Building Strong Parenting Partnerships

National Resource Center for HEALTHY MARRIAGE and FAMILIES

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To build strong parenting partnerships it is important for couples to understand and manage their differing parenting styles. "Parenting styles" refer to how parents teach, influence, and socialize their children. The concept of parenting styles includes two key elements of parenting: parental responsiveness (i.e., warmth or supportiveness) and parental demandingness (i.e., behavioral control).[1]

Parenting Styles

There are four primary parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, indulgent, and uninvolved. For years, researchers have used these parenting styles to predict child well-being; specifically academic performance, psychosocial competence, and social competence.[2]

- Parents with an *authoritative* style demonstrate high warmth and high control. "They monitor and impart clear standards…They are assertive but not intrusive and restrictive. Their disciplinary methods are supportive, rather than punitive."[3] This style is generally linked to children who are happy, capable, and successful.[4,5]

- The *authoritarian* style is high in control but low in warmth. Parents who use this style are "obedience- and status-oriented, and expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation."[6] Children raised by authoritarian parents are generally obedient; while lower in social competence and self-esteem.[7,8]

- *Indulgent* parenting is high in warmth but low in control. These parents are more "responsive than they are demanding."[9] Indulgent parenting styles are generally linked to children who have more problems with authority, have less self-regulation, and poorer school outcomes.[10,11]

- Parents with an *uninvolved* style provide low warmth and low control. This style is generally linked to children who lack self-control, have low self-esteem, and are less competent than their peers.[12,13]

Figure 1: PARENTING STYLES

		CONTROL	
		High	**Low**
WARMTH	**High**	Authoritative *(democratic or balanced)* High Warmth High Control	Indulgent *(permissive or nondirective)* High Warmth Low Control
	Low	Authoritarian *(strict or controlling)* Low Warmth High Control	Uninvolved *(neglectful or dismissive)* Low Warmth Low Control

Source: Maccoby, E. E., & Martin, J. A. (1983). Socialization in the context of the family: Parent–child interaction.[20]

Why Parenting Styles May Differ

Parenting styles can be influenced by numerous factors, including one's culture, family of origin, education, and personality. Style may also be influenced by the age of children, family size, biological relationship and family structure. Particularly when parents have different preferred parenting styles, it is important for couples to work together, to support one another, and to not confuse their children. For example, an indulgent parent may want to give children money for doing chores around the house. However, this could create contention if the other parent feels housework should be an unpaid expectation.

> ## Spillover
>
> **Positive aspects of the couple relationship appear to promote positive parenting and negative aspects of the couple relationship appear to promote negative parenting. [21]**

Tips and Resources to Help Couples Build a Strong Parenting Partnership

Professionals, and other interested parties, who work with parents can help cultivate strong parenting partnerships. The following is a sample of activities to consider:

- Encourage healthy parenting styles. Some parents, because of their upbringing, may not know what healthy authoritarian parenting looks like. Those who work with parents can encourage and reinforce healthy parenting practices and skills such as consistency, monitoring, and warmth.

- Offer, or connect parents to, parenting education courses. Parenting education encompasses opportunities to expand "insights, understanding and attitudes and the acquisition of knowledge and skills about the development of both parents and of their children and the relationship between them."[14] Particularly for adoptive, foster, or first-time parents, parenting education can expose individuals to helpful information about child development, parenting styles, discipline, and effective parenting behaviors (view resources at CYFERnet, www.cyfernet.org).

- Offer, or connect parents to, healthy marriage and relationship education courses to reinforce or strengthen their relationship as a couple and/or co-parenting team. These courses are voluntary opportunities to learn healthy relationship skills and knowledge such as communication and conflict management. A summary of healthy marriage and relationship education and associated programs around the country is available at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Healthy Marriage Initiative website, http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/index.html.

- Facilitate parental partnership development. In social services, it is not uncommon, for males and father-figures to feel excluded.[15] Professionals should encourage both parents to engage in discussions and decisions about parenting.[16]

- Remarriage and stepfamily dynamics may introduce additional adults whose input and participation should be considered. In strong parental partnerships, all caregivers could be encouraged to work together for the good of the children.

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Parenting Apart

Tips for non-residential parents, incarcerated parents, deployed parents, etc: [22]

- **Acknowledge the challenges and offer assistance.**

- **Discourage competition between parents.**

- **Encourage engagement of all parties and strive for cooperative co-parenting .**

- **Link to on-line and electronic resources that facilitate learning and connection from a distance.**

- **Recognize the place both parents have in a child's heart.**

Conclusion

Children who experience high levels of parental conflict tend to have more internalizing and externalizing behavior problems (e.g., depression, aggression, lower academic achievement).[17] Because conflict between parents can have a negative "spill-over" effect on children,[18] parents should strive to work as a team. Parenting styles are changeable and parents can learn and adopt parenting styles and behaviors that facilitate healthy relationships and positive child well-being.[19] Strong parenting partnerships not only benefit the child, but can also reduce stress on the parents as they transition into new relationships and stepfamily situations.

Notes

[1] Maccoby, E. E., & Martin, J. A. (1983). Socialization in the context of the family: Parent–child interaction. In P. H. Mussen & E. M. Hetherington, *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 4. Socialization, personality, and social development* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Wiley.

[2] Darling, N. (1999). *Parenting style and its correlates* (ERIC Digest No. ED427896). Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.

[3] Baumrind, D. (1991). The influence of parenting style on adolescent competence and substance use. *The Journal of Early Adolescence, 11*(1), 56-95; quotation, 62.

[4] Buehler, C., & Gerard, J. M. (2002). Marital conflict, ineffective parenting, and children's and adolescents' maladjustment. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 64*(1): 78-92.

[5] See note 2 above.

[6] See note 3 above.

[7] See note 4 above.

[8] See note 2 above.

[9] See note 3 above.

[10] See note 4 above.

[11] See note 2 above.

[12] See note 4 above.

[13] See note 2 above.

[14] National Parenting Education Network. (n.d.). *Background: Vision, mission, and goals.* Quotation, para. 12. Retrieved from: http://www.npen.org/about/background.html

[15] Daniel, B., & Taylor, J. (1999). The rhetoric versus the reality: A critical perspective on practice with fathers in child care and protection work. *Child and Family Social Work, 4*(3), 209–220.

[16] Trotter, J. (1997). The failure of social work researchers, teachers and practitioners to acknowledge or engage non-abusing fathers: A preliminary discussion. *Social Work Education, 16*(2), 63–76.

[17] El-Sheikh, M., & Elmore-Staton, L. (2004). The link between marital conflict and child adjustment: Parent-child conflict and perceived attachments as mediators, potentiators, and mitigators of risk. *Development and Psychopathology, 16*(3): 631-648.

[18] Ibid*.*

[19] Cummings, E. M., Goeke-Morey, M. C., & Graham. M. A. (2002). Interparental relations as a dimension of parenting. In J. G. Borkowski & S. L. Ramey, (Eds.), *Parenting and the child's world: Influences on academic, intellectual, and social-emotional development* (pp. 251-263). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

[20] See note 1 above.

[21] See note 19 above.

[22] Fagan, J. & Palkovitz, R. (2011). Coparenting and relationship quality effects on father engagement: Variations by residence, romance. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 73*(3), 637-653.

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