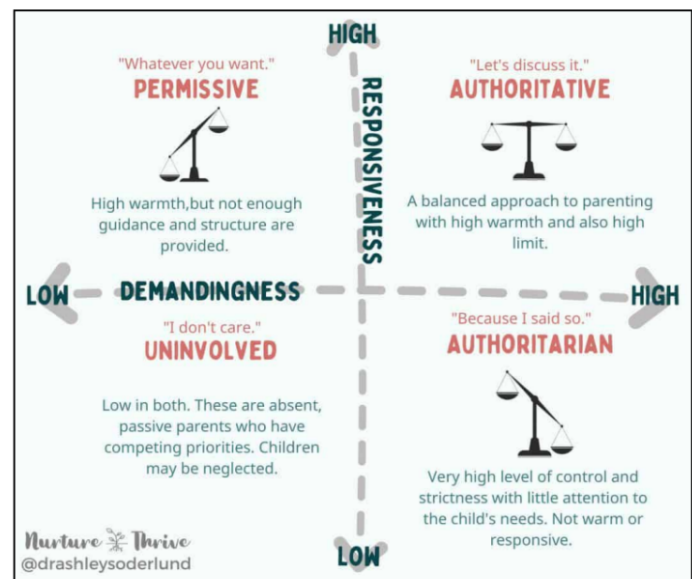


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 Informative Report - Final Draft
 Writing for the Sciences - ENGL 21003
 20 March 2023

A Child Needs a Parent, Not a Friend: An Analysis of Permissive Parenting

The process of becoming a parent is typically the highlight of a person's life. However, taking care of a child is no easy feat. Parenting style varies from person to person, which is a key factor in the social and emotional development of a child from birth to young adulthood. One method of parenting that has been thoroughly criticized is permissive parenting. Although some parents may praise and support this method of parenting, research proves that permissive parenting can have a lasting negative impact on a child.

There are four defined parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved. In Figure 1, the differences between these styles are made clear. Authoritative parents are supportive yet firm, uninvolved parents are neglective, and authoritarian parents are controlling (Soderlund). According to Professors Chris Segrin and Jeanne Flora in the Department of Communication Studies at New Mexico State University, permissive parenting is described as low demandingness and high



Courtesy of *Nurture & Thrive Blog*

responsiveness (Segrin & Flora). In summary, permissive parents allow their children to make their own decisions without any restraint. Permissive parents however, will fully support their

child and be there for their every need. Parenting style is determined by a number of factors. Race or ethnicity can be the reason for varying methods of parenting a child. For example, Dr. Sarah L. McMurtry, PhD a psychologist with a focus on psychotherapy, states that the authoritarian parenting style is significantly correlated to Black Americans, who reported stricter parenting in comparison to White Americans who reported more permissive parenting (McMurtry). This is typically caused by generational trauma within marginalized groups of individuals.

Socioeconomic status is also an indicator of what parenting style may be used in a household. In richer communities where inequality is low, permissive parenting is more common compared to low-income communities who do not have the same financial safety net, as stated by Michael Petrilli, research fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, in his book *The Diverse Schools Dilemma* (Matthews). The type of parent an individual chooses to be can influence the behavior of a child in a multitude of ways. More specifically, the permissive parenting style is shown to have a detrimental effect on a child's addiction potential and academic/emotional intelligence.

Addiction Potentiality (Drugs and Alcohol)

While attempting to avoid conflict and confrontation, permissive parents have a tendency to allow their children to create conflict in their own lives. Children can be easily influenced, and therefore need the guidance of a trusted adult to help navigate through their youth. When they are not provided with the support of their parents to make good decisions, children gravitate toward the wrong path. As explored by Vahid Ahmadi et al. in the Journal of Paramedical Sciences, once the conditions of a child's household are not favorable, a person has a

predisposing inclination toward risky behavior (Ahmadi et al. 5). Specifically, pre-teens and teenagers have the capacity to feel pressured by those they spend more time around, especially if this crowd is substandard. Poor parental monitoring is known to contribute to increased time spent with deviant peers and as a result, these children will have a higher frequency of deviant behaviors such as drug and alcohol use, abnormal and/or impulsive behaviors, misconduct, or criminal acts (Patock-Peckham et al. 255; Ahmadi et al. 3). Underage drinking and drug use is a significant issue in the United States, and parents play a major role in their child's addiction potentiality. Having the ability to monitor a child significantly decreases the number of unsafe decisions they could make.

Monitoring a child is highly important when it comes to the potential to form dangerous addictions. This allows a parent to be aware of their child's social life, plans, and any other events on a daily basis. Professor Julie A. Patock-Peckham et al. in the Department of Psychology and Neuroscience at Baylor University found that permissive parenting is linked to low levels of monitoring (Patock-Peckham et al. 248). This further proves that in allowing a child to make their own decisions, permissive parents will know less about what goes on in their child's life outside of their household. Once negative decisions become a habit, it becomes harder for a child on this path to break their cycle of destructive behavior. In fact, adolescents exposed to permissive parenting were 1.8–5.9 times more likely to deny parental authority regarding drugs and alcohol use than those exposed to authoritative parents (Patock-Peckham et al. 255). If a permissive parent attempts to address alcohol and drug consumption with their child, they are more prone to face negative backlash and disobedience. Due to the fact that an adolescent may be unfamiliar hearing that they are unable to do something from their permissive parent, they are more likely to do it anyway. By choosing to treat a child as if they are a friend

rather than offering guidance to live a successful life, permissive parents increase the addiction potentiality amongst their children from a young age.

Academic and Emotional Intelligence

A quality education is the most important thing a child can receive. Although some may argue against the broken structure that is the American education system, there is a lot of value in having a good education. Children with permissive parents are at a disadvantage when it comes to maintaining high marks in school. Dr. Emily A. Waterman, PhD, and Dr. Eva S. Lefkowitz, PhD, of Pennsylvania State University, discovered that parents who tend to be more lenient view grades as something that is less important (Waterman & Lefkowitz 1254). If a parent expresses a clear disinterest in how their child performs in school, then it is expected for this child to share a similar view. One of the key traits that helps to define permissive parents is guilt. This specific trait is what hinders academic intelligence due to the lack of a structured environment. School typically consists of a rigid system, which a child with permissive parents is unfamiliar with. In a psychology review done by Dr. Martin Pinguart, a Professor for Developmental Psychology at Philipps University, guilt-inducing parents were found to be emotional, impulsive, and may not be capable of providing the cognitively oriented school-related advice and support necessary for high academic performance (Pinguart 477). In order to be able to offer guidance to an adolescent, a parent must be able to stand their ground.

A large part of parenting is being able to help kids learn from their mistakes, which in turn means that parents must inform a child when they are wrong. Permissive parents are unable to do so, as they actively try to avoid conflict. This lack of educational support is directly

correlated with the fact that students with reportedly permissive parents had lower GPAs compared to those with authoritative or authoritarian parents (Waterman & Lefkowitz 1252). Guilt and lack of support as important factors in determining permissive parenting also retards emotional intelligence (EI). Permissive parents are prone to non-contingent responsiveness, which means that they give their children inflated praise and/or unconditional acceptance toward any kind of behavior (Segrin & Flora 4). This characteristic works against the development of social and emotional intellect. Furthermore, because permissive parenting predicts lower EI, researchers Grace A. Wischerth, Matthew K. Mulvaney, Marc A. Brackett, and Donna Perkins in the Department of Human Development and Family Science at Syracuse University conducted a longitudinal study where lower personal growth was seen as well due to having fewer experiences dealing with negative emotions (Wischerth et al. 188). Being able to work through negative emotions such as fear and anger, positively impacts a child's EI.

As previously stated, avoiding conflict is a harmful trait that permissive parents have, as they disallow their kids the ability to face disappointment. The effects of permissive parenting can be lifelong. Preschoolers exposed to permissive parenting showed less self-control and were less autonomous as adolescents, characterizing their socioemotional development as immature (Segrin & Flora 4). If children know that they will receive positive feedback regardless of how they act, they will have no inclination to improve their state of emotional wellbeing. By choosing to give positive feedback to an adolescent for every decision they make, whether it be good or bad, permissive parents assist in the lowering of their child's emotional and academic intelligence.

Permissive Parenting as a Positive

Although the majority of research acknowledges permissive parenting as a failed method, there are a few sources that paint this style in a positive light. Instead of looking at being permissive as a way to not upset a child, permissive parenting can be a way for parents to respect their child as their own person. Many kids grow up fearing their parents which can be unhealthy, while children with permissive parents are treated as an equal from day one. Dr. Emily Loeb, a psychologist at the University of Virginia says that when children feel safe and loved, they are more assertive of themselves, and are better able to “find their voice and figure out the world for themselves” (Moyer). Silencing a child for the sake of expressing that this child has good behavior makes them feel less confident and even less respected, which is typically seen in authoritarian households. Permissive parents prioritize their relationships with their kids, encourage high levels of creativity, and encourage early maturity (“Permissive Parenting Pros”). Many children with strict parents feel as if they are unable to communicate with their parents out of fear of facing backlash. However, those with permissive parents have a safe space at home where they are encouraged to be themselves without having to be afraid. Children who do not have permissive parents at home are unable to reap these benefits if they so wish.

In a study done by Dr. Loeb of adolescents ages 13-32, it was seen that children whose parents were psychologically controlling were less academically successful and less liked by their peers in adolescence compared with kids whose parents were not psychologically controlling (Moyer). Adolescence is a crucial time for social, emotional, and academic development, therefore this time period being filled with negativity is detrimental to overall growth. Having the independence to make decisions individually enables a child to find the motivation to complete tasks without being forced to. In fact, permissive parenting is associated

with better study skills (Waterman & Lefkowitz 1242). It is widely known that it is easier to want to accomplish a task when someone can find the drive within themselves. Lastly, permissive parenting reduces anxiety within children, while adolescents in households with stricter parenting styles had higher rates of antisocial behavior and anxiety. ("Permissive Parenting Pros"; Moyer). Across the board, there is a mutual agreement that permissive parenting fosters secure relationships and confidence within a child. Though the negatives may outweigh the positives, permissive parenting is still a relatively popular method throughout the United States.

Conclusion

Permissive parenting has been proven to be a relatively ineffective style of parenting. While there is no such thing as a "perfect parent," other methods such as authoritative parenting provide a healthy balance of nurturing and firmness. By choosing to be permissive, the result is a child who is unprepared for life outside of their sheltered household. Although a parent may attempt to break the generational cycle of trauma from their own authoritarian parents, being permissive inhibits emotional intelligence, academic performance, and encourages addictive behaviors. The best way to allow for personal growth and independence, while still being an authority figure in a child's life, is authoritative parenting. An individual does not have to be perfect to be a perfect parent. However, the "perfect" parent is the one that encourages their child to be independent and creative, while setting boundaries wherever necessary. Permissive parents are unable to set said boundaries. Consequently, the permissive parenting style enables parents to unintentionally harm their child's future from day one.

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