

The secret to raising a smart shopper: Pick the right parenting style

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Have you ever wondered how to raise children who will become wise consumers once they are adults?

It turns out that [parents](#) are the primary agents who will socialize their

children—more than friends, other adults or organizations such as churches. To find out which [parenting styles](#) help children best learn skills and attitudes needed to be smart consumers, researchers analyzed data from 73 studies nationwide. The results of their meta-analysis are available online in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*.

The researchers created categories to define four basic parenting styles. Authoritative parents are more likely to tell children what they want them to do while also explaining why, which the researchers describe as "restrictive" and "warm" communication. These parents tend to relate quite effectively with their children and expect them to act maturely and follow family rules, while also allowing a certain degree of autonomy.

Authoritarian parents are also restrictive, but not as likely to exhibit as much warmth in their communication, explains researcher Les Carlson, a professor of marketing at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. "They are more likely to tell a child what to do and not explain why," he says.

Neglecting parents offer little guidance for their children's development and limited monitoring of activities. Indulgent parents are lenient, compliant, and give children adult rights without expecting them to take on responsibilities.

The researchers found that many of the studies showed children of authoritative parents had the best outcomes when interacting with the world around them. These children consumed healthier foods like fruits and vegetables, and made safer choices such as wearing a bike helmet. They also provided valuable opinions on family consumption decisions.

"I think that our culture has changed over time to be more permissive with children, but we found a lot of evidence that demonstrated that it is okay to be restrictive with kids," Carlson says. "It's also important to explain to kids why the restrictions are important."

The analysis also showed that children of restrictive parents were less likely to engage in cyberbullying, theft, vandalism, drug use and feelings of having an unattractive body shape, what the study authors termed "negative consumer socialization outcomes."

To apply these findings to daily life, parents could proactively train their children by doing activities like taking them shopping and guiding them in decisions, Carlson says. "For example, parents can talk about why they are skeptical of advertising they may see in a store to teach children how to filter information," he says.

"Watching television with [children](#) is another opportunity to engage with them in conversation about what they are seeing to teach them how to be fully informed consumers."

This study will appear in the April issue of the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*.

More information: www.journals.elsevier.com/journal-of-consumer-psychology

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