

The Benefits of Giving Children Choices Rather than Commands

What is Your Parenting Style? Authoritarian, Permissive, Democratic Parent?

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Children are not little adults. They are little immature beings. Their need for “actual mature” adults to help them grow into successful productive citizens deserves to be responded to with thoughtfulness, patience, and understanding. This is why thoughtfulness, patience, and understanding play beneficial roles when it comes to giving children choices rather than commands.

Showing that choices are more beneficial to children than commands is a cinch when examining research data that classifies parents as having three basic types of child rearing styles. The parenting styles are categorized as authoritarian, permissive, and democratic.

Authoritarian Parenting Style

According to research studies, authoritarian parents tend to dominate their children. In furtherance, studies show that parents using the authoritarian child rearing style are likely to have little to no warmth or affection; and may be excessively critical of children. Authoritarian parents rarely allow children opportunities to make decisions, and they do not explain why they want children to perform assigned tasks unless they tell them they have to because the parent said so.

Permissive Parenting Style

Permissive parents let their children fend for themselves. Permissive parents do not tend to make rules; however, should they decide to make a rule, their children are likely to disregard the rule because past experience has taught the children that their parents are not likely to enforce rules. Permissive parents tend to accept children as they are and usually refrain from making efforts to mold them.

Democratic Parenting Style

Parents using the democratic style of raising children teach children to be responsible individuals. Democratic parents expect their children to think about the things they do or do not do and are more likely than authoritarian parents to allow children choices. Democratic parents expect their children to take responsibility for their actions. Democratic parents are very concise with getting their expectations across to their children and openly explain why they tell the children the things they tell them.

According to studies, democratic parenting styles that allow children choices and insist children take responsibility for their actions benefits children more than other parenting styles. Scientists have found that children have the most positive outcomes when raised by parents using the democratic parenting style. Studies have also found that children fostered by permissive parents become aggressive and eventually begin to act out; and children with authoritarian parents tend to have reduced self-esteem and are likely to become submissive and compliant as opposed to outgoing and independent.

Many parents tend to use the authoritative parenting style because giving children commands is far easier than giving children choices. After all, commands usually do not require a lot of thought. For example, in teaching young children to

help around the house, you could tell a child to take the rugs outdoors and shake them and to clear the table of dinner dishes right off the top of your head.

On the other hand, when using the democratic style of parenting that gives children choices, parents are required to think about whether or not a choice is in order; and if a choice is in order, what kinds of choices would be reasonable and most beneficial for a particular child. For instance, commanding a child to shake rugs and to clear dishes could overwhelm a young preschool age child more so than an older child. However, if a young child is given a choice to shake rugs or clear dishes the child will be less frustrated. In addition, the child will learn about choices because he or she will need to consider his or her options. Should he shake dusty rugs that might irritate his nose, or walk back and forth from table to counter carrying dirty dishes? From this perspective, having children participate in decision-making is more beneficial than giving them commands.

The fact that choices may indeed be more beneficial to children than commands does not mean commands should never be given. There are, in fact, good reasons children should be given commands; and good reasons they should follow them without hesitance. After all, it would not make sense, for example, to give a child a choice between holding his hands over a flame and crossing a street without looking where he is going. Therefore, although giving children choices rather than commands may be more beneficial to children, the bottom line is parents should use the most beneficial parental tactics based on issues currently at stake.

Additional benefits for giving children choices include the facts that when given choices, children can learn to make sacrifices. Allowing children to learn the value of sacrificing one thing for another helps children become responsible for their actions. For example, if a child wants to visit a friend who is scheduled to move away next weekend,

but visiting the friend would mean the child would not be able to attend another friend's party, allowing the child to choose which event to attend rather than telling (commanding) the child which event to attend puts the outcome of the choice in the child's hands.

This type of choice benefits children because in situations such as this, only the children are truly capable of determining which event is more important to them. If a parent selects an event for children (commands them to go to the party, for example), the children could have miserable times at a party wishing they had been visiting their soon to be lost friend.

Teaching children to *predetermine consequences of their choices* is also vital. For instance, if a child's friend appears at the door begging her to come out and play just when she was about to wash breakfast dishes, a parent could tell the child she can go out if she'd rather wash dinner dishes that evening. Since dinner dishes often include more cooking, therefore the use of more cookware and utensils, and more dinnerware for serving and eating than a breakfast meal, the child could immediately visualize washing breakfast dishes in ten minutes as opposed to dinner dishes that may take half an hour or more. The consequence for the child's "immediate gratification" decision, should she choose to go out and play right now, would be to clean a bigger stack of dishes later on.

In closing, parenting styles have powerful impacts on children's thought processes, their outlook on life, and how they feel about themselves. Choosing the most beneficial parenting style, which studies have shown to be the Democratic style, for raising children is the best way to help little ones grow to become law abiding, happy and productive citizens.