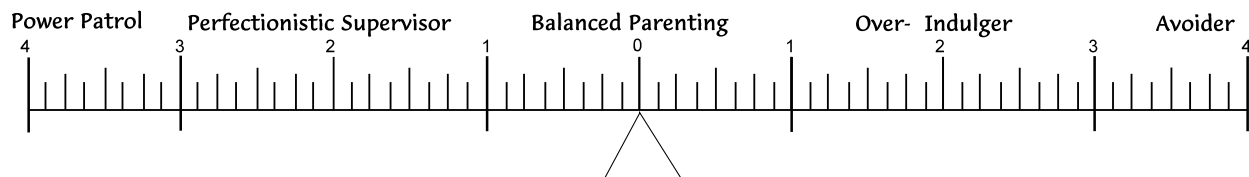


PARENTING STYLES

Family studies have identified three general types of parenting styles. Two are imbalanced and ineffective in the long-run: *over-controlling* and *under-controlling*. Only one general style is most effective in raising children who have the positive qualities and behaviors we identified as our goals. We will call this style *balanced* parenting.



Consider the laws of physics when you look at this scale. Where would you need to put a weight on the scale to balance the scale the quickest? The closer the weight is to the middle, the quicker the scale will balance. Moving the weight slightly, within the balanced area, creates only small imbalances. The farther the weight moves to either end, the more imbalanced the scale becomes. It is humanly impossible (and impractical) to always stay right at the zero. Balanced parenting is a *range*, between the two 1s. We can *choose* more flexible or more firm responses within that balanced range, based on the individual needs of the child, parent, or circumstances of the situation.

If our general, daily parenting style and techniques are within the balanced range, the effects (short and long-term) are healthy and balanced. The degree to which we experience negative and unhealthy effects (short- and long-term) depends on how frequently and extremely we use imbalanced styles or techniques.

The following sections detail five styles of parenting—three general styles and two specific categories within each of the two imbalanced styles. For each style, we ask similar questions about parenting and show how the answers might differ based on the parenting style.

Each style has positive qualities, but if taken too far, the extremely imbalanced forms of these qualities become harmful. In the general descriptions, we might recognize traits we have, yet disagree that we have other traits common to that style. In truth, each of us might use a little of all three styles, but one is usually our main parenting style. We usually have an everyday parenting style and another style we fall back on when we are under pressure, frustrated, or angry. We also might use one style at work or with adults and another at home or with children. As you read the descriptions, consider how they can apply to adult relationships, such as those involving spouses, supervisors, leaders or teachers.

If you want more insights, information and practical tools and tips about parenting styles, then listen to a one-hour recording of a live workshop called, "**Blended or Tossed? Which Is Your Parenting Style?**" For more info. go to <https://ParentsToolshop.com/lunch-n-learn>

The Over-Controlling Parenting Style (Autocratic)

Over-controlling parents are also called autocratic parents. The over-controlling parenting style seems the most extreme and negative. There are two types of over-controlling parenting styles, Power Patrols and Perfectionistic Supervisors. One is more extreme and negative than the other, but there are some traits that are common to almost all over-controlling parenting styles.

ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS

What is the parent's job?

Over-controlling parents believe a parent's job is to control their children. (We detail, later, *what* they want to control and *how* they try to control.)

Who has rights?

Over-controlling parents stand up for their rights, but often at the expense of their children's rights. Winning is important, even if it means the children "lose." The family revolves around the parents' needs or wants, without considering their children's feelings or needs.

Over-controlling families have a pecking order: parents are superior to children, older children are superior to younger children, and younger children are at the bottom of the ranks. If there are two parents present, both are superior to children or one parent is considered superior to the other.

Who gets respect?

Children are expected to treat their parents with respect, but parents are not obligated to treat children with respect.

How are mistakes handled?

Because parents are adults, they are always right. When someone points out their mistakes or offers a different opinion, over-controlling parents feel defensive, rather than admitting to and learning from their mistakes or considering other points of view.

How are problems solved and decisions made?

Over-controlling parents make the decisions and solve the problems that arise in the family, even problems or decisions that don't directly affect them. They believe they have the right answers and want their children to do the right thing, so they do what they can to *make* their children follow their advice.

Who decides how children should behave, which interests they pursue, and the goals they set?

Over-controlling parents want their children to have the behaviors, opinions, personality traits, feelings, goals, and values the *parents* think their children should have.

Who is responsible for controlling the child's behavior?

It is the parents' responsibility to do whatever it takes to *make* children behave the way *they* think children should behave.

Who makes the rules and how are they enforced?

Over-controlling parents want their children to unquestioningly obey all authority figures and their rules. They tell children what to do and how to do it. Sometimes, parents expect children to obey their commands even when they are unreasonable or beyond their children's ability.

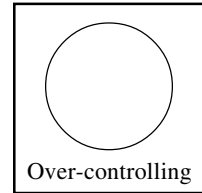
Over-controlling parents use "power tools" to control their children. It *is* important for children to follow rules, but over-controlling parents emphasize the superiority or power of the enforcer, rather than the *value* of the rule. Instead of fostering respect for *all* people, over-controlling parents emphasize adults' authority. Children behave and do what *others* tell them to do so they can *avoid* harsh punishment or criticism.

How do parents discipline?

Over-controlling parents use punishment that imposes suffering of various degrees and types—mental, emotional (shame), or physical suffering. If something goes wrong, it is somehow the child's fault.

SYMBOL FOR OVER-CONTROLLING PARENTING

In the book, *Active Parenting*, author Michael Popkin calls over-controlling parenting “autocratic.” He uses the symbol of an empty circle to represent limits with no choices. We use his symbol to represent the over-controlling parenting style.

**LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF OVER-CONTROLLING PARENTING**

- When children are denied all power and control, they miss important opportunities to make decisions and learn valuable life skills. They take little initiative because they lack confidence and are afraid of making mistakes or not being perfect.
- Children from over-controlling families usually wait for others to set limits for them, rather than setting limits for themselves. If they do something wrong, they are more inclined to lie, to avoid harsh punishment. When they are punished, they either seek revenge or give in out of fear and become blindly submissive to any authority figure. Hence, they don't learn to think for themselves.
- Children and young adults from over-controlling families function well in controlled, structured settings, unless they are rebelling against authority. They have difficulty, however, functioning in permissive settings where no one sets limits for them. When they have excessive freedom, they take advantage of it or can't decide what to do. When they are away from the controlling parent, they frequently engage in excessive behavior (eating, drinking, sex, television-watching, or partying).
- Over-controlling parenting poorly prepares children for today's business world, where employers need adults who can take initiative, think for themselves, and perform independently, with little outside guidance. Adults who were reared in over-controlling families often have difficulty in these areas because they rely on others to tell them what to do and are afraid of making mistakes.

TYPES OF OVER-CONTROLLING PARENTS

The two types of over-controlling parents are Power Patrols and Perfectionistic Supervisors. The following descriptions detail the ways these two parenting types expand on the general traits of the over-controlling parenting style.

Power Patrols

The Power Patrol parenting style, in its most extreme form, is physically or emotionally abusive. Power Patrols are not, however, always abusive. They are simply more concerned with the love of power than the power of love. They want to be in control of situations and the people in them.

Personality Traits of Power Patrols

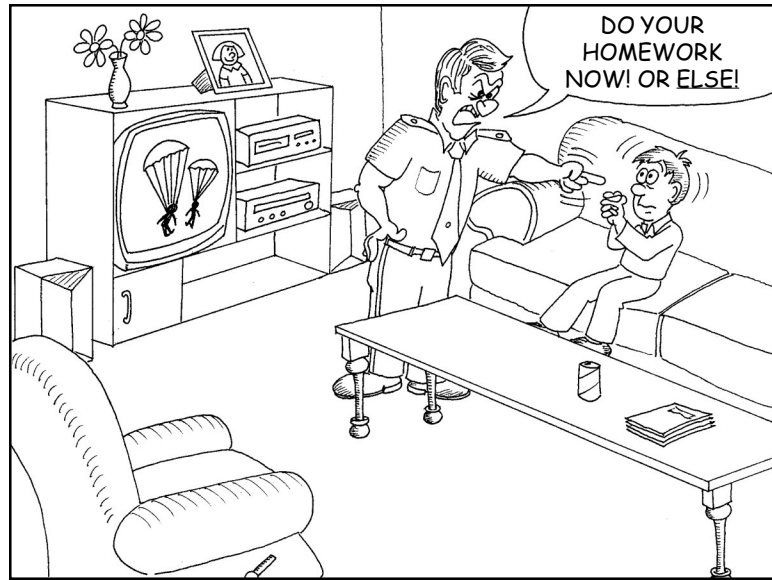
Power Patrols make strong leaders, but can be bossy, have little patience or flexibility, and want to see immediate results. They expect unquestioning obedience and want things done their way, because it is the *right* way. They view compromising as losing or giving in, and often get into power struggles with their children and other adults.

Power Patrols often have difficulty establishing warmth and closeness in their relationships. They often appear angry and resent anyone who tries to control them. Their insensitivity to others' feelings usually shuts down communication. Power Patrols are often argumentative and take

different viewpoints just to stay in control. They don't realize (or don't care) what it's like to be on the receiving end of their demands, orders, and criticisms.

What Power Patrols Believe

A parent's job is to make sure children always follow the rules and to punish them if they break the rules. Children must obey all rules and authority figures or they will grow up to be delinquents. (Studies of delinquent teens have found, however, that angry, aggressive children are often from families where at least one parent is rejecting, hostile, critical, controlling, or revengeful.)



How Power Patrols Handle Negative Feelings

Power Patrols usually think in black and white, right and wrong, my way and the wrong way. They don't allow children to express negative feelings, because they fear they won't be able to control the situation, the child, or themselves. They usually think their children's opinions and negative feelings are wrong so they should not express them. When children speak their minds, Power Patrols usually think they are being disrespectful and defiant.

The Power Patrol's Tools

Power Patrols use commands and threats to motivate children. When children misbehave or challenge their authority, Power Patrols fear they are losing the battle for control. If verbal threats, shame, or blame don't work, they might resort to physical punishment. They believe that if negative behavior brings emotional or physical suffering, children will stop.

Long-Term Effects of Power-Patrol Parenting

- Children of Power Patrols often feel discouraged, have little self-respect, and have a poor relationship with that parent. It is difficult to trust someone you fear, so children build walls to protect themselves from being hurt by the Power Patrol's rejection, criticism, judgment, and harshness. Power Patrols are often unaware of how hurt others are by their actions and words or the unhealthy lessons they are teaching.
- Children don't respect the Power Patrol's authority; they fear it. Children obey rules so they won't get punished, not because they respect the parent's judgement, see value in the rule, and *choose* to follow it. Children of Power Patrols are *other-disciplined*; they often behave only when adults are watching. They wait for the next command, taking little initiative, since they fear mistakes.
- Children of Power Patrols are often impressed with the power their parents have over them and seek ways to have power over others. When they are in positions of power, they often try to control others, get their way, and prove they are right. Since children don't learn assertive, respectful communication skills, they often have negative relationships with others.
- If children (and adult children) don't rebel or strive to be in control, they are likely to blindly follow orders from those they perceive as superior (including bossy peers).

- If Power Patrols tell their children they are controlling or hurting them because they love them, the effects can last a lifetime. As adults, they may equate love with pain, physical or emotional, and stay in abusive relationships. They often believe they deserve to be abused and that the abuse is somehow their fault. As adults, children can make a choice to repeat the errors of their upbringing or break the cycle of physical, verbal, or emotional abuse.

Perfectionistic Supervisors

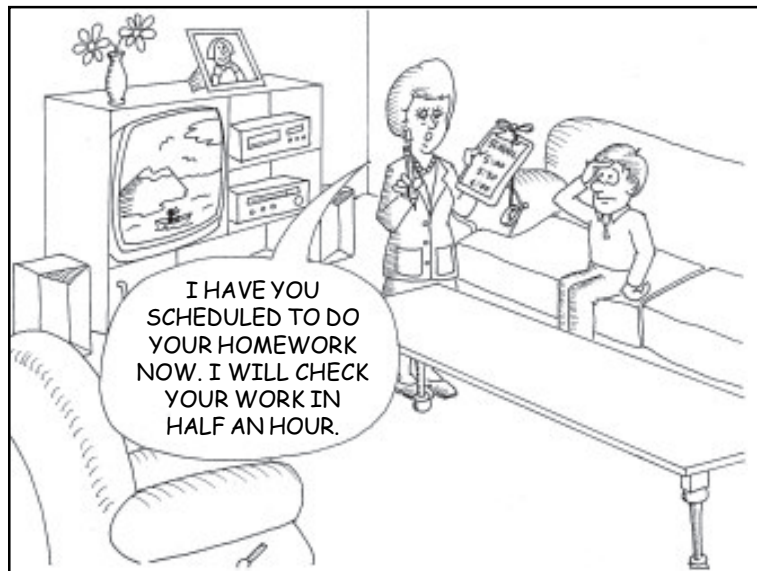
Perfectionistic Supervisors are the more positive but still imbalanced, type of over-controlling parent.

Personality Traits of Perfectionistic Supervisors

Perfectionistic Supervisors are usually highly capable adults—self-disciplined, organized, scheduled, and responsible—and they expect children to be that way, too. Perfectionistic Supervisors are the ultimate super-achievers—they hold down a job, volunteer at school or the family’s religious group, coach a team, assume most household responsibilities, and write a book in their spare time. (Have you guessed that this is the way I become imbalanced?) People admire their accomplishments, so they pressure themselves to achieve more and never disappoint others.

Some professions, such as teaching or management, require qualities that come naturally to Perfectionistic Supervisors. They must be organized, manage large groups, point out mistakes, and keep to a schedule. These qualities, if not extreme or critical, can be helpful. At home,

however, children can feel pressured or controlled and believe their efforts are never good enough.



What Perfectionistic Supervisors Believe

Constant supervision and structure will prevent children from misbehaving. They also believe their children’s behavior is a reflection of whether they are good parents, which influences some of their parenting decisions.

How Perfectionistic Supervisors Handle Negative Feelings

Perfectionistic Supervisors overuse the word *should*. When they listen, they often judge feelings and opinions as right or wrong and try to make their children fit the mold of what *they* think people or children should think, feel, believe, or be like.

The Perfectionistic Supervisor’s Tools

Perfectionistic Supervisors often go beyond taking an active interest in their children’s activities and identities. They take responsibility for scheduling and monitoring the child’s responsibilities. They try to *improve* their children through rewards, incentives, and goal-setting. They reward their children for their compliance by telling them they are proud and happy to have such “good” children. They try to correct their children’s mistakes and weaknesses through suggestions, nagging, criticizing, lecturing, and guilt trips (“I’m disappointed in you”). If these techniques don’t work, Perfectionistic Supervisors increase their control by taking away special privileges, even if they have no logical relation to what the child did.

Long-Term Effects of Perfectionistic Supervisor Parenting

Children of Perfectionistic Supervisors are usually on time, perfectly dressed, well-mannered, and finish their school work promptly—because the *parent* makes sure of it. Their parents are often unaware, however, that their short-term successes have many negative long-term effects and unhealthy hidden messages:

- Children of Perfectionistic Supervisors often express resentment, frustration, and discouragement because their parents have unrealistic expectations. They usually lack self-confidence and think they are a disappointment to their parents, because nothing they do is ever good enough. They try to please other people, so no one will ever be disappointed in them. This inhibits their curiosity, creativity, individuality, and problem-solving or decision-making skills.
- Children behave and do their work because they get rewards—material payoffs, acceptance, and conditional praise—not because they are *self*-motivated.
- Separation issues are often difficult for Perfectionistic Supervisors because they think they are losing control of their children. When their children try to spread their wings, these parents often have difficulty letting go. The children resent this ongoing control and struggle to control their own lives. As teens, their children might rebel, to prove they can't be controlled.
- As teens, children of Perfectionistic Supervisors frequently display obsessive, over-achieving, or perfectionist habits. They practically kill themselves (sometimes literally) trying to live up to unrealistic expectations. If they are not obsessed with trying to prove their worth and don't rebel, they might simply give up trying.
- As adults, children of Perfectionistic Supervisors often have strict rules about what is right and wrong. They usually see things in black and white and having difficulty operating in gray areas.

HISTORICAL TRENDS IN AUTOCRATIC PARENTING

Until the 1950s, most parents used an over-controlling (autocratic) parenting style, which fit the structure of society and most families. Back then, there was a pecking order of superiors and inferiors. At home, the father was the supreme ruler, the mother was expected to obey him, and the children were supposed to obey both of them. To succeed in the workplace people said, “Yes, Sir. No, Sir. What do you want me to do next, Sir?” If someone in authority told people to do something, they did it—without question. Autocratic parenting was the style that best prepared children for the real world *then*.

The 1960s brought a major shift in American society, from a superior/inferior structure to one of equal worth and rights. Civil rights, women's rights, laborers' rights, minority rights, and children's rights forever changed American society. Only when children believe adults are superior and infallible do they believe adults have the right to punish or hurt them.

Teenagers in the 1960s resented adults telling them what to do and rebelled against their autocratic control: how to wear their hair, what clothes to wear, which profession to enter, whether to go to college or be drafted into war. They believed they had a right to voice their feelings, opinions, and make decisions about issues that affected them. Autocratic parenting did not allow for such individuality. Drugs and “the sexual revolution”

provided a temporary escape and a new way to rebel. Parents saw they were losing control. The professionals who tried to help these parents recognized this rebellion against authority and encouraged parents to loosen their reins. So began a new trend—permissive parenting.

Did you know . . .

In America, there were laws and agencies to protect animals from abuse and neglect long before children received the same protection? If children were abused, people called the local animal shelter to intervene!

The Under-Controlling Parenting Style (Permissive)

Parents who don't control their children *enough* are also called permissive. At first glance, it may seem to be a positive parenting style because there is no harshness, criticism, or punishment. It is, however, as equally imbalanced as the over-controlling style, but in the opposite way, and also has many negative long-term effects. There are also two kinds of under-controlling parenting styles, the Avoider and the Over-Indulger. They are more different from each other than the two kinds of over-controlling parenting styles. There are some common traits, however, to most under-controlling parenting styles.

ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS

What is the parent's job?

It is the parent's job to avoid conflict and make or keep children happy. This usually includes protecting children from disappointment, frustration, and getting in trouble.

Who has rights?

Most permissive families revolve around the children; their rights and needs are more important than the parents'.

Who gets respect?

Under-controlling parents try to treat their children with respect, hoping they will feel happy and, therefore, behave better. Since parents put their needs and rights below children's, they are more willing to accept disrespectful behavior from their children. While it's clear most parents aren't getting respect in these families, the children are also not getting real respect.

How are mistakes handled?

When children make mistakes, permissive parents might listen to the child's feelings, but not hold them accountable for the results of their actions. Children have unlimited chances to correct their behavior, with few or no consequences for misbehavior. Some under-controlling parents are overprotective so the children will not make mistakes. Most under-controlling parents rescue their children from mistakes by making excuses for the child's behavior or by blaming others (including themselves).

How are problems solved and decisions made?

Most under-controlling families solve problems and make decisions based on the children's demands or what will make the children happy. Some under-controlling parents solve problems *for* their children. Most let their children make whatever decision they want, even if it is impulsive or irresponsible. When a problem arises, these parents deny it exists, hope the problem will go away, or view it through filtered lenses. They only acknowledge a problem's existence when it gets so bad that they can no longer ignore it.

Who decides how children should behave, which interests they pursue, and the goals they set?

Children make behavior, interest and goal decisions. The parents are usually willing to let the children do whatever makes them happy.

Who is responsible for controlling the child's behavior?

Being responsible means "to be *accountable* for" our behavior. We consider our options, the possible risks, make the best decision we can, and accept the positive or negative effect of the choices we make. Therefore, children from under-controlling families are not *responsible*, but are definitely *controlling* their behavior choices (even if their choice is to behave irresponsibly).

Who makes the rules and how are rules enforced?

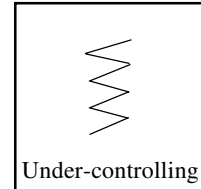
Children can usually do as they please, since under-controlling parents rarely set limits or enforce rules. They use reminders and polite pleading to convince children to behave properly. If they set limits, they rarely enforce them. If the children don't like others' rules or experiencing the effects of breaking rules, their parents often request special treatment or rescue their children.

How do parents discipline?

Under-controlling parents rarely discipline because it's too inconvenient or because they fear losing their children's love. When repeated pleading doesn't work, parents often say, "I've had it. I'm tired of being ignored." They either give in or jump to the other extreme and try to regain control through over-controlling means.

SYMBOL FOR UNDER-CONTROLLING PARENTING

In *Active Parenting*, author Michael Popkin calls under-controlling parenting "permissive." He uses the symbol of a zigzag line, which symbolizes freedom and choices, without any limits. We use his symbol to represent the under-controlling parenting style.

**LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF UNDER-CONTROLLING PARENTING**

- An under-controlling parenting style poorly prepares children for the real world. Most societies offer some freedom, but within consistent, reasonable limits that protect the rights of others. Since these children can usually do what they want and experience few discomforts, they have little motivation for changing or improving themselves and are unprepared for the harsh realities of the real world. Children who lack self-control, self-discipline, and respect for others have difficulty operating within the rules of structured settings like school and work. They test limits, hoping they can manipulate others into loosening the reins. When their efforts to change others or their environment fail, they often quit, saying "School (or the job) was too hard (or restrictive)."
- Children from under-controlling families are used to others rescuing them or excusing their behavior, so they don't accept responsibility for their actions. They seek out rescuers and blame everyone—parents, teachers, employers, spouses—for their problems and failures. Because they've been pampered, they can't handle criticism or suggestions for improving themselves. They use their energy and creativity to manipulate others into taking care of their needs and desires. They spend more time trying to get *out* of responsibility than in developing responsible independence.

TYPES OF UNDER-CONTROLLING PARENTS

Under-controlling parenting can involve two extremes—not doing enough (avoidance) or doing too much (over-indulgence) for children. The following descriptions detail the ways these two extremes expand on the general traits of the under-controlling parenting style.

Avoiders

Some under-controlling parents are Avoiders. In these families, the parent's needs are most important. Parents don't teach skills, set limits, supervise, or follow through because it takes too much time; they are either too busy or too tired (lazy?) to be bothered. Extreme Avoiders are physically or emotionally neglectful.

Personality Traits of Avoiders

Avoiders are into comfort—their own comfort. They are often easy going, undemanding, and let their children do for themselves. They avoid responsibility and commitments because they are too busy or too relaxed to be inconvenienced. They often break promises at the last minute, because they no longer feel like doing it. They are often emotionally detached and rarely take the time to talk or listen.

What Avoiders Believe

Children will learn skills and proper behavior on their own, just from trial and error. Children should not inconvenience parents. Problems (and problem behavior) will eventually go away if parents ignore them or pretend they don't exist.

How Avoiders Handle Negative Feelings

They avoid stress, negative feelings, and conflict. Even if people are upset, they should not express it. They often perceive even healthy disagreements and assertiveness as fighting or arguing and insist on eternal family peace.

The Avoider's Tools

Avoiders have a hands-off approach to parenting. They let their children do whatever they want, as long as it doesn't inconvenience them. Parents who are into their own comfort are often preoccupied with adult conversations and activities. They don't pay attention to children, allowing them to do whatever they want, even if it is inappropriate or hurts others.

Long-Term Effects of Avoidance Parenting

- Letting children learn by trial and error has its merits, but Avoiders don't take the time and effort to teach their children good decision-making skills or help children process what they learn from their mistakes. If children are unsupervised or alone a much of the time (e.g., latch-key kids), they become bored and often make impulsive, poor decisions.
- The children often respond to problems and mistakes as the parent does—they deny responsibility, make excuses ("I'm too busy" or "I don't feel like it."), and expect special treatment. When the real world holds the children accountable and they fail, their parents want to avoid further disappointment, so they often give up on the children and "write them off."
- Children of Avoiders usually have a poor sense of self-worth because their parents didn't make an effort to show they cared.



Over-Indulgers

Over-indulgence is the more common, positive, yet still imbalanced, type of under-controlling parenting style. Here, the parents don't set limits because it might make their child unhappy.

Personality Traits of Over-Indulgers

These parents are usually sensitive and understanding people, in touch with others' feelings and desires. These are positive traits, if used properly. Over-indulgent parents want to be loved, liked, and appreciated. They try to please others to earn this approval. They sacrifice their own needs and rights to keep the peace or make others happy.

What Over-Indulgers Believe

Children should have a happy, carefree childhood. Over-Indulgent parents want their children to have the things they didn't have and protect them from negative experiences, even if these experiences could offer valuable lessons.

How Over-Indulgers Handle Negative Feelings

They do whatever it takes to keep others happy and rescue them from their negative feelings. These parents usually sense what their children want or need and are afraid to disappoint or frustrate them. So they give in or give undue service, hoping that if their children are happy, they'll cooperate more.

The Over-Indulger's Tools

Too often, these parents give and serve too much, at the expense of their own rights and needs. They suffer from “affluenza,” doting on their children, emotionally and materialistically. They usually take on too many responsibilities, becoming maids, cooks, toy stores, tutors, financiers—and doormats.

Over-indulgers are great rescuers, protecting children from even healthy hardships. They often volunteer their time to the child's activities so

they can intervene or prevent problems from occurring. They deliver forgotten lunches and retrieve homework left at school so their children won't experience disappointment. Perfectionistic Supervisors are overly involved so they can *control* the situation or child and look like good parents. Over-indulgers are overly involved so they can *protect* children and *serve* their children's whims.



Long-Term Effects of Over-Indulgent Parenting

- Children from under-controlling homes develop a distorted perception of reality—they think the world revolves around them. At first, they may feel powerful, because they can take advantage of others. Eventually, they resent the people who don't have the courage to set limits. Because they've been protected and rescued, they have trouble coping with the normal struggles of adult life. They expect success, but aren't willing to work for it.
- Over-Indulgers, who bend over backwards to keep their children happy, are often shocked when their children become ungrateful, demanding, and disrespectful in return. But the children know who's really in control—they! Children learn to manipulate by using “please,” promises, and logical arguments to get their parents to give in.
- Young adults from under-controlling families have difficulty operating within the limits of a job, its rules, and with authority figures. They often drift from job to job, trying to find the perfect job. When they can't support themselves, their parents welcome them home, offering the standard of living to which they are accustomed. The parents think this is their job and they like feeling needed.

A Personal Story. When I was in college, I worked at a runaway shelter. I expected most runaway teens would come from negative, controlling families. I was surprised to find just as many who ran away from perfectionist-controlling families and permissive ones. Runaways from permissive homes thought their parents didn't care about them. They tested how far they could go before their parents would set limits. I rarely saw a child who had run away from a family that wasn't over-controlling or under-controlling.

HISTORICAL TRENDS IN PERMISSIVE PARENTING

The angry teens of the 60s blamed their parents and authority for their problems and vowed to raise their children differently. Instead of keeping what their parents did well (such as setting limits and teaching respect for authority) and rejecting what they did poorly (such as demanding blind obedience and trying to control children's individuality), they went to the other extreme. These changes tipped the scale to the other extreme—permissive parenting.

In 1970, Thomas Gordon developed *P.E.T.: Parent Effectiveness Training*, the first parenting curriculum that was widely accepted in America. It taught effective communication skills such as problem-ownership, active listening, I-messages, and problem solving. These skills greatly improved family relationships by fostering effective communication. In fact, *P.E.T.*'s communication skills are so effective, nearly every major institution still uses and/or teaches them, including business, education, counseling, human relationships, and parenting. Parents and professionals eventually became frustrated with *P.E.T.* because it contained no guidelines for discipline—and they labeled it “permissive.” Today, a few popular parenting resources encourage parents to throw out all the important valuable skills *P.E.T.* taught, simply because it was missing one important skill area. *P.E.T.* was *not* a permissive parenting program, just an incomplete one.

By the 1980s, problems that started in the 60s had reached epidemic proportions. Many families were touched, in some way, by problems such as widespread drug use, teenage pregnancy, AIDS, gangs and violence, child abduction, and sexual victimization. Many people rightly blamed permissiveness for most of these problems. Other problems, such as abduction and sexual victimization, had their roots in abusive parenting and autocratic practices that taught children to blindly obey any authority at the expense of their own rights. Some people said parents should go back to autocratic methods to regain control. They had obviously forgotten, or didn't know, the reason permissive parenting became popular in the first place—because autocratic parenting had a long-term rebound effect. The pendulum was swinging away from permissive, but was going too far again into the autocratic zone, without finding and maintaining a healthy balance. Since autocratic and permissive parenting both resulted in negative results for children and society, it is wise to avoid both of these extreme, imbalanced parenting styles.

The Balanced Parenting Style ☆☆☆☆

Any time our parenting style is extreme, so are the long-term effects. The balanced parenting style is based on a healthy, balanced philosophy and uses effective parenting techniques. Therefore, the long-term effects are almost exclusively positive.

ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS

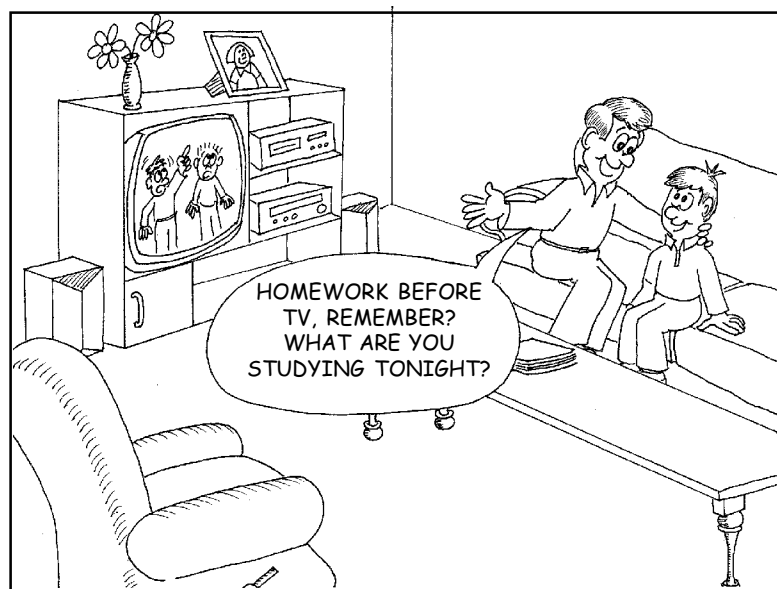
What is the parent's job?

Balanced parents share the individual, family, and societal goals we listed earlier. They believe their job is to *teach* children the life skills they need to be self-sufficient, responsible members of society.

Who has rights?

In balanced families, parents and children are equal but different. They each have equal human worth and deserve to be treated with equal dignity and respect, even when their individual needs are different. Parents try to balance the needs of the adults and their

relationships and also the children's individual needs and the parent/child relationship. While this is a difficult balancing act, they also realize that they can't (and shouldn't) meet each member's every need. Their goal is to teach children how to meet their own needs. They strive to maintain appropriate boundaries—they are available to their children, without fostering unnecessary dependency.



In balanced families, the adults aren't superior to children, just different—they are older, more experienced, and usually more knowledgeable. Increased privileges result from increased responsibility, not just one's age or position.

Who gets respect?

Balanced parents believe that *all* people deserve to be treated respectfully, regardless of their age or position. Parents teach respect to their children and earn respect from their children by treating their children and others respectfully, as role models.

Balanced parents set rules that are mutually respectful. They show self-respect by setting limits and they show respect for their children by offering choices. Children have some freedom and choices, within limits that show respect for others' rights. Balanced parents are socially responsible, teaching their children the positive and negative effects of their behavior choices.

Over-controlling parents treat children like objects, doing things *to* them. Under-controlling parents treat children like royalty, doing things *for* them. Balanced parents treat children like assets that have worth by doing things *with* children and involving them in decisions and activities.

How do balanced parents handle negative feelings?

Balanced parents show empathy and understanding for their children's negative feelings and differing opinions. They don't try to *change* them or label them right or wrong. They recognize that feelings and opinions are a part of life, so they teach their children *how* to express those feelings appropriately. In a balanced family, "We can agree to disagree, if we disagree respectfully."

Balanced parents regularly practice the healthy communication skills they teach to their children. They express their concerns in respectful, assertive ways. They stand up for their rights, but don't violate their child's right to be treated with respect. They avoid using blame or guilt to motivate others. When their anger is about to erupt, they disengage and calm down so they don't direct their anger at their children.

How are mistakes handled?

Balanced parents encourage their children to learn from their mistakes. They know that mistakes are part of life and learning, so they avoid blame and criticism. Instead, they hold children accountable for making amends for the effects of their choices and learning better skills.

Balanced parents are gentle with their own mistakes, willing to admit when they are wrong, and consider others' viewpoints. Through their words and actions (role modeling not lecturing), balanced parents show children how to make responsible decisions, accept responsibility for their mistakes, learn and grow from them, and still maintain their self-respect and sense of self-worth.

How are problems solved and decisions made?

When problems arise in a balanced family, parents take responsibility and ownership for their contribution to the problem. They shift the focus to what there *is* a choice about, within limits that respect the rights and needs of others.

Whenever possible, balanced families strive to reach win/win solutions to problems. *Balanced families do not vote* because there are always losers—and discouraged losers will usually sabotage the decision. While mutual agreement is their goal, it isn't always possible. On occasion, parents need to make an executive decision. Balanced parents listen to their children's ideas and opinions and consider them in their decision. Children can have a say about an issue, but might not always get their way.

Who decides how children should behave, which interests they pursue, and the goals they set?

Balanced parents view their children as unique individuals, not carbon copies of themselves or balls of clay to mold into whatever forms *they* think the children should become. They teach their children *how* to set and reach goals, rather than setting goals *for* their children and then pressuring them

to meet unrealistic expectations. They may not share their children's interests, but they strive to understand them so they can increase their own knowledge and better support their children.

Who is responsible for controlling children's behavior?

The balanced parent's job is not to *control* their children; their job is to guide and teach children how to control their *own* behavior. As children develop the skills and qualities they need to be healthy, well-balanced, fully-functioning adults, they naturally make increasingly responsible decisions that positively affect their lives.

Sometimes balanced parents are more firm than flexible or more flexible than firm. These are *conscious* choices, based on the needs of the situation, the parent, and child. They are not the result of their personality issues. Such slight, temporary, conscious imbalances, within the balanced range, are often quite appropriate.

Who makes the rules and how are they enforced?

Balanced parents tell children what they *can* do, instead of what they *can't* do. Their rules focus on the *value* behind a rule, rather than the power of the rule-maker. Balanced parents offer some choices or freedom within reasonable rules or limits. They provide limited privileges to see how responsibly their children can handle them. Over-controlling parents use privileges to bribe and control children. Under-controlling parents offer unlimited privileges without any responsibility.

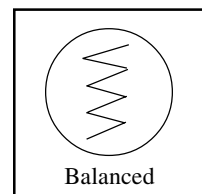
How do balanced parents discipline?

Balanced parents try to *prevent* the need for discipline by telling children what they *can* do, teaching behavior skills, revealing children's behavior choices and the possible outcomes of those choices. When children choose to misbehave, balanced parents consider the children's point of view and their possible goals. They show their children how to meet these goals through positive behavior. If children still *choose* to behave inappropriately, balanced parents allow the revealed outcome to occur. They may also need to use discipline in unexpected situations in which behavior is so inappropriate that parents must set immediate boundaries.

The actual discipline balanced parents choose depends on the situation. Balanced parents use the most logically related discipline for the misbehavior. Balanced parents do not add suffering to their discipline, because this distracts children from the lessons they need to learn. It builds resentment and invites revenge, instead of focusing on how children can make amends for their mistakes.

SYMBOL FOR BALANCED PARENTING

Active Parenting calls balanced parenting "democratic" and uses the symbol of a zigzag, representing choices or freedom, inside a circle, which represents reasonable limits. We refer to this symbol often as we learn how to set and maintain a balanced parenting style.



Balanced parenting got the label "democratic" when authors compared the qualities of a balanced parenting style to a democratic *society*.² Here are just a few examples:

- Citizens have certain basic rights (free speech, for one) and privileges they can earn (a driver's license, for example). They must balance these rights and privileges with the responsibility of using them appropriately and not violating other people's rights in the process.
- All people have equal human worth, even when they are different or have individual needs. "All men are created equally." ("Men" refers to humankind.)
- Citizens are involved in decision-making whenever possible. When they cannot make the final decision, they can express their opposing opinions and their representatives will consider them in the decision.

Balanced parenting is no longer called “democratic,” because parents and professionals confused democratic parenting with a liberal political belief. (Someone can be a conservative Republican and still practice balanced, “democratic” parenting.) As a result, a few authors have criticized “democratic parenting” as being liberal and permissive. These authors inadvertently discourage parents from using accurate, healthy, effective parenting resources, simply because the resources use a label that has lost its original meaning. They usually present only two extreme styles of parenting, permissive parenting and autocratic parenting.

When you read criticism about “democratic” parenting, carefully read the explanation. If you use the guidelines and accurate definitions in this book, you can recognize imbalanced parenting advice, whatever its label. (See the “Screening Advice” section of Chapter 15, The Three C’s, for more suggestions.)

LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF BALANCED PARENTING

Research and decades of experience have proven that children from balanced families learn the life skills and develop the qualities we listed as our individual, family, and societal goals. Over the past 40 years, each generation has had a growing number of children raised in healthy, balanced families. Even when these children (and later, adults) are the minority, they make a significant impact on their corner of the world.

- Children and young adults from balanced families know how to operate within rules and limitations. They find the *value* of a rule (even when it is not stated) and the choices they have within those limits. They also act responsibly in permissive settings because they are *self-disciplined*. They usually only resist a request if doing so defies logic or would violate someone’s rights, ethics, or a higher law.
- As teens and adults, children of balanced parents usually make responsible decisions. They have been making choices their entire lives—to varying degrees, based on their age, maturity, and the situation. Children from balanced families often want more independence and are usually skilled and responsible enough to handle it.
- Children from balanced families are self-motivated. They are more likely to take the initiative to do tasks, simply because they see that it needs done. They also know when they need to ask permission first. These are valued qualities in the business world.
- Children and young adults from balanced families have excellent leadership and communication skills. They know how to motivate people without bribes or threats. They promote teamwork and bring out the assets in each team member. They know how to resolve problems, learn from their mistakes, and accept responsibility for their behavior choices.
- Children raised in balanced families learn *how* to be responsible—for their jobs, emotions, bodies, and behavior. They have good time-management and organizational skills. Whatever profession these children choose as adults, they are active members of the work team and resolve problems professionally and maturely.
- Children from balanced families are less likely to rebel against authority. Their relationships with authority figures are usually positive because they don’t see them as a threat or symbol of power and control. They see them as people—and people have different personalities and needs. Because their parents respected their individuality and taught them important life skills, they know how to tolerate or work *with* people who are different. When someone treats them disrespectfully or tries to manipulate them, they know how to respond appropriately. They might reach a win/win agreement or voice their opinion assertively, which are both respectful options.

Read an article on Parenting Teamwork at:

<https://parentstoolshop.com/parenting-challenges/how-to-build-teamwork-with-different-parenting-styles>

SEE A VIDEO “Parenting Style Show” at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0yBHWONKLZw>

Then listen to a one-hour recording of a live workshop called, “**Blended or Tossed? Which Is Your Parenting Style?**” For more info. go to <https://Parentstoolshop.com/lunch-n-learn>