

Should I Be A Strict Or Lenient Parent?



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To be strict or not to be strict, that is the question – in fact, it’s the number-one question among child-rearing and education authorities, among teachers and, of course, parents. It’s doubtful that there is a parent who hasn’t at one time or another agonized over this.

There is a widespread uncertainty on how to be at home (or how to come across in the classroom) – tough or soft, to be a strict disciplinarian or a permissivist. Have you noticed, however, that you seldom hear a parent or teacher admit “I am authoritarian” or “I am permissive”? These are terms reserved for those with whom you disagree.

The question, whether to be strict or lenient, never ceases to be debated in books and articles, or at conferences and conventions. Dr. Gordon points out that this question is what social scientists call a “pseudo problem” and how it also is a clear case of “either-or thinking.” Let’s take a look at what he means by that.

Seldom parents or teachers seem to recognize that it is not necessary to make a choice between these two leadership styles. Few adults know it, but there is an alternative to being at either end of the strictness-lenient scale. There is the choice of a third style. This alternative is being neither authoritarian nor permissive, neither strict nor lenient. Does that mean being somewhere near the middle of the scale – moderately strict or moderately lenient? Not at all. The alternative is not being on the scale at all! How so?

Authoritarian leadership – whether at home or in the classroom – means that the control is in the hands of the adult leader. It has been researched and proven for decades how ineffective maintaining control through power is. Authoritarianism often creates fearful and subservient children and/or rebellion. Still, no parent or teacher really wants to



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suffer the chaotic consequences of unrestricted freedom and lawless permissiveness either. It's also true that most children are uncomfortable with the consequences of permissiveness. Permissive leadership means that control has been "permitted" to be in the hands of the youngsters. Children of permissive parents usually feel guilty about always getting their way. They also feel insecure about being loved, because their inconsiderate behaviors make them feel unlovable.

So what is that third viable alternative to both, authoritarian and permissive adult leadership? It's what Dr. Gordon in detail describes in his model of parenting, a set of skills and methods known as Parent Effectiveness Training that are geared toward rearing self-disciplined children in a harmonious family climate.

For now, let's just emphasize that this new approach to relating to youngsters requires a transformation in the way adults perceive children, as well as a shift in the way they treat them. This transformation can be accomplished by learning a few new skills and methods that are applied in everyday life.

This newsletter will describe and examine each of these skills and methods in its future editions and hopefully contribute to you having a more harmonious and peaceful home in 2007!

Happy Holidays!!