

Raising Responsible Children

There are three distinct parenting styles or approaches related to raising responsible children, each producing different results: **Punishing, Authoritative, and Indulgent**. Punishing and Indulgent parents allow children to *externalize back to the parent* the primary responsibility for managing their behavior. Authoritative parents, on the other hand, tend to raise children who over time *internalize* responsibility for their choices and behavior. These children tend to grow up to be much more well adjusted and, therefore, happy.

I believe this to be true:

Show me a chronically irresponsible or under-responsible child, and I will show you an overly responsible parent who is likely frustrated or struggling to maintain control.

What does this mean? How can a parent be *overly responsible* in today's world? Isn't this just another example of blaming the parent? *Absolutely not!* It means there is a reciprocal relationship between parents and children regarding responsibility. If and when someone drops the ball (or dirty sock), someone has to pick it up! It means we need to carefully look at what works and doesn't work in raising children to become responsible and dependable adults.

Definitions

Let's define our terms - Punishing, Authoritative, and Indulgent. Carefully examine these three charts describing the *characteristics, goals, and typical results* of each parenting approach.

1. Punishing Approach		
Characteristics	Goals	Typical Results
Emphasizes the power of some external source (parents, courts, etc).	To control behavior by use of threats and/or punishments (take away, grounding, spanking, etc)	Child responds with rebellion, revenge, anger, sneakiness, and lacks an "internal" sense of responsibility for their choices and behaviors.
Arbitrary and usually not related to the actual act being punished (i.e., taking bike away for back talking)	To try and find some external "leverage" (punishment) to "persuade" change.	Child does not learn to connect realistic consequences to <u>their</u> choices.
Invites ongoing and escalating power struggles as child grows older. Demands obedience.	Parent constantly fighting battle to maintain power and control over increasingly autonomous child/adolescent.	Parent ends up yelling or threatening out of frustration and thereby giving up power and "genuine authority."

2. Authoritative Approach		
Characteristics	Goals	Typical Results
Uses mutual respect and grants rights, even the "right" to experience natural and logical consequences of poor choices.	To empower the child to make choices about their behavior within consistent parameters.	Child learns to make responsible "internal" choices about their behavior, instead of depending on or deceiving external controls.
Consequences are realistic and related to the act in question. Needs of others are considered.	To give child immediate and consistent feedback linking their behavioral choices to realistic consequences.	Child learns from their experiences and important values are reinforced.
Focuses power struggles "within" the child by giving child choices. Permits learning experiences.	To assist child make choices about how they can behave, within parameters set by truly authoritative parents.	Child learns to monitor their own behavior over time and make better choices between available alternatives.

3. Indulgent Approach		
Characteristics	Goals	Typical Results
Encourages child to direct their behavior based upon immediate gratification needs, while not attending to the needs of others.	To avoid a tantrum or "scene." Or, perhaps to allow parent to cope with "guilty" feelings or allow compensation for "harmed" child (e.g., post divorce, etc).	Encourages "irrational demandingness" by child. In extreme cases, family gets taken "hostage" because of child's poor behavior. Child grows up unable to manage own moods or needs.
Arbitrary and fails to connect child's behavior to consequences. Sees child as helpless victim, in spite of ability to control adults/others.	To "excuse" child from natural and logical consequences for their choices and behavior. To protect the parent from their own upset when child makes poor choice.	Child learns to manipulate others and project blame on others. Child takes the "victim" identity and plays this card when they fail. "Spoiled" child unwilling to delay gratification.
Seeks to avoid a power struggle at all costs. Allows disrespectful behavior to go unchallenged. Confuses child-age appropriate behavior with permissiveness.	To avoid conflict at all cost, but which, paradoxically, only invites more confrontation by the child towards the parent.	Parent ends up being disrespected, child has more power and control over parents than vice versa, and therefore there is no genuine "authority" to guide the child.

As you just discovered,

- **Punishing parents** tend to use punitive, escalating, and external pressure through grounding, spanking, "taking away", yelling, threatening - to try and control their children. Children respond by seeking power through rebellion, deception, and argumentativeness. Children refocus arguments on whether or not the parent is "fair", instead of examining whatever they did to invoke the punishment in the first place. **Bottom line: Punishing parents are working way too hard.**
- **Authoritative parents**, on the other hand, are quietly confident in their parenting. They know children make mistakes and learn best by experiencing natural and logical consequences. They do not need to "invent" ever-escalating punishments, but, "allow the *consequences* to fit the crime." They give their children choices - so that the child can decide about their behavior - and therefore learn over time to make responsible choices. **Bottom line: Authoritative parents guide, not control, their children by empowering them to make good choices and experience natural and logical consequences for poor choices.**
- **Indulgent Parents** seek to avoid the escalating conflicts and arguments characteristic of punishing approaches. Here, *others* suffer from the child's poor choices as natural and logical consequences are removed. The child is "bailed out" too often. Child fails to learn to connect "real world" consequences with their self-absorbed behaviors and choices and lacks empathy for the needs of others. **Bottom line: Others suffer the consequences of the child's poor choices and the child fails to grow.**

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