

Parenting styles

These four parenting styles were identified by Gottman and his colleagues. Most people use a mix of styles, but one is usually more dominant than the others and thus has the greatest impact on children.

Emotion Coaching style of parenting

Parents whose style is largely Emotion Coaching:

- see emotions as a time for intimacy and teaching
- value children's emotions
- makes time to talk about feelings with children
- try to find out why their child is feeling the way they do
- help their child to be aware of the feeling, label it, and express it
- show empathy and seeks closeness
- avoid criticising or labelling the child (such as stupid, shy, mean, silly)
- are able to remain calm and help the child to solve a problem
- are aware of his/her own emotions.



Their child learns to trust their feelings, regulate their own emotions, and solve problems. S/he has high self-esteem, learns well and gets along well with others.

Permissive style of parenting

Parents whose style is largely permissive:

- accept emotion but do not help their child understand the emotion
- show lots of empathy
- are unable to use their child's emotions to teach problem solving strategies
- do not set limits
- believe there is little you can do with negative emotions other than ride them out
- are often unclear about the meaning of the child's emotional experience
- have a 'hands off' idea about handling emotions
- show their own emotions but often without being able to resolve them.

Their child might not learn to regulate their emotions. They might have trouble concentrating, forming friendships and getting along with other children, especially when they are emotional.

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Dismissive style of parenting

Parents whose style is largely dismissive:

- ignore their child's feelings
- believe that it is most important to be positive and not to dwell on negative emotions
- find it hard to stand a child feeling sad, angry, scared etc.
- use distraction as a way to deal with their child's emotions
- dismiss their child's emotion as part of 'being just a child' or them 'not really understanding'
- dismiss sadness, and aim to control or hide anger
- find it hard to show their own feelings.

Their child might come to believe that their own feelings are wrong, inappropriate or not valid. They might think that there is something wrong with them because of the way they feel. They might have difficulty regulating their own emotions.

Disapproving style of parenting

Parents whose style is largely disapproving:

- judge and criticise their child's emotions
- need to set limits on their child's emotional expression
- view emotions as behaviour that needs to be controlled
- view sadness as 'the child getting their own way' or being manipulative
- particularly disapprove of anger
- believe negative emotions are bad parts of a person
- believe that showing emotions is weak, and that children must be tough to survive
- do not show their own emotions unless very angry or depressed.

Like children of parents who use dismissive styles, children of parents who are disapproving might come to believe that their own feelings are wrong, inappropriate or not valid. They might think that there is something wrong with them because of the way they feel. They might have difficulty regulating their own emotions.

Gottman and colleagues found that the outcomes for these children were often more severe. They found links between disapproving parenting styles and later depression, eating disorders, alcohol and drug problems, and antisocial problems.

