

STRATEGIES FOR PARENTING HARD-TO-MANAGE CHILDREN

I. If you're not relating well to your child(ren), first identify your own parenting style:

Authoritarian Style

- Enforcer: I tend to intimidate my kids with words or actions.
- Boss: I often tell my kids what to do and how to do it.
- Critic: I label or blame my child a lot.

Permissive Style

- Threatener: I promise dire consequences, but seldom follow through.
- Pleaser: I don't want my kids to suffer so I don't create sufficient consequences for misbehavior
- Nag: I don't want big problems, so I nag a lot.

Mixed Style

- Martyr: I try to control my kids by making them feel guilty.
- Professor: I explain a lot about why my kids should behave, but seldom take action.

Parents can become aware of their style by observing themselves, getting feedback from others, and noting the impact of the style on the kids.

THE GOAL IS TO BEGIN TO DEVELOP A PARENTING STYLE THAT IS FIRM IN ESTABLISHING LIMITS, BUT GENTLE IN APPROACH.

II. The second step is to identify your child's negative styles.

There is a difference between the actual misbehavior and the way in which the child responds. Misbehaviors might include: not doing homework or chores, coming home late, lying, ignoring, dawdling, etc.

there are four levels of oppositional styles (in order of increasing intensity):

One: whining, complaining, nagging

Two: arguing, pleading, talking back, demanding, bossing

Three: defying, threatening, yelling, antagonizing

Four: screaming, tantrums

III. In order to manage misbehavior, parents must first correct any oppositional style, starting with the least emotionally intense style that the child exhibits. Then move on to the next one, etc.

Use both rewards and modeling to accomplish this.

A. Present The Problem During a Quiet Time

- point out that the child argues, whines, etc. too much and you don't like it

- state that you'll not talk to the child or engage with them when they are whining, etc.
- state that there are other ways that s/he can talk to you
- teach the child how to disagree or ask for something
- teach older children how to negotiate respectfully
- use role playing to practice
- reward the child on the spot with verbal praise or affection as s/he demonstrates learning of the appropriate communication style

B. In Real Life: the first time the oppositional style appears

- Say: Stop. Remember how we talked; remember how I told you to argue
- Disengage if necessary
- Reward with praise and affection as the child gains control over his/her communication
- Have a surprise reward after a period of successful effort
- Note: you may need a predetermined logical consequence for when the opposition recurs (if you're doing this effectively, at least the child won't be getting what s/he is asking for because you're not engaging in the first place)

As the child's lower level oppositional styles are reduced, their complain and cooperation will improve. If there are still higher level styles occurring, deal with them next. When the oppositional styles are effectively dealt with, the behaviors should improve, as well. Any remaining behaviors can be dealt with last, with a system of effective logical consequences.