

TUTORIALS: Family Issues

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FAMILY ISSUES

Tutorial: Parenting Styles

See also Tutorials on [Behavior Management](#); [Discipline](#); Collaborative and Elaborative Interaction Styles; [Apprenticeship Teaching](#))

WHAT ARE PARENTING STYLES?

Parents interact with their children in a variety of different ways, and these styles of interaction change as the child ages and becomes more independent and autonomous. However, specialists on parenting often define three primary parenting styles. As in all such attempts to categorize complex phenomena, many parents do not fall neatly into any of these three categories or they might fall into more than one category.

Supportive (Authoritative) Parenting: Supportive or authoritative parents are said to have the following approaches to child rearing, which may be present in different combinations with different parents:

- 1. Warmth (positive affect):** Supportive parents express feelings, especially affection for their children. They are interested in their children's activities, enthusiastic about their children's accomplishments, and sympathetic when their children suffer.
- 2. Child-centeredness:** Child-centered does not mean always following the child's lead. Rather, it means that supportive parents organize reasonable proportions of family activities, family talk, and family concerns around issues of interest and importance to the child.
- 3. Advance (proactive) teaching of social skills:** Supportive parents seek opportunities to teach their children what successful social behavior looks like in specific social contexts – before the child enters that context. They do not wait for the child to fail and then react to that failure. Rather, they try to ensure that the child succeeds socially and behaviorally. **[See Tutorials on [Positive Behavior Supports](#); [Elaborative and Collaborative Interactive Style](#); [Social Competence](#); [Social Perception](#)]**
- 4. Positive reinforcement:** Supportive parents attend to and celebrate their child's accomplishments and successes. There is more attention paid to success and good behavior than to failure and bad behavior.
- 5. Inductive discipline:** Supportive parents tend to teach children rules of conduct by taking advantage of specific events to explain why some choices are good ones and others are not. With this form of mediation or discussion, the child can “induce” – generalize from specific events in his life to appropriate principles of behavior that make sense to him. This is not to say that there are no rules. Rather, discussion and agreement are key features of such homes, even as parents remain the ultimate authorities on acceptable behavior and discipline. **[See Tutorials on [Elaborative and Collaborative Interactive Style](#); [Discipline](#)]**
- 6. Provision of appropriate play and other social experiences:** Supportive parents are involved in the lives of their children at least to the extent that they know about their child's social life and try to ensure that the child has ample opportunities to play and share other positive social experiences with peers.

Authoritarian (Harsh) Parenting: Authoritarian or harsh parents are said to have the following approaches to child rearing – components which tend to go together:

- 1. Authoritarian, top-down decision making:** Authoritarian parents issue rules and mandates with no rationale and in a way that may not be consistent. The key concepts are power and control, not discussion and agreement.

2. Harsh, punitive disciplinary policies: Authoritarian parents tend to use punishment regularly and those punishments tend to be physical or emotional attacks.

3. Relatively little warmth: Authoritarian parents tend to be less positively involved in their children's lives, with little time for warm interaction.

4. Relatively little involvement: Authoritarian parents may or may not be actively involved in the lives of their children. Furthermore, they may or may not actively seek to ensure that their children have adequate opportunities for interacting with other children.

Permissive Parenting: Permissive parents may, in individual cases, resemble either positive parents or authoritarian parents in some respects. The key, however, is that the general family policy is to create few rules or boundaries for their children. Children are largely free to explore their worlds in the absence of parental guidance or control.

Although many factors interact to shape a child's development and adult outcome, studies do consistently show that high levels of supportive parenting and low levels of authoritarian parenting are associated with a variety of positive child adjustment outcomes. These outcomes include behavioral, social, and academic adjustment. For example, parents who discuss specific social challenges with their children in a problem-solving and proactive manner tend to have children with fewer behavior problems. Conversely, aggression in children tends to be predicted by low levels of calm discussion with parents and proactive teaching, and by high levels of harsh discipline. In addition, supportive parenting has been found to lower the risks normally associated with family adversity, such as poverty, single parent homes, and the like.

WHY ARE PARENTING STYLES IMPORTANT FOR MANY STUDENTS AFTER TBI?

Raising a child with ongoing disability after brain injury creates a variety of burdens and stressors for families while also depleting them of the energy and resilience needed to deal positively with difficult challenges. Physical care for the child may require considerable time and effort. Managing difficult behavior consumes time and energy. Helping with school work and social activities is more demanding than it is with children with no disabilities. Furthermore, these demands on a parent's time and energy may come at a time when family resources are stretched thin.

Under these difficult circumstances, it may require great effort to maintain the practices associated with supportive, authoritative parenting.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN THEMES IN PARENTING STYLES (See Tutorials on Behavior Management: Prevention Strategies; Positive Behavior Supports; Cognition and Interaction; Discipline)

All work with families must be conducted in a way that is respectful of the cultural, ethnic, and family-specific values, roles, and practices of the individual family. With this framework as background, the goal is to help the families deal with their burdens and to create a family life that is as close to the Supportive, Authoritative Parenting model as possible.

Support for families may take the following forms:

1. Support for families: Case management: Families need somebody who can guide them through the medical and rehabilitation systems, school systems, state and private funding systems, and the like. In New York, FACTS coordinators sponsored by the Brain Injury Association are available around the state. They are in a position to help families with many of these tasks, and can recommend case managers if the issues require a higher level of assistance.

2. Support for families: Professional services: Families often need access to medical, rehabilitation, psychological, and education specialists for their child. Again, the FACTS coordinators can help identify helpful specialists. In a school district, the special education staff, school psychologist, school counselor, and related services providers can offer specialist services. This web site is designed to be a support to this effort.

Parents may also benefit from emotional support for themselves. These may be natural supports, such as family members, friends, religious leaders, and the like. Or they may be peer supports – other parents who have been through a similar experience. Identifying such peer supports is another function of the Brain Injury Association. Parents may also benefit from the help of well-trained family professionals (counselors) who may be able to guide them through these troubled waters

3. Support for families: Natural supports: During family crises, friends, members of the extended family, and colleagues are typically ready to help in any way they can. Families in crisis should feel comfortable requesting this help and even requesting that some natural support people organize this help.

4. Support for families: Training in supportive parenting skills: Many parents need no help in supporting and disciplining their child effectively. However, because academic, social, and behavior problems are common in children with TBI, help for parents is often useful. Many of the components on this web site should be useful to parents as they try to get to the bottom of their child's difficulties and determine what to do about it. Relevant professionals at school should be in a position to help with this process.

5. Support for families: Respite: Because fatigue and frustration are common consequences of the ongoing demands of raising a child with brain injury, parents and siblings may simply need to take a break. Relatives might be available to assume care for a few days or professional respite services may be available for this purpose.

Specific Tutorials That Should Be Helpful:

[Positive Behavior Supports](#)

[Behavior Management: Prevention Strategies](#)

[Discipline](#)

[Apprenticeship Teaching](#)

[Conversation and Cognition](#)

[Social Competence](#)

[Motivation](#)