

What is 'permissive parenting'?

May 23 2023, by Ann Schreiber



Parenting styles play a significant role in children's development and well-being. Permissive parenting, as a distinct contrast to authoritative or authoritarian styles, has gained attention for its impact on children.

This article delves into permissive parenting, examining its definition, traits, techniques employed by permissive parents and discipline within this style.

What is permissive parenting?

The American Psychological Association (APA) says parents who embrace this style are "warm, but lax." Permissive parents prioritize their [children's](#) desires, grant them considerable autonomy and avoid confrontations.

"They fail to set firm limits, to monitor children's activities closely or require appropriately mature behavior of their children," [the APA says](#).

What is the permissive parenting style like?

Psychologist Francyne Zeltser, director of mental health services at the Manhattan Psychology Group in New York City, observed that parenting styles are often classified by levels of warmth and control.

"Permissive parents provide a high degree of warmth, referring to their responsiveness to their child's needs and wants," she said. "And, these parents provide a low degree of control, meaning they let their children call the shots."

Permissive parents prioritize their children's desires, grant them considerable autonomy and avoid confrontations. Instead of imposing a lot of rules, they allow kids to figure out things out on their own. Permissive parents often act more like friends than authority figures.

"Permissive parents are at their child's beck and call. They tend to be overly indulgent with an aim to please and appease. They are reluctant to

implement rules and will take great lengths to avoid disappointing their child," Zeltser said.

The lack of rules and expectations in permissive parenting can lead to unhealthy eating habits, particularly snacking, which may increase the risk of obesity and other health issues in the child's later life. Children in permissive households also enjoy much freedom, such as deciding their own bedtime, whether or when to do homework, and how to manage screen time.

While children of permissive parents tend to have some level of self-esteem and decent social skills, they may also exhibit traits such as impulsiveness, demanding behavior, selfishness and a lack of self-regulation.

Permissive parenting examples

Here are some [examples of permissive parenting](#) according to MedicineNet:

- **Affectionate and warm:** Permissive parents are always loving and nurturing towards their children, providing a supportive emotional environment.
- **Lack of restrictions:** They do not believe in controlling their kids or imposing strict rules and regulations.
- **Limited responsibilities:** Permissive parents assign few responsibilities to their children and allow them to regulate their own behavior and choices.
- **Emphasis on freedom:** These parents prioritize their child's independence, giving them the autonomy to influence significant decisions.
- **Lack of monitoring:** There is often little monitoring of snacks and [screen time](#), which can contribute to obesity and eye damage

in children.

However, [research](#) has shown associations between permissive parenting and increased risks of alcohol use among teenagers, higher rates of school misconduct and lower academic achievement.

Zeltser offered an example of permissive parenting.

"Think of a child who asks their parents to be part of a baseball team," she said. "So, the parents signed the child up. Then one day, the child tells their parent that they don't want to go to their ball game. And the parent responds, "OK, we don't have to go," letting the child make the decision. Situations like this fail to teach children about the need to follow through with their commitments. They let down their teammates, too."

Permissive parenting discipline

Permissive parents tend to avoid confrontation and rarely engage in disciplinary actions. Rather than setting explicit rules and expectations, they adopt a hands-off approach, allowing children to navigate challenges and learn from their own experiences.

The emphasis is on independence and self-discovery. The limited use of discipline in permissive parenting can challenge establishing boundaries and promoting accountability.

"Unfortunately, children of permissive parents often develop some undesirable behavioral traits," Zeltser said. "They tend to have poor self-control, can be self-centered, they have low self-esteem, they demonstrate a disregard for authority, and in extreme cases, they can be aggressive. But most unfortunate is that these kids don't develop the skill to be resilient in the face of adversity."

Authoritative parenting versus permissive parenting

Permissive parenting is a distinct style that fosters an open and nurturing environment where children have the freedom to explore and express themselves, but the lack of structure and clear boundaries can lead to challenges in terms of self-regulation and accountability.

Overall, [parents](#) must strike a balance between providing support and guidance while still instilling necessary limits to ensure the healthy development and well-being of their children.

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