

Identify the Parenting Approach

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Parents approach their interactions with their children in many ways and, over time, parents develop their own style. Some styles are more effective than others. Through the Tarnow Center's work with many different families, we have come to recognize patterns that parents fall into that are often counterproductive. We work with families to move them towards parenting styles that promote self-management in their children.

Below, we describe very typical parent-child confrontations and then list five potential methods of dealing with the situation. Each of these methods are based on actual case histories of families we have worked with. We have created labels for each parenting style that will help you identify why it may or may not be effective. As you read through the various potential methods, try to match them with the parenting style labels listed, and for each method, consider both the parent's goal in the situation and the reaction that method might elicit from the child.

1) Sam is a sophomore in high school. He relies on his parents to get him up in the morning and out the door in order to get to school on time. It is getting harder and harder to get him moving. The parents are frustrated.

responses

- _____ a) The parents get together and come up with ideas to get Sam out of bed that include pouring water on him, putting ice cubes in his bed, and removing all of his covers.
- _____ b) The parents do nothing and let Sam face the consequences of missing school.
- _____ c) The parents and Sam sit down and begin to problem-solve how to transition Sam into taking responsibility for getting up in the morning. The plan involves less and less parent participation over time. Sam will have to face any consequences from the school for lateness.
- _____ d) The parents take the door off of his bedroom.
- _____ e) The parents continue the usual yelling and morning dramatics to try and get Sam up.

match these labels with the responses above

- 1) Creative, if beside the point
- 2) Self-management
- 3) Venting
- 4) Revenge
- 5) Consequences without tools

2) Ginny, age 10, loves to play all sorts of sports. Every year she plays in a soccer league. Her Mom takes her to practice and games 3 times a week. At the last practice, Ginny did not have her soccer shoes.

responses

- _____ a) Ginny yelled at Mom for forgetting her shoes. Mom rushed home to get them, hoping that Ginny will be able to participate in at least some of the practice.
- _____ b) Ginny yelled at Mom for forgetting her shoes. Mom apologized and tried to explain that she got really rushed today and must have overlooked them.
- _____ c) Ginny felt terrible for forgetting her shoes and pleaded with Mom to go get them. Mom felt sorry for her and rushed home, looked high and low to find the shoes, and then rushed back to practice.
- _____ d) Ginny felt terrible for forgetting her shoes and pleaded with Mom to go get them. Mom empathized with her disappointment, but let Ginny know that it was too difficult to rush home and back. They could stay at the practice as they were, or miss it and go home.
- _____ e) Ginny felt terrible for forgetting her shoes and pleaded with Mom to go get them. Mom empathized with her disappointment, and took her out for ice cream.

match these labels with the responses above

- 1) Placating
- 2) Guilt and over-functioning
- 3) Self-management
- 4) Over-functioning
- 5) Guilt

3) Sometimes Ryan's parents lend him a credit card for gas. He is told not to charge anything else with it. When the bill comes at the end of the month, there are \$400 worth of charges for things other than gasoline that Ryan made without permission.

responses

- _____ a) The parents take away the credit card, keep a record of the debt, and offer to help Ryan figure out how he will pay it back and over what time frame. Ryan is informed that he will not be given money except for necessities until the debt is paid.
- _____ b) The parents yell at Ryan and lecture him about the importance of trust.
- _____ c) The parents yell at Ryan and lecture him about the importance of trust. He is told that if it happens again, he will no longer have the use of their credit card.
- _____ d) The parents take away the credit card and tell Ryan that he has to pay them back. Neither parent records the amount or takes responsibility for tracking the payments. Each parent thinks that the other one is following through. The issue fades in about a week's time as Ryan asks for and gets money to go out with friends on the weekend.
- _____ e) The parents take away the credit card and tell Ryan that he has to pay them back. He cleans out the garage that Saturday which accounts for \$30 off the debt. Neither parent follows through after that weekend and the issue fades (until the next time he spends their money without permission).

match these labels with the responses above

- 1) Lecturing/guilt/phantom consequences
- 2) Self-management
- 3) Consequences with limited responsibility
- 4) Lecturing and guilt
- 5) Consequences without responsibility (by anyone)

4) Mornings at the Tandy house are very stressful and chaotic on school days. Getting the girls, 7 and 9, out the door on time with everything they need is a challenge.

responses

- _____ a) Mom hovers over the girls trying to keep them on track: “Get your shoes on.” “Brush your teeth.” “Finish eating.” “Take your medicine.” “Did you put your homework in your backpack?” “Don’t forget your lunch.”
- _____ b) Mom and Dad divide up the kids, each taking responsibility for making sure that the assigned daughter is on track. “Get your shoes on.” “Brush your teeth.” “Finish eating.” “Take your medicine.” “Did you put your homework in your backpack?” “Don’t forget your lunch.”
- _____ c) Mom and Dad divide up the house. Dad takes responsibility for the upstairs functions. Mom takes charge of the downstairs and out-the-door functions. Aside from the usual commands, Mom yells upstairs to Dad, “They are going to be late if they don’t get their breakfast right now!”
- _____ d) The parents begin to work with the girls on establishing routines that need to happen on school mornings. The girls have a chart which is a checklist of the morning tasks. The parents then make a game out of practicing the morning routine on the weekend when the stress is lower. The game involves the girls getting up, dressed, ready, backpack and homework ready, and lunch in hand, ready to go. They practice the routine over and over, earning points as they go, or heading off to Chuckie Cheese for lunch. The parents play a game to quiz the girls as to what’s next in the routine. The parents problem-solve with the girls what they would like to earn for making the mornings better for everyone.
- _____ e) Mom hovers over the girls trying to keep them on track: “Get your shoes on.” “Brush your teeth.” “Finish eating.” “Take your medicine.” “Did you put your homework in your backpack?” “Don’t forget your lunch.” When the girls are gone, Mom goes back to the kitchen to have a cup of coffee. She sees their lunch boxes sitting on the counter. Mom gets dressed and takes the lunches to school.

match these labels with the responses above

- 1) Over-functioning
- 2) Self-management
- 3) Divided labor/overfunctioning
- 4) Over-functioning without consequences
- 5) Divided labor/overfunctioning

5) Tim is in the 7th grade and hates doing homework. He has a report on the Alamo due in two days. Tim has done some work on the report, but still has a lot to do. The parents want to help him, but Tim gets really angry and tells them loudly, "Leave me alone!" The report counts a third of his grade for the six weeks. Dad steps in to try and organize Tim and see what he needs to do. Tim becomes very angry, shoves his books off of the table, and yells at Dad telling him, "You're stupid. I hate you."

responses

- _____ a) Dad tells him to stop yelling or he will take away his X-Box. Dad picks the books up off of the floor and tries to sort out the assignment, once again. The night goes on with some progress on the report and intermittent meltdowns on the part of Tim. At 11 pm, Tim has fallen asleep at the table. Dad continues to work on the project until 2am.
- _____ b) Dad gets upset and says, "Go ahead and fail. See if I care. But, you're not doing anything else until this paper is done." Tim sits at the table the rest of the night, not doing anything. The parents send him to bed at 11 pm.
- _____ c) The parents are torn. They know it is important that Tim complete his work, but they can't stand the idea of letting him fail if he refuses. They also don't want to help someone who is being mean to them. They decide to have a conference with the teachers to get their input. The parents also develop a behavioral plan where Tim earns privileges for doing his work, such as TV, computer, or getting together with friends, and the parents commit to stop yelling and hovering over him about his work. He does have to show them completed assignments in order to earn privileges. The parents get input from the teachers so that they know if he is current with his work. If major problems persist with Tim and school work, the parents will seek further professional guidance to better understand what is interfering with Tim being successful in school.
- _____ d) Dad gets frustrated and tells Mom, "You deal with him! I quit."
- _____ e) Tim is grounded and sent to his room. He plays video games until the parents come into his room and take it away.

match these labels with the responses above

- 1) Team approach to self-management
- 2) Pass the buck
- 3) Punishment
- 4) Consequences without tools
- 5) Over-functioning/phantom consequences