

Parenting

WHAT KIND OF
PARENT ARE YOU?



Some people walk,
dive or slip into
parenting without
much thought,
running on autopilot.

Others feel high
anxiety that they must
parent perfectly.





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“THERE IS NO
ONE CORRECT
PARENTING STYLE.”

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The good news is that, while there are methods that don't work, there is no one correct parenting style. You don't have to turn into someone else—your personality will do fine. In fact, your greatest gift to your children is yourself—especially if you are into personal growth, working towards being balanced, sorting out weak areas, and simply loving and being available.

What kind of parent are you? In general, there are five basic parenting styles, each of which has strengths to build on and weaknesses to watch:

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1. The rules parent

This parent is self-motivated, organised, high-achieving, a born leader and quite controlling. They don't waste time, money or words. Yet they need to learn to relax more, be less judgemental of others, be a little more flexible, not to set impossibly high standards, be more gentle and patient, and to love people unconditionally rather than for what they do. (If you're reading this and saying, "Ha! Not in the real world!", then you're a classic example of a rules parent.)

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2. The easygoing parent

This parent is fun, optimistic, future-focused and great at motivating a group. They are great friends with their children and love to play. Yet they need to be consistent and do the hard yards of parenting. They should stop avoiding confrontation and take the occasional strong stand, even if this means the whole world—especially their children—may not like them.

3. The permissive parent

This parent is very sensitive and caring. They don't want to damage their children in any way. Yet they need to be more emotionally even, and also make some firm rules so that children know where the boundaries are and don't feel insecure.

4. The analytical parent

This parent is careful in making decisions and getting things absolutely right. Yet they need to remember to be warm and to listen.

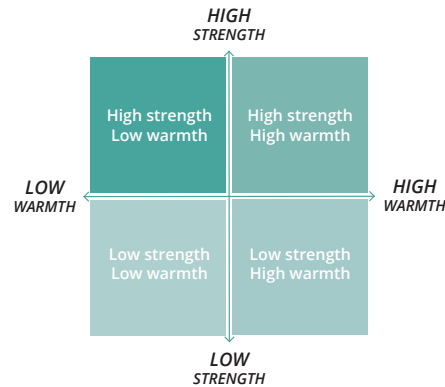
5. The balanced parent

This parent is someone who is naturally one of the types above, but is trying to balance out their natural tendencies with learning, growing and working with their partner, who has different strengths.

“YOUR GREATEST GIFT
TO YOUR CHILDREN IS
YOURSELF.”



You may notice the similarities between these first four types of parent and the four personality types mentioned in our Relationships course, “Why can’t you be more like me?”



Parenting expert, Steve Biddulph classifies parents another way. He talks about warmth and strength as two axes on a graph.

So you can imagine how extremes of these types would be:

- **High strength; Low warmth**

This parent would be no-nonsense, perhaps too busy and aloof. They would need to work on unconditional love. Their children would be well-behaved, but may feel unloved.

- **High strength; High warmth**

This parent would be clear on discipline and responsibilities, but also have a lot of fun and love. This is ideal. Their children know they are loved, and know the rules and why they make sense.

- **Low strength; High warmth**

This parent would find fun and love easy, but would have little control and not like “feeling bossy”. They would feel walked over. Their children would feel loved but a little insecure and out of control.

- **Low strength; Low warmth**

This poor parent struggles with discipline. They tend not to worry about discipline, then have aggressive explosions, but then feel sorry and apologise, and go back to being weak. They need to learn to be assertive and consistent. They also need to show affection to their children.

Note these are extremes. Most people are somewhere in the middle.

This graph causes an “Aha!” from some parents because it makes them conscious of where they are. It also shows them it is possible to be very loving and very strong in discipline at the same time. Steve talks about:

Soft love

tender, generous, warm love that helps children feel worthy, good and lovable.

Firm love

which basically says, “I love you, which is why I won’t let you do this, form a habit and become a brat that no teacher bothers with and no children want to play with.”



Choose the right moment to discuss the questions listed below with your partner in parenthood. Don't do it when you're tired, hungry, under pressure or too soon after a conflict over children.

Reflect a moment

- Where do you feel you are on the graph?
- Where would you like to be?
- Does your partner agree?
- Where do you think your partner is?
- Where would you like them to be?
- Do they agree?
- Where do you think the children would see you both?



Parent educator, Jean Illsley Clarke lists five defective types of parenting. If you see a tendency to any of these in yourself, please don't get the guilts and give up. Just correct the balance—and gradually take small steps.

1. The abusive parent

"Stop that, you! I wish you'd never been born!" I will never forget hearing that blasting across a supermarket. I didn't know the mother, but her child seemed to be a threat to her brittle self-confidence. It looked like she didn't have the emotional strength to be caring under pressure. At first I felt angry at her for hurting her child, but then I realised she had probably been brought up that way and was a hurt child herself. This mother needed re-parenting. With repeated abuse, a child will probably grow up to be a teenager who struggles with feeling worthless, discouraged, hurt, angry and lonely. I like to hope some caring teacher, coach, youth worker or minister will get alongside them and give some parental support. This is an extreme case, but there are worse—ask any casualty doctor. Yes, even the best parents admit moments when they have reacted abusively, even if it's just losing their cool and calling a child a fool. The problem is doing it repeatedly. People abuse because they have been abused, or because they feel weak and inadequate and think they can hide their weakness behind anger.

2. The conditional love parent

"Sit still in that trolley or you won't get a drink." Translation: Behave perfectly, just as I want, or I won't meet your needs. This raises a child who never feels quite good enough. They may become a high achiever in some way, but may never quite believe in their achievements and may never feel lovable or get close to people. This parent needs to love the child just as they are. They also need to love themselves that way! Perhaps their own parenting was lacking in unconditional love. Interestingly, churches often attract people who strive to be perfect to earn God's approval, imagining a conditional-love parent in the sky. But good Christianity teaches that God loves "you with an everlasting love" and no behaviour can change that. Believing in this kind of heavenly parent can change people's self-esteem.

3. The indulgent parent

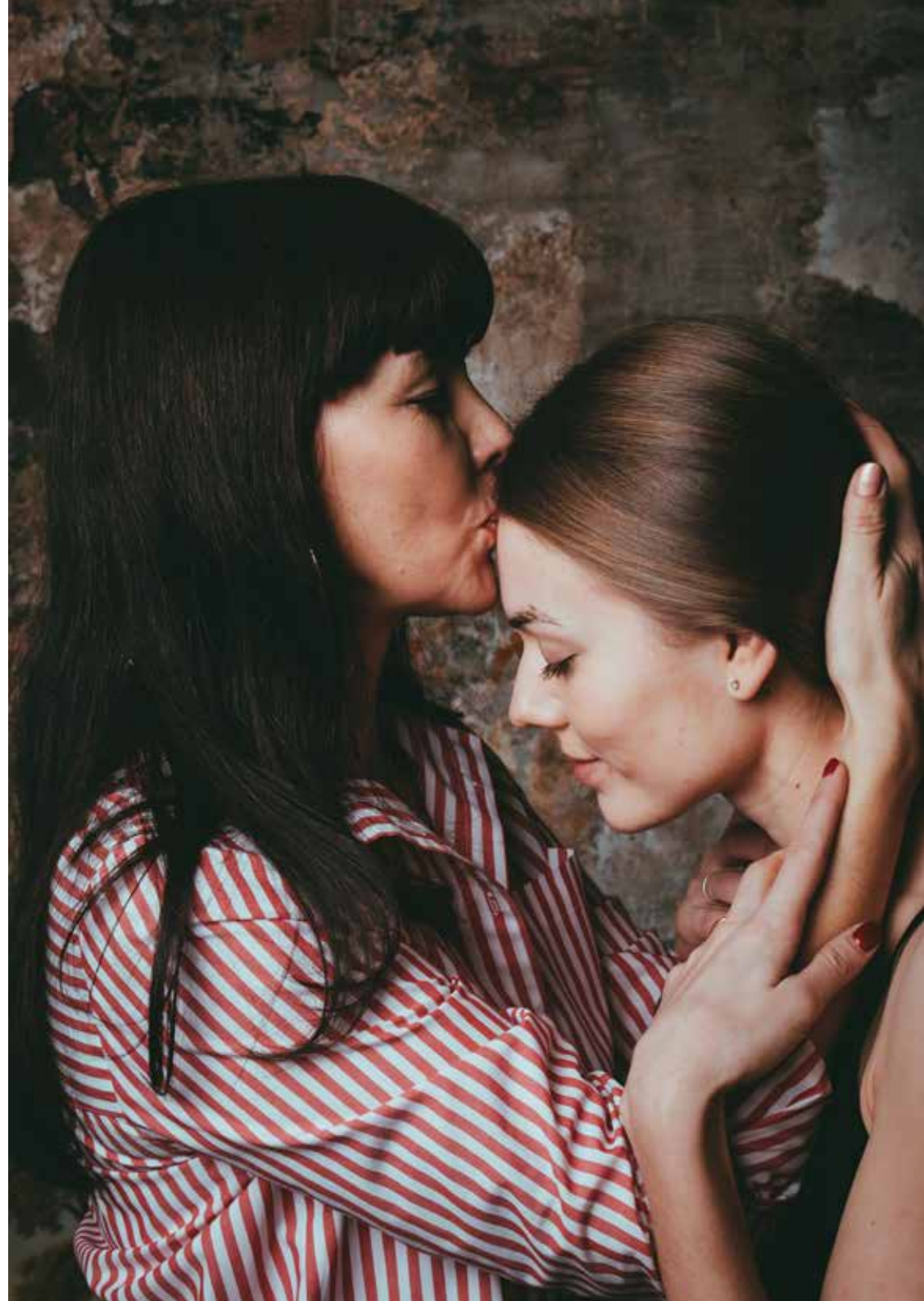
A child falls over and is not really hurt, but this parent rushes in, makes a huge fuss and takes over. "Oh, poor schnookums. Here, let me carry you." The message is that the child is a poor, useless victim and the parent is a noble saint who deserves total obedience. This sounds very loving, but it's really being forced on the child by a parent who is feeling needy and wanting reassurance. It produces weak, dependent children who often can't wait to escape their cloying, saccharine parent. This kind of martyrdom may feel good for a parent's weak self-esteem, but not when they really understand what they're doing.

4. The neglectful parent

Imagine a child falls over and hurts their knee. This parent may not even be there. They tend to expect others to parent for them: School to teach their child everything they need for life and church to make them good. They often dump the children on relatives or babysitters. If they do notice the skinned knee, they'll say, "Get over over it and toughen up." This is the way they have been brought up: Life is hard and you have to be tough and self-reliant and expect no pity. Their intentions may be good, but this makes a hard, lonely adult with a lot of pain and anger, and little trust in others. They need someone to show them some care.

5. The assertively caring parent

If a child falls over, this parent remains calm, listens to any hurt feelings, gives any help the child asks for or wants, but is not pushy and so builds their independence. This parent would swim through the crocodile tank for the child if necessary, but does not weaken the child's independence by doing too much. An assertive parent sets principles and rules, makes clear requests (and demands if necessary), does not feel guilty about conflict, and can negotiate more as children become more responsible. Having established clear expectations, they can relax and have fun with their child without having to be bossy and "pull rank" all the time.



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**“ONE GREAT WAY TO LOOK
AFTER A CHILD IS TO
LOOK AFTER YOURSELF.”**

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Looking after parents

Parenthood is a demanding job. One great way to look after a child is to look after yourself.

Here are a few tips:

Relax and enjoy it—you'll do OK

Take parenting seriously, but not so seriously that it shuts you down. Family theorist Edwin Friedman says over-seriousness can be destructive. It can become “an attitude . . . a total orientation, a way of thinking embedded in constant, chronic anxiety”. He says it makes you less flexible, pressured to try harder but scared to try anything new, grow beyond the same old stock responses, and shrinks your view of the big picture. He argues that playfulness can loosen you up, give you perspective and flexibility, blow away your stress and make you a calming influence on others. He’s not saying you must be a stand-up comic, but suggests a more relaxed, playful view of life. Maybe you should watch your favourite comedy show tonight. As the proverb says, “A cheerful heart is good medicine.”²

If you're looking for answers on parenting, invest in some good books

Of course, if you think the “experts” have been too long in a library and not enough with children, ignore those. Talk to people whose children are doing well and borrow their strategies. Observe people whose children are doing badly and learn from that as well.

Value yourself

When people ask what you do, don't ever mumble, “Oh, I'm just a mum.” A friend of ours resigned as vice-president of an international bank to become a full-time mother.

When people ask what she does, she says, “I was a banker, but I’ve been promoted to motherhood.” Most people think that’s great. Some people don’t get it or patronise her because they think it’s not as impressive their earth-changing jobs—but who cares what some people think? You are shaping the future for the most valuable people in the world. Your respect is written in stone by the finger of God: “Honour your father and your mother”³. Even bankers didn’t get that good a mention.

Look after yourself

Take some time out just to think, to exercise, to stuff yourself with chocolate biscuits. (Oh alright, that last one is not a good way to handle stress. You’d be better to go for a walk.)

Find someone to give you a break

Even if they just sit in the house for an hour watching your TV when the children are asleep, it leaves you free to go for a walk and think.

Lose the guilt

You will make mistakes. Forgive yourself (God does) and move on.

Reward yourself

Here’s where you bring in the chocolate biscuits. Go easy on them though.

Don’t misuse your imagination on worrying what might go wrong

Instead, visualise positive things: Your children at their graduation ceremony, or making the parliamentary, wedding or Oscar speech (“I’d like to thank my parents”).



Don't expect them to live your life again for you

I'll never forget watching one father pressure and push his son into football when the child really wanted to play the guitar. The father had almost made the national football team and was determined his son would do well where he felt he had failed. This may sound kind, but it's actually selfish. Spare yourself the disappointment.

Some emotional roller-coaster rides will happen

It doesn't mean you're losing the plot, your mind or your children.

Walk away when you feel anger rising

We often say or do things we'll regret later. Better to first make sure your children are safe, then walk away from them for a few minutes until you've calmed down.

Look for role models

If your own parenting has been too harsh for example, find a gentle, nurturing parent and copy their tactics. It's never too late to re-parent yourself.

A functional marriage can be a major source of encouragement, balance and love to improve your parenting

Keep putting time, learning and energy into that.

Find someone to talk to

Hopefully this will be your partner, but ideally also someone outside the home who will listen to you so that you get perspective. If you're really blessed, you'll find wise, old neighbours with 40 years of nursing, parenting and foster-parenting experience. (Hi, Hugh and Mary!)



REFERENCES:

1. Jeremiah 31:3, The Bible.
2. Proverbs 17:22, The Bible.
3. Exodus 20:12, The Bible.

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