

Parenting style and its impact on alcohol and other drug use

Although parents sometimes doubt their importance, they can play a significant role in preventing, or at the very least, delaying adolescent alcohol and other drug use. There are two main protective factors that are supported by research evidence and they are as follows:

- **parenting style**
- **parental monitoring**

Four types of parenting styles have been identified, each defined along two axes – strictness ('parental control') and warmth ('parental support'):

- **authoritarian** (strictness but not warmth)
- **authoritative** (strictness and warmth)
- **indulgent** (warmth but not strictness)
- **neglectful** (neither warmth nor strictness)

Authoritative parenting is the style recommended, with parents encouraged to set simple and clear rules for their children about what is expected of them and what will not be tolerated from an early age. Parents should know where their children are and who they are with and if rules are broken there are consequences that will be applied. This approach, provided in an environment where the children feel loved and cared about can have a protective effect on adolescent alcohol and other drug use.

Although parents sometimes doubt their importance, particularly during the teenage years, research indicates that parents play an important part in the development of their adolescent children. As such, parents can play a significant role in preventing, or at the very least, delaying adolescent alcohol and other drug use.

Research indicates that parents can protect against adolescent substance use where parenting skills, parent-adolescent communication and levels of warmth and affection are high. Attachment to the family and low parental conflict are also considered to be protective factors that may contribute to teens choosing not to use drugs.

There are two main protective factors, however, that are supported by research evidence and they are as follows:

- **parenting style**
- **parental monitoring**

For information on parental monitoring, please see the fact sheet 'Parental monitoring and its impact on alcohol and other drug use'.

What types of parenting styles have been identified?

Four types of parenting styles have been identified, each defined along two axes – strictness ('parental control') and warmth ('parental support'):

- **authoritarian** (strictness but not warmth)
- **authoritative** (strictness and warmth)
- **indulgent** (warmth but not strictness)
- **neglectful** (neither warmth nor strictness)

Parental control reflects how children's behaviours are managed, e.g., how family rules are developed and enforced, parental knowledge and monitoring of their child's activities, etc. Parental support refers to parental affectionate qualities and is associated with characteristics like warmth, acceptance, and involvement.

Authoritarian parenting

This is often referred to as 'top-down' parenting. These parents make rules and expect that their children will follow them without exception.

Parenting style and its impact on alcohol and other drug use

Children are not usually given the reasons for the rules and there is little room for any negotiation. Authoritarian parents may use punishments instead of consequences.

Authoritative parenting

Authoritative parents also have rules that children are expected to follow, and the consequences of breaking those rules are made clear, however, all rules and consequences are bound in unconditional love. Rules and boundaries are set because you love them and want to protect them. This is sometimes referred to as 'tough love' parenting. These parents are more likely to tell children the reasons for the rules and involve them in the rule-making process to some extent. Changes to the rules are made over time, usually as a reward for good behaviour and an acknowledgement that they are growing up and becoming more self-sufficient. Authoritative parents tend to use consequences instead of punishments and use positive consequences to reinforce good behaviours.

Indulgent parenting

This is also called 'permissive parenting', with many in this group taking on more of a friend role rather than that of a parent. Indulgent parents are often reluctant to discipline their children, rarely following-through with handing out consequences should the rules that have been set be broken. These parents are more likely to use the line "but I trust my child", trying to avoid conflict, only stepping in when a serious problem arises.

Neglectful parenting

Neglectful or uninvolved parents have little knowledge of what their children are doing. There tends to be few, if any, rules or expectations. These parents are likely to fail to meet their children's basic needs and these children are often expected to raise themselves. Neglectful parents often have significant issues of their own (e.g., mental health problems or substance use) and often lack knowledge about parenting and child development.

Which parenting style is recommended?

Authoritative parenting has been found to have a range of positive impacts on adolescents. Research has shown adolescents with authoritative parents show better psychosocial development, greater academic competence and less delinquent behaviour. They are also more likely to experience many health benefits, with studies finding that they smoke less, drink less alcohol, and are less likely to use cannabis. The positive effects of authoritative parenting have been found to be similar for males and females but have been found to be inconsistent across ethnic groups.

Research provides support for the relationship between parenting style and illicit drug use and the apparent protective effect of a style incorporating strictness and warmth. That said, research does support that children raised in a home with authoritative parents are less likely to use illicit drugs compared to those from non-authoritative homes. Rules and boundaries, provided in an environment where parental warmth is the norm, are much more likely to be accepted by adolescents. Teens are also much more likely to share their concerns or discuss problems they may be experiencing when they know they will be listened to in a non-judgemental way, thus providing parents with much more information about their children's lives.

Authoritative parenting is the style recommended by most experts based on the available evidence, with parents encouraged to set simple and clear rules for their children about what is expected of them and what will not be tolerated from an early age. Parents should know where their children are and who they are with and if rules are broken there are consequences that will be applied. Research has found that this approach, provided in an environment where the children feel loved and cared about can have a protective effect on adolescent alcohol and other drug use.