

Parenting styles

Considering parenting style is important when treating obesity. Children often need guidance and look to their parents as role models. However, as children get older they also want to make their own choices.

No one parent is perfect and there are no right or wrong parenting styles. Parents that seem to be more successful at encouraging positive behaviours often use a combination of different parenting styles at appropriate times.

The authoritative parent tends to be more successful at encouraging healthy lifestyles. See the examples below to see how parenting style can lead to different behaviours in children for certain situations. You can also read more about ['What is authoritative parenting?' on the VeryWell website.](#)

Scenario 1

It is 4.00pm on Wednesday afternoon and 6 year old Joseph has returned home from school and is asking for something to eat. His dinner will be ready in 1 ½ hours and you know that if he has a large snack, he will not eat his dinner.

Permissive Parent:

You can have a biscuit, a banana, a pot of custard, a bag of crisps, a slice of pizza, a bar of chocolate, carrot sticks and dips, a cup cake, a slice or toast or anything you like.... This parent is giving too much choice and is relying on the child to make their own decision, which may not necessarily be the best for their health. The parent is being supportive by providing lots of options but there are no rules and the child may not know which is the best choice and will not be able to learn if they do not receive more parental guidance.

Uninvolved Parent:

Eat whatever you like; there is plenty of food in the cupboards. This parent is not providing support by making suggestions and is not monitoring what the child is eating.

Authoritarian Parent:

You cannot have anything to eat as your dinner will be ready soon. This parent is not giving any choice at all and therefore the child may not be able to learn how to cope with different situations when faced with them in the future as they have always been instructed what to do. This can also make the child more defiant as they are unable to exert their personality or responsibility.

Authoritative Parent:

If you are hungry, you can have an apple, a yogurt or a packet of raisins. Which would you prefer? This gives the child choice as well as some direction but the parent is controlling the situation as they have only offered healthy options. This allows the child to make a decision whilst learning that they should have a healthy snack.

Scenario 2

Mum has served Jenny and her 2 older sisters their dinner of fish fingers, mashed potato, peas and sweetcorn. Jenny refuses to eat the mashed potato, sweetcorn or peas as she does not like them.

Permissive Parent:

Ok, what would you like instead? This parent is doing exactly what the child asks of them without setting rules or encouraging them to eat the potato or vegetables. They have not explained the reasons for eating the vegetables or potatoes (e.g. explain why peas are good for health). The parent is giving too much choice and is relying on the child to make their own decision, without providing any guidance at all.

Uninvolved Parent:

Make dinner yourself if you don't want to eat that. This parent is not providing support or encouraging the child to eat the vegetables or potato and they are not monitoring what the child is eating.

Authoritarian Parent:

You will sit there until you eat all of your meal and you will go straight to bed if you don't eat it. This parent is not giving any choice at all. This may also exert fear in the child and either lead to them not being able to eat the meal at all (as the fear is may make them feel queasy and put them off the food completely) or it will instill in the child that they must eat all of the food on their plate, which may lead to overeating.

Authoritative Parent:

I would like you to eat the potatoes as this gives your body and brains lots of energy so that you can do really well with your homework. I would also like you to eat either all of your peas or all of your sweetcorn please. If you eat all of your potatoes and either all of your peas or sweetcorn, we can go to the park to play on the swings tomorrow morning. What would you like to do? This gives the child choice as they have allowed the child to choose which vegetable to eat but the parent is controlling the situation as they have asked for the potatoes to be eaten. It also offers a reward if the potatoes and one vegetable has been eaten and provides a choice for the child – do they want to play on the swings and eat their vegetables or would they rather not.