

ParentBrief



When parents don't have a compass, kids are at risk of getting lost

As parents, we need a compass. When we have a compass, we're able to guide our kids in appropriate behaviour, ethics and standards, and give them markers for respect of authority. Our parenting compass gives directions on how to make friends, be independent, take responsibility and work as a team, as well as mark milestones in our child's emotional development and maturity. When we adopt a parenting style that is not short on structure, lacking rules or boundaries, or one too haphazard or too laid back, we help our kids steer a path to true north. When we give in to our kids with permissive parenting, we're not equipping them with the directions they need, and our kids run the risk of getting lost...

Why permissive parenting?

It's understandable for parents who were raised by strict, overly controlling, authoritarian parents, to want to be more relaxed about parenting their own children. Some may decide on a less structured, more casual approach to parenting, where discipline and the laying down of rules and imposition of consequences are not high on their list of priorities. Others may decide that it's more important to be a friend to their child rather than a parent, so that their authority doesn't negatively impact the relationship. The up-side of a permissive parenting style is that kids often feel free to do just as they please. The down-side is that the world they live in is structured around commitment, responsibility, and respect for authority.

What's so important about structure?

Without structure and firmness, some kids develop a frustration phobia. They do not have the Habits of the Mind that are required to do work they don't feel like doing. In addition, giving too much freedom and power for making decisions to young children, may contribute to rebelliousness later on. As these children become adolescents, they may continue to exercise the right given to them by their parents to decide what they do with their time and money and whether they do their work or not. As parents, once we've given up our power and authority, it can be impossible to get it back when we notice our kids abusing theirs.

The link to underachievement

Of all the parenting styles, permissiveness is the one that research clearly finds associated with educational underachievement. Children are born with no ability to put up with frustration and no self-discipline. It must be nurtured and encouraged. Patience and delaying gratification has yet to be learned. Kids need progressively greater amounts of frustration tolerance in order to achieve, and fortunately, for many kids, maturity helps. With increased cognitive capacities, many children begin to be able to tolerate not getting what they want and having to do what they don't want to do. However, on their own, some children are not able to acquire the self-discipline necessary to fulfil all of their parents' and teachers' expectations for work. When permissive parenting allows kids to free-range and do as they please, strategies and motivation to persevere with academic learning can be thin on the ground.

Firmness works

- Firmness in structure and follow-through is an important aspect of parenting
- Provide explanations or reasons for rules
- Ensure consistency with parenting when rules are broken
- Teach kids that sacrifices in the short term = pleasant results in the long term
- While kids are young we set the rules, as they get older we become more democratic
- Encourage age-appropriate independence, but oversee with discernment
- Communicate expectations
- Don't hold back on appropriate consequences when boundaries are intentionally crossed

As parents, we know that navigating a life journey isn't easy. Without a compass for parenting, we only make it harder for our kids, but if we can navigate truth north, our kids will be on the right path from day one.