

INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose - No. 1 parenting educator



Kids shine with tough love parenting

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Children with parents that use a tough love parenting approach are best prepared to do well in life, according to a recent British study.

Kids that experience a mix of discipline and warmth are more likely to develop important character traits, such as self-regulation, empathy and application by the age of five than parents that use permissive, authoritarian or disengaged styles.

The Millennium Cohort Study involving 9,000 UK households, found that while family structure and parent income levels impacted on children's development, it was parenting style that had the greatest influence on outcomes for kids.

An analysis of school results is revealing. One quarter of kids with authoritative parents were in the top 20 per cent at school. Next came permissive parenting with 18 per cent, 15 for authoritarian and 11 per cent of this top cohort going to kids of disengaged parents.

Parenting style is not necessarily fixed. It changes over time according to children's needs, our well-being and their ages. Common sense suggests parents need to be stricter with some children than with others and there will be times when parents need to adopt a more permissive approach.

Certainly parental mood and well-being contributes to how parents respond to kids. But most parents will default to one style. Recent research suggests that if parents want kids to develop the characteristics to succeed, then they should default to authoritative or tough love parenting.

Here are 10 tough love parenting strategies to use in your family:

1. Set **limits and boundaries** that expand as kids get older and become more capable. Boundaries make kids feel secure and teach them how to behave well.
2. Use a **negotiable style** with children according to their age and stage of development. Parents also need to realise that not everything is up for negotiation. There are times when the word 'no' needs to be heard as parents act in the best interest of their kids.

3. Use **consequences** and other tools to teach kids to behave well and develop a sense of personal responsibility. Resist the temptation to let kids off the hook when they do the wrong thing. Firm, but fair, is the key here.
4. Put **family rituals**, such as shared mealtimes, in place to make sure you interact regularly with your kids.
5. **Praise** kids for improvement, effort and contribution rather than their ability at school, in sport and other areas of their lives. Focus your positive comments on their participation rather than the results of what they do so kids learn that trying and persistence are important.
6. **Recognise cooperative behaviours** with positive attention such as praise, physical touch and rewards and **minimise negative behaviours** through a range of measures such as ignoring and using consequences.
7. Teach kids the skills needed for **independence** from an early age so they learn to look after themselves. Avoid regularly doing things for kids that they can do for themselves.
8. Adopt an **open communication style** in your family where kids learn that there's nothing so bad that they can't talk about it.
9. Encourage a sense of **empathy** in children by recognising their emotions and giving them permission and assistance to talk about their feelings.
10. Encourage **generosity and kindness** in your kids. They do this by sharing toys and other items, helping others and doing chores that benefit their family. This sense of community that authoritative parenting promotes is the real strength of the style.

At a time when a parent's voice can be drowned out by the din of modern life, this research is a great reminder that it's effective parenting not media, celebrities or peers that have the greatest impact on future outcomes for kids.

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