

Opinion: Most parents don't pick a parenting style, but that's why being a 'conscious parent' matters

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Credit: Josh Willink/Pexels

The program [Parental Guidance](#) has been showing on Channel 9 this month. This is the second season of the show that pits [12 sets](#) of parents with very different parenting styles against each other to work out which is "best."

This year, for example, there is a couple who use "American-style"

parenting, pushing their young daughter to excel in a range of academic and sporting pursuits. Then there are parents who adopt an "unstructured style," which prioritizes a child's own decisions and [mental health](#) over "conventional measures of success."

But do most parents actively pick a parenting style? What should you think about when it comes to how you parent?

Approaches to parenting

The way you parent does matter. Research [shows](#) parenting is one of the greatest contributors to child and adolescent development and well-being.

Most parenting approaches fall under one of four main approaches:

1. neglectful: these parents do not [show enough love or interest](#) in the child, or set boundaries around behavior. The 2023 [Australian Childhood Maltreatment Study](#) found about 8.9% of surveyed Australians aged over 16 had experienced neglect as children. Parental neglect can result in a child who does not have the ability to regulate their own emotions, has [poor self-esteem](#) and relationships difficulties.

2. permissive: these parents are lenient, accepting, promote psychological autonomy and avoid coercive behavioral practices. This approach has been linked to children [lacking resilience](#), doing worse in school and struggling to control their impulses.

3. authoritarian: these parents shows little warmth and are strict. This [may result in compliance](#) when the child is young, but when a child is older, they may [rebel](#), have low self-esteem and behavioral issues.

4. authoritative: here, parents are warm and loving but give their child

firm boundaries. They support their child to develop a [sense of autonomy](#). The parent works together with the child to solve problems rather than telling them or controlling them. Research shows this leads to a [positive self-esteem](#).

Falling into a style

But while many parents view parenting as central to their lives, they often don't make a conscious choice about their parenting style.

They tend to [fall into a style](#) because of how they were parented, their culture, personality, [family size](#), education level and religion.

For example, if you were raised by very strict parents and it worked for you, you may seek to do this with your own children. If you hated this, this may seek to raise to children without a lot of rules.

Even if parents do eagerly read up on [different styles](#) before having a child, the pressures of life, work and family tend to see parents lack the energy to remain consistent. They either become more permissive as a way of letting go or become stricter to regain control.

It is important to be conscious about parenting

So, while most of us won't actively "choose" a parenting approach and may use combinations of approaches, it is important to be conscious of how you are parenting.

Being a [conscious parent](#) means being mindful and aware of who you are as a parent. This allows you you to react in more helpful ways while ensuring your needs as a parent are also met.

This means reflecting on your and your child's temperaments.

For example, if you see a young person's disruptive behavior as something that is done on purpose and rude, you will likely have a bad reaction. But if you understand your child has an exuberant temperament, their behavior may become less agitating.

Or, if your [parents](#) pushed you hard to succeed academically, you may need to adjust your definition of "success" if you have a child with learning difficulties or who is much more interested in sport.

Being a conscious parent also means looking after yourself. If you are aware of your needs, you can make sure you get the rest and recuperation you need to make good decisions as a parent.

Be consistent but adapt

But while parenting needs to be consistent (so kids know what to expect), this does not mean you can't or should not [adapt your style](#) to the circumstances.

For one thing, it will likely alter as your child grows. Parenting a toddler or [young child](#) is very different from parenting a teenager. Younger children can be directed and "told" a lot more than [older children](#). But other circumstances also change. Your shy, clingy toddler may become an extroverted, independent teen.

Lastly, don't worry about what your friends (or people on TV) are doing. Just keep thinking about what your family needs are and how your choices are fitting in with your parenting goals.

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