

Parenting for Moral Growth

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THE COUNCIL FOR SPIRITUAL AND ETHICAL EDUCATION

RESOURCES FOR INDEPENDENT SCHOOL PARENTS ABOUT SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ETHICAL DEVELOPMENT

Parental Authority and its Effect on Children

BY DIANA BAUMRIND, PH.D.

In 1960 I initiated research to investigate how childrearing patterns affect children's development of character and competence. More than 100 parents and their children participated in my longitudinal study of childrearing practices and their effects when the children were in preschool, middle school, and high school. At each stage trained psychologists spent some fifty hours studying the characteristics of members in each family, and their interactions. One team observed parent-child interactions both at home and in the laboratory, and then interviewed parents about these interactions. A second team observed each child's interactions with peers in school and on the playground; the children were interviewed when they were in middle school and high school.

The parents in our study demonstrated different approaches to how they balanced demandingness and responsiveness. Demandingness refers to the way parents use power; it is how they monitor and supervise their children's activities, and how they control, prohibit, and modify children's behaviors to fit their standards. Responsiveness refers to how parents express love, balance their children's needs for protection and autonomy, and comply with their children's needs and wishes.

We discovered that children's levels of competence and adjustment could be explained by how parents integrated responsive and demanding practices. Four primary parenting patterns emerged, which I labeled unengaged, permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative. Although both authoritative and authoritarian styles of parental authority are highly demanding, their ways of asserting power differ markedly, as do the effects on their children's development of character and competence.

Unengaged Parents

Unengaged parents are neither demanding nor responsive. They discourage dependency, and contribute little in the way of governance or education to their child's development of character or competence. They are uninvolved because they want to remain unencumbered by childrearing responsibilities. Some are detached

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Parenting Styles

BY JULIE STEVENS

Research shows that the way in which we deliver guidance to, set limits for, and interact with our children – in other words, our parenting style – profoundly influences our success in raising them to be competent, caring individuals. Our parenting style is shaped by many factors, including our personality, the temperament of our children, our cultural or ethnic background, and the parameters of our professional lives. Also important to consider are the assumptions that underlie our way of being in the world, from our routine encounters with others to our most critical life choices. These assumptions also shape our beliefs about parenting.

Through decades of longitudinal study, researcher Diana Baumrind identified distinct styles of parenting, which include **authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative**. Of the parenting practices associated with developing confidence, resilience, and the capacity for moral action, adopting an authoritative parenting style is a proven strategy (see CSEE's *Parenting for Character: Five Experts, Five Practices*). What distinguishes one approach from another

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can be briefly summed up by considering parental behavior along two continuums: **responsiveness** (willingness to grant appropriate independence, respectful, open to communication) and **demandingness** (having high expectations, willing to enforce rules).

Authoritarian parents are:

- more demanding, less responsive
- restrictive and controlling
- rigid and absolute
- high expectations for good behavior, but attention is contingent on “doing as I say” (adult-centered)

Permissive parents are:

- more responsive, less demanding
- lenient, avoiding confrontation, but sometimes intrusive
- rules set but not consistently enforced
- warm and accepting, but don't communicate high expectations for behavior (child as buddy or ally; sometimes role reversals between parent and child)

Authoritative parents are:

- balanced in being both demanding and responsive
- assertive but not restrictive or intrusive
- clear and firm, but open to compromise and negotiation
- expect much of their kids, while treating them with warmth, empathy, and unconditional love (child-centered)

with the unquestioning obedience that results in “good behavior”. However, Colorosa points out that such a worldview prompts children to respond by becoming fearful, aggressive, or avoidant. Furthermore, she notes that such a family system encourages kids “to do what they are told without question – *not because they believe it is the right thing to do*, but to get the reward or avoid the punishment.” And, because such an approach assumes that life is an “us vs. them” struggle, with the rewards going to those who prove themselves to be “the best”, Brick-wall families promote the kind of competition that trains kids to see others as adversaries who potentially could block their own success.

In contrast to the rigid moral absolutism of the Brick-wall family is the “whatever feels right” moral relativism of the Jellyfish family (similar to a permissive parenting style). Lacking much internal structure, such families are adrift in the shifting social currents. Operating on the assumption that many conflicting ideas may be valid, and that children are at their best when left to their own devices, Jellyfish families accord kids great freedom of choice, offering only a few, inconsistently invoked guidelines. One day a child may be punished for teasing her sister; the next she may be rewarded for not teasing for an entire afternoon. This causes the child to focus on avoiding the reprimand or gaining the reward, rather than learning to empathize with her sister's feelings. Says Colorosa, in the Jellyfish family emotions rule the behavior of both children and parents. Parents' interactions with their children tend to swing between rescuing, smothering and benign neglect. Consequently, kids in such families have trouble developing “their inner voice that speaks to them before they act,” a key component for moral action. Not having developed genuine confidence and self-awareness, they may have trouble problem-solving and tend to blame others when things go wrong.

The worldview of the Backbone family (similar to an authoritative parenting style) is one that rejects both extremes of moral absolutism and moral relativism. Says Colorosa, these families operate out of “an ethic rooted in deep caring, with the supposition that deep caring may be informed by reason and will, principles and rules, but is neither controlled nor bound by them.” Parents in such families are emotionally available to their children, and they model appropriate control of their own emotions. Rather than demanding respect from their kids, parents demonstrate and teach respectful interactions with all family members, as well as with those outside the family, thus communicating that respectful behavior is the expectation. In Colorosa's words, “Children are held to high standards of conduct, not to please their parents, but because parents believe they are capable

“Our parenting style corresponds to our broader worldview.”

In her book *Just because it's not wrong doesn't make it right* (see review in this newsletter) Barbara Colorosa suggests that our parenting style corresponds to our broader worldview. She offers descriptions of three types of families, each reflecting different assumptions about human nature, child-rearing practices, and how children become moral adults: Brick-wall families, Jellyfish families, and Backbone families. These metaphors are useful in examining how parenting style affects the

moral development of children.

Colorosa explains that in a Brick-wall family (similar to an authoritarian parenting style) strict adherence to rules and structure becomes a barrier to young people developing autonomy or making and learning from mistakes. Because children are assumed to need to be controlled and made to mind, their feelings are seen as unimportant or interfering

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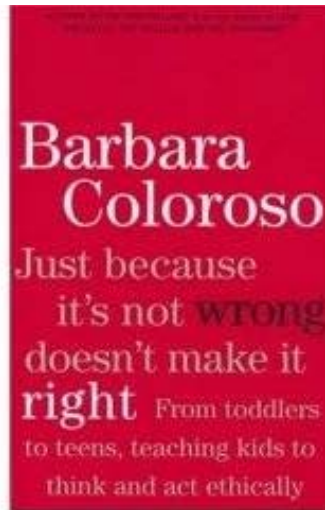
Book Review

**Just Because It's Not Wrong
Doesn't Make It Right:
From Toddlers to Teens,
Teaching Kids to Think and Act
Ethically**
by Barbara Coloroso
© Viking Canada, 2005, 240 pgs
ISBN 0-060-04439-3

Any parent encountering the compelling title of Barbara Coloroso's most recent book should want to know more. For that matter, anyone interested in improving the often disturbing state of our global community, one young person at a time, will want to read and take to heart Coloroso's wise advice.

Over the course of thirty years as a teacher, writer and lecturer, Coloroso has focused on helping parents raise children who are responsible, resilient individuals, able to contribute positively to their families and communities. She has tackled such overarching topics as parenting in crisis, the dynamics of bullying, and the roots of genocide. In this most recent book Coloroso incorporates concepts that she has refined through her prior work, logically revealing how certain fundamental principles and practices encourage children to develop moral relationships with an ever expanding circle of others.

To provide an accessible context for her approach to raising ethical kids, Coloroso relies on descriptions of child and adolescent behavior that parents will find entirely familiar. *Just Because It's Not Wrong...* is anecdotal and pragmatic rather than scholarly. Yet much of what Coloroso recommends is supported by recent scientific research on moral development and the ways parents can foster their children's ethical feeling, thinking, and action. For instance, Coloroso begins her book by citing instances of children and teenagers who acted on behalf of others out of an innate sense of what she labels "a deep ethic of caring." She emphasizes that these young people acted as they did not because they were following rules, adhering to a proscribed dogma, or hoping for a reward. Coloroso contends, as do many researchers, that our inherent capacity for empathy and sympathy incline us to behave morally toward others. She also warns that such natural inclinations can be perverted, corrupted or negated. In the most commonplace interactions of small children on



the school playground, she identifies the antecedents of both selfless altruism and appalling violence. Thus, Coloroso begins by highlighting the fundamental connection between feelings and moral behavior.

Coloroso then shifts her attention from ways parents can nurture a child's compassionate feelings to how they can support the thought processes underpinning ethical action. It is easy to see the impact of Coloroso's extensive work on bullying in the guidelines she suggests children can be taught to use in determining an ethical course of action. She suggests focusing first and foremost on intent. Of additional help to parents, Coloroso provides an excellent overview of the stages of moral development, from infancy through young adulthood.

As researchers have emphasized, the kinds of family systems, schools, and communities in which we live can promote or hinder ethical behavior. Coloroso's lively analysis of three types of families - "brick-wall", "jellyfish" and "backbone" - provides vivid examples of parenting styles and associated outcomes. The patterns she describes are substantiated by research, including that of Diana Baumrind. (See CSEE's new publication, *Parenting for Moral Growth: Five Experts, Five Practices*.) Coloroso provides many examples of ways that "backbone" families nurture, teach respect, create rules that are simple and clear, provide consequences for misbehavior that are natural and reasonable, and ultimately balance the sense of self and the sense of community in all that they do.

Many parents, teachers, and policy makers express concern about the pervasive influence of all forms of media on the world-views of young people. Coloroso offers parents her measured insight and concrete steps for managing television, video games, and the internet. Once again, she includes a valuable developmental perspective on how kids are able to tolerate media at different ages. In the chapter "Media: The Good, the Bad, the Ugly, and the Indifferent," she steers clear of the hand-wringing and fomenting of parental fear which often characterizes such discussions. But she pulls no punches in her sobering commentary on the insidious ways in which advertisers and marketers target even very young children.

Having laid this thoughtful groundwork, Coloroso turns in the second half of the book to how parents can best respond when their children inevitably make mistakes. For her, these become teachable moments of great power, if parents can rise to the task. Under the broad categories of "hoarding, harming, and hating", she examines a spectrum of behavior ranging from competitive acquisitiveness (not necessarily unethical but corrosive to caring

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Father Doesn't Always Know Best

BY MARVIN W. BERKOWITZ

I am a pretty self-assured person. I have a Ph.D. I write a newspaper column. I am well-respected in my profession. I am pretty smart...

My wife and son take much of the brunt of this self-assuredness. And I am pretty good at arguing my side of an issue, so I often win. Well, at least I often win the battle.

I am less confident that this strategy is helping me win the war. The battle is the particular argument—the war is the relationship with others and how they perceive me. I may win the arguments with my son, but if the cost is alienating or hurting him, then this particular tactic is not successful. Besides, we know that kids grow up to be like us, and we don't want them to develop our bad habits and character.

I was recently told a story about an elementary school child who had learned through a character development program at school to believe in yourself and persevere. To be optimistic and have a "can do" attitude. He was helping his mother decorate the Christmas tree when she accidentally dropped a treasured family heirloom ornament, which smashed into many fragments.

Mom was despondent that she had destroyed the ornament. Mom, of course, knowing better, said it was impossible. Her son, however, remained undaunted and recited the lessons from school that said you can do whatever you set your mind to.

Mom resisted. Son persisted. Mom relented and they set about to try to do what mom knew was a futile repair job.

Lo and behold, they did manage to resurrect the ornament. Son was vindicated and mom was relieved. Son knows best in their case.

I can clearly see the delight and surprise on my son's face, even now that he is in high school, when he is right about something and I am wrong. Even about the most trivial issue.

There is a sense of power and self-esteem that comes from being right. Especially when in disagreement with someone who seems to be right more often than not. Like arrogant old dad.

Remember that you are not always right. Kids may sometimes know things or figure out better than you, so keep an open mind and an open ear. This will build communication, a positive relationship, and the kid's self-esteem, initiative, and character. Trust me, I am confident about this one.

*Marvin W. Berkowitz is Sanford N. McDonnell Professor of Character at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, and one of the most respected character educators in the United States. This article is reprinted with permission from **Parenting for Good: Real World Advice for Parents from the Character Columns of Dr. Marvin W. Berkowitz.***

Book Review

MINDSET: The New Psychology of Success

by Carol S. Dweck

© by Random House 2006

288 pages

ISBN 1-400-6275-6

"A good book is one whose advice you believe in. A great book is one whose advice you follow. I have found C. Dweck's work on mindsets invaluable in my own life, and even life-changing in my attitudes toward the challenges that over the years, become more demanding rather than less. This is a book that can change your life, as its ideas have changed mine."

*Robert Sternberg (author of **Successful Intelligence**)*

Carol Dweck is a leading expert in motivation and personality psychology. She feels that your mindset is not a personality quirk; it creates your whole mental world. It explains whether you are optimistic or pessimistic. It shapes your goals, your attitude toward work and relationships, how you raise your kids, and whether or not you fulfill your potential. Everyone has one of two mindsets:

- **Fixed mindset** (the path of stagnation)
 1. You believe that your talents and abilities are set in stone—either you have them or you don't.
 2. You must prove yourself over and over, trying to look smart and talented at all costs.

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and neglectful whereas others are more actively rejecting and cold. The majority of children with unengaged parents were neither agentic [meaning that they did not tend to take initiative in important matters] nor communal [meaning that the quality of their relationships was deficient]. Adolescents with unengaged parents had the lowest achievement scores and suffered most from anxiety, depression, and substance abuse.

Permissive Parents

Permissive parents are undemanding, but responsive. They do not require mature and competent behavior. They set few explicit clear standards, limits, or prohibitions that would require their children to behave responsibly and respect the needs of others. They do not consistently enforce basic rules for conduct such as respect for others' needs, property, and feelings. These parents give their children wide latitude to govern their own behavior, and fail to provide adequate structure and stability to their children's lives. While they could demand mature behavior, prohibit undesirable behavior, and obtain compliance, they more frequently indulge their children or rely on psychological manipulation by bribing, withdrawing love, or making the child feel guilty for hurting the parent. When children resist or test limits, permissive parents avoid confrontation in an effort to be perceived as good friends rather than authority figures. Children raised permissively were not self-regulated, prosocial, or achievement-oriented; during adolescence, these children were more likely to abuse drugs than were children whose parents were more demanding. The parents' indiscriminate acquiescence to children's demands tended to foster dependency rather than responsible self-sufficiency.

Authoritarian Parents

In contrast to permissive parents, authoritarian parents are demanding, but unresponsive. They lack warmth, tenderness, and show little concern for their child's perspective. They tend to be disapproving and hypercritical, rarely praising their child's constructive achievements (like timely completion of chores or good grades) or encouraging initiative. They micromanage their child's activities and impose unreasonable regulations based on parental whims. Authoritarian parents make no effort to communicate the reasons for their directives or sanctions. To get their children to behave, and to preserve their hierarchical authority, they use threats, punishment, criticism, guilt induction, and bribes rather

than explanation, negotiation, or reason. Authoritarian parents impose consequences for disobedience that are harsh, incoherent, and sometimes unpredictable. Their demands are arbitrary, immoderate, inconsistent, and developmentally inappropriate, such as expecting quiet for long periods from a preschooler. They insist on conformity to parental wishes in rigid and inflexible ways, as opposed to being realistic, issue-oriented and guided by the reality of the child's interests, abilities, and needs. Children perceive authoritarian parents as unapproachable, and their parents' use of power as arbitrary. The children in our study gave in to peer pressure, had poorer academic skills, and experienced greater rates of anxiety and depression than their peers.

Authoritative Parents

Authoritative parents are both demanding and responsive. They integrate and balance high levels of responsiveness with high levels of demandingness in ways that are beneficial to children's development. By contrast with authoritarian parents, authoritative parents encourage individuality and independence; they are warm and understanding of their child's perspective. Authoritative parents require mature behavior within the child's range of ability, and base demands and prohibitions on their child's developmental level. When they make power assertive demands, they accompany their demands with explanations to help the child understand appropriate behavior. These parents use reason and discussion to obtain compliance and are willing to negotiate when they deem their child's objections to be reasonable. They praise worthy behavior and achievement, and criticize actions that require change. Because authoritative parents are warm, responsive, and autonomy-supportive as well as power-assertive their children are motivated to restore family harmony by complying or else by constructively dissenting in an effort to change their parent's mind rather than to defiantly or evasively disobey. Children of authoritative parents were both more community-oriented and agentic than their peers.

(Diana Baumrind, Ph.D. is one of the preeminent child development researchers in the western world. She is Professor of Child Development and Head of the Family Socialization Project at the University of California, Berkeley. This article is an excerpt from her chapter titled "Authoritative Parenting for Character and Competence," in CSEE's 2008 publication Parenting for Character: Five Experts, Five Practices.)

MINDSET (CONTINUED FROM P. 4)

- **Growth mindset** (the path for success)
 1. You know that talents can be developed.
 2. Great abilities are built over time.

Mindsets unfold in childhood and adulthood. They drive every aspect of our lives, from work to sports, from relationships to parenting. Creative geniuses in all fields apply the growth mindset to achieve results.

I agree with Sternberg's quote that opened this short review, and highly recommend the book primarily because it centers on "effort" as "the secret to raising smart kids" (*Scientific American*, Nov. 28, 2007). Research has shown that teaching people to have a "growth mind-set," which encourages a focus on effort rather than on intelligence or talent, helps make them into high achievers in school and in life. Children who view intelligence as malleable tend to be life-long learners. They learn for learning sake. This results in challenges being viewed as something to "master" and they are often thought sought out and characterized as energizing. When these children are confronted by a setback they are more likely to persevere.

The same "growth mindset" can affect the quality and longevity of personal relationships. Those with a growth mindset are more likely to broach problems and they believe that people can change and grow. They are confident that they can resolve interpersonal challenges.

(Book reviewer Mike Cerkovnik is a lawyer and school psychologist by training. He currently works as a lower school counselor at Mary Institute and St. Louis Country Day School in St. Louis, Missouri. He is a member of CSEE's moral development team, where he is considered the "resident expert" on resources for children's development.)

COLOROSO: "JUST BECAUSE..." (FROM P. 3)

relationships) to what she terms "mayhem" (serious breaches of trust with long-term consequences for victim and perpetrator). Coloroso makes an important distinction between discipline and punishment, and offers step-by-step advice on how to help young people take action toward restitution and reconciliation. While the process is conveyed with clarity, she does not sugar coat the profound commitment involved, on the part of both parents and children, in setting right moral transgressions. Throughout this readable, practical guide, Coloroso's message is that such hard work is transformative and vital, both for individuals and for society.

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Contributions and comments are welcome.
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STEVENS, "PARENTING STYLES," FROM P. 2

of being decent, responsible, caring people." Instead of viewing kids' misbehavior as either an affront to parental authority or as simply a phase that will pass on its own, Backbone parents see their children's inevitable misdeeds as teachable moments. They make sure their child understands when his actions have been unkind or unfair, and they help him take responsibility for rectifying the problem. While the parents maintain their authority, such families are democratic in enlisting input and cooperation from all members, and in sharing opportunities to work and to play together. Children have first-hand experience contributing to the smooth functioning of the household, which builds their sense of competence.

The concept of an authoritative parenting style, which balances responsiveness and demandingness, coupled with Coloroso's description of the underlying worldview and patterns of interaction in a Backbone family, provide a vivid picture of a home environment that fosters skills associated with moral development. As Coloroso counsels, "By knowing the possible alternatives and their potential impact on your children, you can mindfully and with a wise heart begin to create your own family model, one that will more readily enable you to teach your children how to think and act ethically."