

Reclaiming Parenthood

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In these days of information overload, a time when we are constantly flooded with information, opinions, and advice, it can become confusing to know what we truly believe, value, and intuit. The internet is filled with voices that are strong and confident in what they convey. How do we filter out and incorporate only what actually benefits us?

When it comes to parenting, this phenomenon certainly applies. The sheer number of parenting experts and techniques that are out there can be overwhelming. Considering that parenting is a role that most people undertake feeling ill-prepared, many are concurrently intentionally seeking out approaches that will help them be the best that they can.

Parenting styles, as the term goes, actually only date back as far as the 1960s. Parenting styles refers to the parental practices that involve "directly observable, specific behaviors that parents use to socialize their children" (Darling and Steinberg, 1983). It also refers to the parental support found in the parent-child relationship, "as indicated by involvement, acceptance, emotional availability, warmth, and responsiveness" (Cummings, 2000).

In the 1960s, Diana Baumrind, a developmental psychologist and pioneer in research pertaining to parenting, developed what she referred to as the Pillar Theory, in which she proposed the then-novel idea that children's behaviors can be a reflection of the way that they were parented. She developed three main parenting styles based on her research - authoritarian, where parents seek to shape, control, and evaluate their children's behaviors based on certain standards; permissive, where parents are more warm but less autonomous; and authoritative, where parents provide expectations of their children but also space for them to develop autonomy.

In 1983, Stanford researchers Eleanor Maccoby and John Martin expanded upon Baumrind's research with their own similar styles of parenting, albeit a bit different. Their styles were based on various combinations of parental responsiveness and expectations, with authoritarian parents having high expectations and low levels of responsiveness towards their children, indulgent parents having low expectations and high levels of responsiveness, authoritative parents having high expectations and high

levels of responsiveness, and finally, neglectful parents with low expectations and low levels of responsiveness.

In 1993, William Sears, an American pediatrician, and his wife Martha, published the first manual in which they discussed attachment parenting, a new style of parenting they had termed. Attachment parents, they concluded, raised their children on the foundation that there is a strong and sensitive emotional attunement between parents and their children. Attachment parenting also follows what is known as the "Baby Bs" - birth bonding, breastfeeding, baby wearing, bed-sharing, and being responsive.

In 2001, Professor Matthew Sanders, a clinical psychologist and researcher from Australia, created The Triple P Program, alternatively known as The Positive Parenting Program. The basis of this approach was raising children in an always non-violent and mutually respectful environment using specific strategies and techniques. Although this program was originally designed specifically for at-risk children and their parents, it became a universally used approach.

In 2004, Drs John and Julie Gottman, in collaboration with the Talaris Research Institute, developed their own four signature parenting styles, which they published in their popular book entitled *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child: The Heart of Parenting*. The four styles they identified were based on emotional awareness and guidance and included dismissive parents, who tend to ignore their children's negative emotions; disapproving parents, who tend to punish their children when displaying negative emotions; laissez-faire parents, who accept all emotions but stay uninvolved; and emotion coaching parents, who offer empathy and guidance for the full range of emotions.

Obviously, this is not an exhaustive history of parenting styles over the years. However, it is still quite a lot and very varied. What do we do with all of this? Parents searching for answers and guidance can find themselves feeling pressured to find the correct method, scared and concerned that if they fail, they may ruin their children forever, and essentially, trying desperately to apply science to the everyday interactions of human relationships. Knowing that all relationships are different and always changing and evolving, this almost seems like a set-up for failure.

Of course, acquiring skills and using helpful techniques is a good thing. Finding something that works for you and picking and choosing pieces that make sense can be extremely beneficial on this journey called parenting. More importantly, though, parents need to feel confident in their abilities, intuition, and the unique relationships they have

with each individual child. Trusting our intuition as the parent meant for our children, and trusting the natural desire we have to want what is best for our children - simply being authentic, and being attuned to our children - may be all we really need to "succeed". More than anything, our children just want to know that we enjoy them as the developing human beings that they are.