



**Authoritarian Parenting,  
Permissive Parenting,  
Loving Parenting**

## **The Authoritarian Parent**

By Dr. Margaret Paul

**When we are operating from fear, we generally try to either control our children or allow our children to control us. This article explores the authoritarian parent's fears, false beliefs, expectations and ways of attempting to control children, as well as the negative consequences of authoritarian parenting.**

When we are operating from our frightened wounded self, we generally either try to control our children or allow our children to control us. We are operating as an authoritarian wounded parent when we attempt to have control over our child, and we are being a permissive wounded parent when we allow our child to have control over us.

Often we try to control our children in the same ways our parents tried to control us or each other, or in ways we learned in childhood from other children or from TV.

How do you try to control your children?

As you read these, please be gentle with yourself. We have all learned to control in many ways, and judging yourself for the ways you control will cut off your ability to learn and understand what you are doing and the consequences of these choices.

- Yelling
- Getting angry
- Criticizing, judging
- Demanding
- Saying "Tsk, tsk" and shaking your head
- Getting annoyed, irritated, short, curt
- Accusing
- Blaming
- Pouting, sulking
- Becoming ill
- Drama
- Being sneaky/deceptive
- Lying or withholding the truth
- Therapizing, analyzing
- Dismissing
- Moralizing

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- Nagging, bitching
- Lecturing, giving advice
- Arguing
- Explaining, convincing, selling
- Becoming self-righteous
- Complaining
- Justifying
- Interrogating
- Denying
- Talking others out of their feelings by telling them they are wrong
- Asking leading questions, to which only one answer is acceptable
- Bribery
- Scowling
- Hitting, spanking
- Changing the subject
- Using sarcasm
- Raising eyebrows
- Whining
- Shrugging shoulders
- Making comparisons
- Throwing things
- Interrupting
- Telling your own feelings with an accusation that your children are causing them
- Silent, angry withdrawal
- Acting like a know-it-all
- Interpreting
- The silent treatment
- Disapproving looks
- Disapproving sighs
- Blaming tears
- "Poor me" tears
- Put-downs
- A superior attitude
- Half-truths
- Being a "nice guy"
- Giving gifts with strings attached
- Teaching, pointing things out without being asked
- Flattery or giving false compliments
- Giving in, giving yourself up, going along
- Caretaking - giving to get
- People-pleasing
- Incessant talking

- Rescuing
- Using threats of:
  - Financial withdrawal
  - Emotional withdrawal
  - Exposure to others
  - Abandonment
  - Illness
  - Violence
  - Suicide

### **Beliefs about Controlling Children**

The need to have control over children comes from many fears and false beliefs. What are your beliefs about controlling your children?

- I can have control over my children liking me, loving me, caring about what is important to me, and respecting me.

The inability to control others' feelings applies to all people, including children. Do your children have control over how you feel about them, how you treat them, whether you like them, love them, care about them, respect them or reject them? You may have influence on how they feel about you and treat you, but they each decide for themselves how they feel about you.

- I can have control over the type of people they turn out to be.

Anyone who has had children knows that they do not come into this world as blank slates. They come in with their own personalities, each one different. We can influence how they turn out, by the environment we create and the role modeling we provide, but we have no actual control over who they choose to be.

- It is my job as a parent to control my children.

Your job as a parent is to provide a safe, loving environment and healthy role-modeling. When you do your own Inner Bonding work so that you can provide this, your children will not need to be controlled.

- If I don't control my children, they will be totally out of control.

Your children will be out of control if:

- You are out of control and role-model out of control behavior.
- You are permissive and allow them to violate you and others.
- They are fed poor diets with too much sugar.
- They have chemical imbalances, inherited illnesses, birth defects or other physical or developmental problems that lead to out-of-control behavior.

Healthy children do not have to be controlled to behave. They need to see caring behavior modeled and they need you to set loving limits for yourself and them-- letting them know what you will and will not accept, and following through with your own behavior, such as leaving a room when they behave in ways that are uncaring about themselves or you.

- Controlling my children indicates that I care about them.

Children feel cared about when they are cared about, not when they are controlled. No one feels loved when someone is trying to control them.

- My children will eventually appreciate my controlling them.

We have worked with thousands of people over the years, and rarely has anyone said they appreciated being controlled.

- Controlling children teaches them personal responsibility.

Children learn personal responsibility by seeing it role-modeled. If you do your Inner Bonding work and become a personally responsible person, it is likely that your children will too. Children tend to do as you do. Controlling children only teaches them to be controlling of others, especially others younger or weaker than them.

Sometimes attempting to control a child can have the opposite effect: he or she may become resistant and rebellious against the control. Rarely, in today's society, do

children passively accept being controlled. If they don't rebel as small children, it is very likely that they will rebel as adolescents, when you can no longer control them.

- There are times when hitting or yelling are necessary to get a child to behave.

Millions of children grow up to be responsible and successful adults without being hit or yelled at. When you hit or yell at a child, you are role-modeling that it is acceptable to hit or yell at someone smaller than you. Do not be surprised if your children learn this from you and take it out on other children, younger than them.

- Children are naturally unruly, and need to be controlled.

Children naturally want to please their parents. They are unruly when they are unhappy, hurt, angry, sugared out, chemically imbalanced, or have no other way to communicate. They need love rather than control when they are acting out.

## **Expectations for children**

Some of the need to control comes from the expectations you may have for your children. Whenever you have expectations, you will feel upset when they are not met. Expectations have to do with what you believe your children will or should do, if they love and care about you. Often, our expectations come from false beliefs about caring.

What are some of the expectations you have for your children?

If my children really loved me and cared about me, or if I were really important to them, they would:

- Never do anything that upsets me
- Be ready on time
- Agree with me
- Lose or gain weight
- Go to college
- Do their homework
- Get good grades
- Eat what I cook
- Eat with the family

- Keep their rooms clean
- Eat right and take their vitamins
- Do their chores
- Dress the way I want them to
- Be affectionate
- Put their clothes away
- Make me proud of them
- Give in to me
- Do things my way
- Do things for me to prove their love for me, such as getting me gifts
- Stop drinking or taking drugs
- Spend more time me
- Stop watching so much TV
- Never lie to me
- Never argue with me
- Talk to me about their problems
- Take a shower every day
- Stop being friends with kids I don't like
- Become a doctor, lawyer, etc.
- Not leave dirty dishes around
- Have good manners
- Say "Please" and "Thank you"
- Not do anything that embarrasses me
- Be good in front of my friends
- Appreciate the things I buy for them
- Be who I want them to be

What are the negative consequences, to your child, of attempting to control him or her?

Our choice to control always has negative consequences for our children. It is important to connect our controlling behavior with the consequences that may result. While controlling might appear to work in the short run, it can create many problems in the long run.

- My child and I get into power struggles.
- My child does what I want most of the time, but becomes resistant in certain areas. My child resists:
  - Taking a bath or shower
  - Brushing teeth
  - Going to bed
  - Doing homework

- Getting ready for school
- Learning
- Going to school
- Reading
- Keeping his or her room clean
- Doing chores
- Telling the truth
- Dressing appropriately for school
- Using appropriate language
- Looking nice
- Being kind and considerate
- Being on time
- Talking with me
- Having my values
- Eating well
- Caring about his or her health; instead, he or she:
  - smokes
  - drinks alcohol
  - smokes pot
  - uses drugs
  - eats junk
- Caring about his or her safety; instead, he or she:
  - rides a motorcycle without a helmet
  - drinks or uses drugs and then drives
  - drives recklessly
  - has unprotected sex
  - walks in dangerous areas
- Calling when he or she is going to be late
- Caring about what is important to me
- Being loving to me
- Listening to me
- Getting a job
- (The rest of the items on this list should be solid-bulleted and indented in the same way as the first two items on this longer list above (My child and I get into power struggles, My child does what I want most ...))
- My child never does what I ask. He or she is always resistant.
- My child suffers from low self-esteem.
- My child is depressed.
- My child feels unloved.
- My child is bossy with other kids.
- My child is tense, anxious, angry and/or unhappy.
- My child beats up on younger kids.

- My child does not take personal responsibility.

## **Negative Consequences**

What are the negative consequences, to you, of trying to control your child?

Our controlling behavior also has negative consequences for ourselves, especially in the long run.

- Parenting is not fun. It feels like a burden.
- I feel resentful toward my child.
- I am tired of the power struggles.
- I feel tense, anxious, angry or frustrated.
- I feel like a failure as a parent.
- My child and I do not have fun together.
- I feel rageful and out of control.
- I feel overwhelmed.

Parenting can be a wonderfully fulfilling experience, when you learn to parent as a loving Adult with an intent to learn about yourself and your children, rather than as a controlling parent.

## **How Else to Parent**

Parenting becomes a joy and a sacred privilege, instead of a burden, when you learn to be a loving role model for your children. When you practice Inner Bonding and learn to be loving to yourself, you will naturally know how to be loving to your children. When you learn to be in the intent to learn with yourself, you will naturally be open to learning with your children, which is what they need. When you are open to learning with your children, you will not need to resort to authoritarian or permissive controlling behaviors. Parenting as a loving Adult, with an intent to learn about yourself and your children, leads to totally different outcomes than parenting from your authoritarian or permissive wounded self.

Doing your inner work and practicing the Six Steps of Inner Bonding daily is the very best thing you can do for yourself and your children. As you become a loving parent to yourself, you will become a loving parent to your children. As you learn what it means to truly see and love yourself, you will be able to truly see and love your children. As you role-model loving action toward yourself, others and them, your children will learn how to be loving to themselves, others and you.

No matter how old your children are, it is never too late to become a loving role model. Your children will continue to learn from you, even when they are adults.

Doing your own inner work is not only the greatest gift you can give to yourself and your children; it is the greatest gift you can give to the planet. Through changing yourself and bringing up healthy children, you change the world.

## **The Permissive Parent**

By Dr. Margaret Paul

### **Are You Letting Your Children Run All Over You?**

We are being a permissive wounded parent when we allow our children to control us. The permissive parent comes from a set of false beliefs that lead us to compliance, indulgence or indifference. When you are being compliant, you are giving yourself up and going along with what your children want. When you are being indulgent, you are giving in to your children, even when you know it is not good for them. When you are being indifferent, you have withdrawn from being an involved parent and from being affected by your children's behavior.

What are your false beliefs that lead you to be compliant, indulgent, or indifferent?

- If I don't do what my children want, they won't love me. I have to give myself up to be loved by my children.

Your children's love for you is not conditional, because love by definition is not conditional. They might not give you the approval you want. They might be upset with you if they don't get what they want. However, if you do constantly give them what they want, especially if it means giving yourself up or going against what is in their highest good, they will learn to disrespect you. Instead of being loving, they will learn to be bratty and demanding.

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- Going along with what my children want will ensure that they love me.

When you give in to your children to get their love, you are not loving them. You are attempting to control how they feel about you by giving in. When this is the case, you are more concerned with getting their love than with being loving. It is not loving to children to give to them in order to get their love. It teaches them to be manipulative to get what they want.

- I can avoid problems with my children if I give myself up.

It might seem that you are avoiding problems in the moment, but the problems that you create by being permissive will come back to haunt you.

- Complying is a more loving way to try to control.

Complying as a way to control may seem more loving because on the surface it is not so invasive, but any behavior towards another that is designed to get, instead of to give, is not loving.

- A good way to resolve conflict is to give in.

Giving in creates a win-lose situation, not conflict resolution. Giving in to your children does not teach them how to achieve win-win conflict resolution. As adults, they will continue to expect others to give in.

- It feels better to give myself up than to find out that my children don't care about what is important to me.

This may seem true in the short run, but in the long run losing yourself is far worse than losing anyone else. If your children don't care about what is important to you, it is because you have not cared about what is important to you. If you continually put yourself aside, you are giving everyone around you the message that what you want isn't important.

- Giving in to my children lets them know they are important.

Giving in to your children teaches them to control. Children learn that they are important when they are treated with love and respect, and when you treat yourself with love and respect. They will never feel important, no matter how much you give in to them, if you do not feel you are important to yourself. How can children really experience themselves as important if their parents do not see themselves as important? Giving in to them teaches them that you are not important, and they absorb this belief and apply it to themselves. Children learn at least as much, if not more, from how you are with yourself as from how you are with them.

- I don't want to be authoritarian like my parents were with me, so the only other thing I can do is be permissive.

These are not the only two ways to parent. Continue working with the parenting section to learn another way to parent, and consider reading *Do I Have To Give Up Me To Be Loved By My Kids?*

- I can shut down my feelings and still have a loving relationship with my children.

Children need to feel your love. There is no way to have a loving relationship when you are not present with your feelings.

- I can shut down and shut my children out, without their noticing or being affected by it.

Children notice everything and are affected by everything. Children are especially sensitive to your energy. When you shut them out, they are deeply affected by the lack of loving energy.

## **Negative Consequences**

What are the negative consequences, to your child, of being a permissive parent?

While giving in to your child may make you feel safe in the moment, there are many short and long term negative consequences to being a permissive parent.

- My child is demanding and disrespectful.
- My child has no regard for others' wants and needs.
- My child sometimes acts like a selfish, self-centered brat.
- My child expects others to take responsibility for him/her.
- No matter how much I give my child, he/she is never happy; it never seems to be enough.
- Even though I am constantly giving to my child, my child is often angry with me.
- My child has no sense of self-discipline.
- My child lacks self-direction.
- My child is overly needy.
- My child is angry
- My child is depressed.
- My child expresses that he/she feels unloved.
- Even though I think I give my child everything, he/she seems to lack self-esteem.
- My child does not care about his/her health and safety. My child:
  - smokes
  - drinks alcohol
  - smokes pot
  - uses drugs
  - eats junk
  - rides a motorcycle without a helmet
  - drinks or uses drugs and then drives
  - drives recklessly
  - has unprotected sex
  - walks in dangerous areas

What are the negative consequences, to you, of being a permissive parent?

As with all forms of protecting ourselves from our feelings, what seems to work in the short run does not work at all in the long run.

- I feel trapped and used.
- I feel resentful.
- My child is often angry at me.
- My child often shuts me out.
- Parenting is not fun; it feels like a burden.
- I feel resentful toward my child.
- I feel tense, anxious, angry or frustrated.
- I feel like a failure as a parent.
- My child and I do not have fun together.

Parenting is supposed to be a fun and fulfilling experience, which it will be when you learn to parent as a loving Adult, and learn to be loving with both yourself and your children.

### **How Else to Parent**

Parenting becomes a joy and a sacred privilege, instead of a burden, when you learn to be a loving role model for your children. When you practice Inner Bonding and learn to be loving to yourself, you will naturally know how to be loving to your children. When you learn to be in the intent to learn with yourself, you will naturally be open to learning with your children, which is what they need. When you are open to learning with your children, you will not need to resort to authoritarian or permissive controlling behaviors. Parenting as a loving Adult, with an intent to learn about yourself and your children, leads to totally different outcomes than parenting from your authoritarian or permissive wounded self.

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No matter how old your children are, it is never too late to become a loving role model. Your children will continue to learn from you, even when they are adults.

Doing your own inner work is not only the greatest gift you can give to yourself and your children, it is the greatest gift you can give to the planet. Through changing yourself and bringing up healthy children, you change the world.

## **Are You Letting Your Children Manipulate You?**

By Dr. Margaret Paul

**Children learn very early how to manipulate a parent who is overly concerned with being loved by the child.**

Rachael is the young mother of Nathan, who just turned two. Rachael is a stay-at-home mother who works part-time at home and has the help of a housekeeper five days a week. Rachael consulted with me because of her problems with Nathan.

"When Nathan is with David (her husband), he's fine. He adores David and listens well to him. When he's with Amalia (her housekeeper), he's fine. He loves her and plays calmly with her. But when he's with me, he's impossible. He throws temper tantrums when he doesn't get his way. He goes to sleep easily at night for David but not for me. I want so much to be a good mother and I can't figure out what I'm doing wrong. I never get angry with him but sometimes I feel like throwing him across the room! I need help!"

"Rachael, when you are with Nathan, what do you think is more important to you - to get him to love you, or to be loving to yourself?"

Rachael replied instantly. "To get him to love me. I never think about loving myself. I just want him to love me. If he loves me, then I know that I'm a good mother."

"And what does it say about you if you are a good mother?"

"It means that I'm okay."

"So you have handed to Nathan the job of defining your worth. He has to love you for you to be okay. What do you think is most important to David?"

"Oh, David takes good care of himself. He really doesn't seem concerned about whether or not Nathan loves him. He's very loving to Nathan, but if David wants to eat dinner when Nathan wants to play with him, he just eats dinner and Nathan seems to accept it. If I want to have my breakfast when Nathan wants to play, Nathan has a tantrum."

"Rachael, Nathan has learned that he can manipulate you because you are so concerned with how he feels about you. As long as his loving you is more important to you than taking loving care of yourself, he will be able to manipulate you. This is not good for him or for you. It is too big a burden on him to have the responsibility of defining your worth. As long as your worth is attached to being a good mother, Nathan will be able to manipulate you."

"I can see that. Amalia is like David. If she has work to do, she just expects Nathan to play by himself, and he does. She loves him, but she is firm about what she needs to do. I can see that I give in all the time because I don't want him to be upset with me. What can I do now to change this?"

"First of all, you need to consciously detach your sense of self-worth from being a good mother. You need to do some Inner Bonding work on defining your worth separately. Your sense of worth needs to be attached to who you are - your kindness, compassion, empathy, warmth, aliveness. You need to take responsibility for defining your own worth, rather than making Nathan, David, or anyone else responsible.

"Second, you need to care about taking care of yourself as much as you care about taking care of Nathan. Nathan is a brat with you because you are being a permissive parent. You don't care about yourself when you are with him, so he has learned to not care about you. You are teaching him not to care about you, when you do not care about yourself."

"Okay, I think I get this. I'm really going to try to do it differently."

The next week, when we spoke in our phone session, Rachael reported that things had already dramatically changed. Nathan was listening to her, going right to sleep when she put him down, and seemed happier in general. His tantrums had not yet completely stopped, but they were far fewer. Rachael, too, felt happier because she was finally taking care of herself and her own needs. For the first time since giving birth to Nathan, she was having some time to herself.

## **Authoritarian Parenting, Permissive Parenting, or Loving Parenting**

By Dr. Margaret Paul

**Our society swings back and forth between authoritarian and permissive parenting. This article describes why neither works to raise emotionally healthy children, and what does work.**

Angie was brought up by rigid authoritarian parents, who kept her on a tight leash. They rarely considered her feelings about anything, showing a complete lack of empathy and compassion for her feelings and desires. If she came home five minutes late from school or from an activity, she was punished. Yelling and hitting were their favorite forms of punishment.

Angie was a good girl. She did well in school and did what she was told, but she was often sad and lonely, and never felt important. When she married and had her own children, she knew that she didn't want to treat her children the way she had been treated. She wanted to consider their feelings and needs. She wanted them to feel valued and important.

Angie was a very loving mother. She spent lots of time with her children, playing with them, listening to them, and giving them much affection and approval. However, because it was so vital to Angie that her children feel valued and important, she often put herself aside and gave in to their demands. Because Angie had never felt important, it was easy to put herself aside. She actually believed that her children's feelings and needs were more important than hers. As a result, Angie swung the other way from her own upbringing and became a permissive parent.

The consequences for Angie of authoritarian parenting, was that she didn't value herself. The results for her children of permissive parenting were that her children grew up with entitlement issues, thinking they were more important than others, and often not being caring and respectful toward others.

Neither authoritarian nor permissive parenting is loving parenting. Loving parenting is parenting that values both the parents' and the children's feelings and needs. Loving parents do not attempt to control their children - other than in situations of health and safety - nor do they allow their children to control them. They do not violate their

children with anger, blame or hitting, nor do they allow their children to violate them. They do not expect their children to give themselves up for others, nor do they give themselves up for their children.

Loving parents are parents who have diligently practiced Inner Bonding so that they value themselves enough to not worry about being rejected by their children. They are willing to set solid limits on unacceptable behavior, and are not available to being manipulated by their children. Their identities are not tied in to their children's performance in school or in other activities such as sports. Nor are their identities tied up in how their children look. They are accepting of who their children are as individuals, even when their children are very different from them. They do not impose their way of being onto their children, yet at the same time they solidly reinforce a value system that includes honesty, integrity, caring, compassion, kindness and empathy.

As much as we want to be loving parents, unless we have done our own Inner Bonding work to heal our own deep fears of rejection and domination, we will automatically be acting out of these fears without being consciously aware of it. If you grew up with fears of rejection and/or domination, you will automatically protect against these fears in your relationships with your children. You may find yourself trying to control them out of a fear of being controlled or rejected by them. Fears of rejection can manifest in your parenting through trying to control your children with anger, or through trying to control their love through giving yourself up to them. Fears of domination can manifest through controlling them with anger or violence to avoid being controlled by them. Insecurities can manifest through attempting to get your children to perform in the way you want, in order to define your own worth.

In one way or another, whatever is unhealed within you will surface in your behavior with your children. Raising healthy children means first healing the wounded self within you - the part of you that is run by your fears and insecurities, and your desire to protect against rejection and domination.

Our society has swung back and forth between authoritarian and permissive parenting; the result of both is far less than desirable. We have only to look at the number of people taking antidepressants and anti-anxiety drugs, as well as the number of alcoholics and drug addicts, and the rise of crime and the number of people in prisons, to know that neither method works to raise healthy individuals.

Perhaps it is time to accept that we need to be in the process of healing ourselves before becoming parents.