

Parenting style and its impact on alcohol and other drug use

Parents and carers can play a significant role in preventing, or at the very least delaying adolescent alcohol and other drug use. Factors that have been shown to have a positive impact on protecting children from alcohol harm include:

- **an authoritative parenting style that combines strictness and warmth**
- **appropriate parental monitoring of a child's activities**

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

Although parents sometimes doubt their influence, particularly during the teenage years, research indicates that parents play an important role in preventing or, at the very least, delaying adolescent alcohol and other drug use.

Parents can protect against adolescent substance use when parenting skills; parent-child communication and levels of warmth and affection are high. Family attachment and low parental conflict are also considered to be protective factors that may contribute to teenagers choosing not to use drugs.

There are two main protective factors that are supported by research evidence:

- **an authoritative parenting style that combines strictness and warmth**
- **appropriate parental monitoring of a child's activities**

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, which involve varying degrees of 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. 'Parental support' refers to parents' affectionate qualities and is associated with characteristics like warmth, acceptance and involvement.

Authoritarian parenting

Often referred to as 'top-down' parenting, these parents make rules and expect that their children will follow them without exception. Children are not usually given the reasons for the rules and there is little room for any negotiation. Authoritarian parents tend to 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 explain to 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 as the children grow up and become more self-sufficient. Authoritative parents tend to use consequences instead of punishments and use positive consequences to reinforce good behaviours. ►

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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 and 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 may fail to meet their children's basic needs. The 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, which incorporates strictness and warmth is the style recommended by most experts. Based on the available evidence parents are 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. This parenting style, provided in an environment where the children feel loved and cared for, can have a protective effect on adolescent alcohol use. Research also shows these children are also less likely to smoke cigarettes and use cannabis.

Rules and boundaries, provided in an environment where parental warmth is the norm, are much more likely to be accepted by adolescents. Teenagers 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-judgmental way.

Evidence also shows that adolescents with authoritative parents experience better psychosocial development; greater academic competence and less anti-social behaviour.