. A great deal of focus has been directed to figuring out which style is best for raising healthy, well-adjusted children. However, it can be difficult to figure out how to match your parenting *behaviors* to a particular *style*.

Let's start with a brief explanation of parenting styles. The four most studied styles are:

Authoritarian: This style is characterized by high expectations for children's behavior and low responsiveness to children's input. Discipline is key in this parenting style. Few explanations are given for rules and little to no discussion about the reasons for rules is allowed.

Authoritative: This style is characterized by high expectations for children's behavior and high responsiveness to children's input. While discipline and rules are important, it is equally important that children understand the reason behind the rules. Children are allowed and even expected to ask questions and give opinions. Independence is encouraged.

Permissive: This style is characterized by low expectations for children's behavior and high responsiveness to children's input. Parents are involved in their children's lives, but discipline and rules are not a high priority. Children are encouraged to follow their own path and parents provide little intervention.

Uninvolved: This style is characterized by low expectations for children's behavior and low responsiveness to children's input. Parents are generally not engaged in their children's lives beyond providing necessities. Children's input is largely ignored instead of actively discouraged.

Most studies have found that the authoritative style is related to the most beneficial outcomes for children. However, it can be confusing to figure out what that means for your actual parenting. Your preferred parenting *style* is related to your parenting *values* and feels like a part of who you are as a parent. Under typical circumstances, your parenting style tends to be fairly consistent over time unless you make a conscious effort to change it.

However, your parenting *behaviors* are influenced by many factors, including your child's behavior, the immediate situation, and your mood in that moment. As a result, your parenting *behaviors* are more variable and may not always support your preferred *style*.

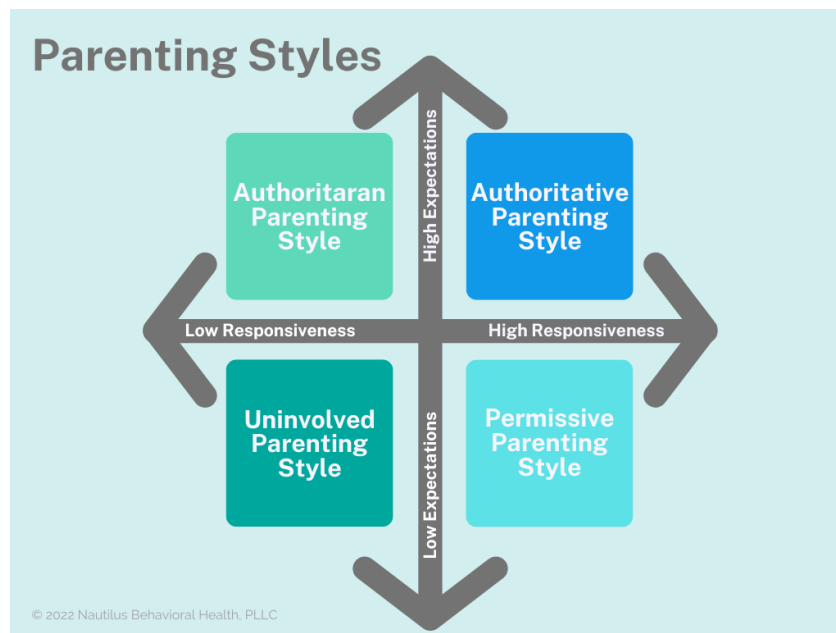
For instance, let's say that it is important to you to be an authoritative parent (high expectation, high responsiveness). However, after you've had a frustrating day and your child questions a rule or does not follow an instruction, you find yourself imposing harsh consequences or making comments like, "As long as you live in my house, you'll live by my rules." These behaviors are not typically associated with an authoritative parenting style.

So, what does this mean? Have you failed at being an authoritative parent? Will your child now become poorly adjusted and fail at life?

Absolutely not!

Even when you are working your hardest to adopt certain behaviors or parent according to a certain style, you're going to have moments when you step off the path. *This is not a big deal.* It is just a signal that there might be some things you want to change so that your parenting is more in line with your parenting values and the parenting style that you wish to adopt.

Take a look below at the diagram of the four parenting styles. You can move along the continuum of both responsiveness to your child's input and expectations for your child's behavior to align your parenting behavior to a particular style.



In the example above, you've had a long, frustrating day and you may not have enough energy/resources to fully engage with your child in the way you normally would. In this case, your responsiveness will be lower. However, your expectations of your child's behavior likely remain high. This is how you end up responding in a way that is out of line with your preferred authoritative style.

Again, it is not the end of the world if it happens occasionally. But if you notice that you consistently engage in behaviors that do not support your preferred parenting style, a quick way to adjust is to consider your level of expectations for your child's behavior as well as your level of responsiveness to their input. If either of those are not in line with the kind of parent



you want to be, make decisions about how you want to change your behaviors to bring them in line with your preferred style.

In our example, if you value responsiveness and want it to remain high even after you've had a bad day, you can tell your child that you need a few minutes to yourself when you get home so that you can decompress and then attend to them. Or you may need to take a few minutes to yourself before entering your home so that you can reset and prepare yourself to engage with your family.

Adjusting your expectations for your child's behavior or your responsiveness to your child's input will not solve every problem, but this is a good place to start if you need to get your behavior back in line with your preferred parenting style.