

Placing Yourself on the Parenting Style Continuum - Directions for Exercise

Set-Up: Print pages 2 – 15 of this document. Cut apart the labels on the last few pages.

For each pair of quotes pages, tape them up on the wall, with about 3 – 4 feet of space between them. Tape up a piece of yarn (or ribbon) stretched between them to make the “continuum” for that topic. Put out enough clothespins (or stickers) out for each student to have five – one marker for each continuum.

Intro in Class: “The media loves to simplify things into black and white labels. For parenting, those include: Helicopter Parent, Tiger Mom, Free Range Parent, Radical Un-Schooler, and so on. We know that parenting choices are more complex than that. But, I think that there is something to be learned from looking at labels and “trying them on” to see what applies to us.

So, I have put up on the wall 5 different spectrums, where on each piece of paper, there are quotes about how a certain “type” or parent might handle certain parenting situations. I want you to read each paper, then figure out where you lie on the continuum. If you read this side, and say “yes, that’s me” put your clothespin near that end. If the other end represents you perfectly, put your clothespin on that end... many of you may be somewhere in the middle on some of these where both feel close, but not right. I’ll give you about 15 minutes to do that, then we’ll discuss it.”

Give them 15 or 20 minutes to do this, while kids play

Discussion: For each pair, tape up the labels that describe that type of parenting, read the summaries (see handout on spectrums) of that type, then have the students discuss: what are the strengths of that approach – what will it teach the child? What are the weaknesses – what problems could come up if that approach were taken too far? How do they react to it personally - what about it resonates for them or turns them off?

Go on to each pair in turn and discuss.

Approach to Baby Care (under 6 months or so)

It's important for a baby to learn a schedule as early as possible. They need to understand the difference between day and night, and that they eat when the family eats, not any time they want to.

Babies will never learn to soothe themselves if the parents "rescue" them every time they cry.

A parent's job is to provide structure, a predictable environment, and a consistent response style.

Approach to Baby Care (under 6 months or so)

Parents should watch baby for hunger cues and feed on demand. They don't need to watch the clock to know when to feed.

When tired cues appear, they settle baby to sleep.

Parents always respond to crying, helping to soothe the baby. They don't let baby "cry it out."

Parents focus on being responsive to the child, and the family's schedule adapts around baby's needs.

School, Homework, and Piano Lessons (for ten year old child)

Nothing is fun until you're good at it. To get good at anything you have to work, and children never want to work, so parents need to make them.

My friends consider themselves strict if they make their kids practice an instrument 30 minutes a day. For me, the first hour is the easy part...

Once a child starts to excel at something—whether it's math, piano, pitching or ballet—he gets praise, admiration and satisfaction. This builds confidence and makes the once not-fun activity fun.

School, Homework, and Piano Lessons (for ten year old child)

Trust your child to choose what they want to learn. Trust that they will make the right choices of what to eat, what to read, how to spend their leisure time, and when to go to bed.

Parenting is supposed to be joyful, and it can be when we learn to connect with, rather than control, our children.

The focus of our life is on happiness and pursuing our interests with reckless abandon together. We totally immerse ourselves in our passions every single day.

Protect your child vs. Let them explore

Parents should be very involved in their kids' lives, providing frequent advice, reminders, and assistance.

Parents should help protect children protect from physical harm and from emotional upset.

Parents should help their children make the best decisions.

Parents can “smooth the way” for their child by being actively engaged with teachers, coaches, etc.

Protect your child vs. Let them explore

Parents should encourage children to actively and independently explore their worlds.

We don't want our kids to fall off a bike. But we do want them to learn to ride. We can [either] hold onto handlebars forever, or wish them luck and then let go.

There were 3 and 4 year olds bicycling down the street without supervision, climbing on roofs of playhouses and climbing trees. Our instinct is to keep children safe by childproofing their lives, but the most important safety protection you can give a child is to let them take risks.

At the Playground (3 – 6 year olds)

I keep a close eye on my child as he plays. I make sure that he takes turns with other kids on the slide, and I don't let him push other kids.

I will leave my conversation with another parent to intervene if a conflict comes up between my child and another child.

If I sense a conflict brewing between kids, I move in close to intervene and help them solve it before anyone gets upset or hurt.

At the Playground (3 – 6 year olds)

Kids like to run wild on the playground. They often play with toy swords and guns. They often push and shove each other when they get excited. It's part of being a kid.

It's normal for kids to get into fights on the playground. If they get hurt (physically or emotionally), they'll cry for a while, but then they'll soon shrug it off and go back to having fun with the friend they were just fighting with.

Kids need to learn to resolve conflicts on their own. Parents need to stay out of their way for them to learn it.

Activities and Enrichment Toys (Preschool Age)

I research and buy toys, video games, and videos that will help my child learn skills like ABC's, numbers, and colors.

My child participates in lots of activities: we do story time, gymnastics classes, and music classes.

When we are at home together, I try to spend lots of time with my child, helping him learn new skills. I feel a little guilty if I take time off to myself or leave him to play by himself for a long time.

Activities and Enrichment Toys (Preschool Age)

Sometimes I purposely ignore my child for a while. When she's bored, then she gets creative, and comes up with new ideas for cool new games.

I don't buy a lot of special toys for my kids. We spend a lot of time playing with simple things like blocks, balls, pipe cleaners, and play-dough. We also spend a lot of time outside, where they can turn a stick into anything from an umbrella to a horse to a giant pencil.

I make sure we have a couple days a week where there's nothing on the schedule so we have a chance to seize the moment and pursue whatever whim catches us that day.

Parent-Led

Child-Led

Tiger Mom

Radical Un-Schooling

Helicopter Parent

Free Range Parent

American Playground

Japanese Playground

Scheduled Family

Un-Scheduled Family