

## Parenting in a Democratic Society

Each July 4th Americans celebrate the freedom we treasure in our democratic society. Freedom of speech and the right to express our opinions is one of the privileges of living in a democratic society. So how do the principles of democracy apply to parenting? After all, the goal of parenting is to teach our children to survive and thrive in the society in which they live. Let's take a look at how various parenting styles work in the **democratic** society we live in.

The role of the parent in today's family should be of the leader, who has the right to make the final decisions affecting the family. Family members, however, should have a right to express opinions and offer compromises. In other words, everyone should have their say, but not necessarily always their way. Decisions affecting the whole family can be discussed at a Family Meeting where each family member is allowed to offer suggestions and opinions.

To understand this concept better, let's compare three common parenting styles:

- Dictator Style - A dictator is one who has absolute control and doesn't allow their children to challenge, question or disagree. "Because I'm your parent and I said so!" You get the idea. Children who grow up in this environment don't develop good self-esteem or the courage to take risks or, at some point, will rebel with anger and disrespect.
- Doormat Style - This style of parenting became popular after the era when children were "seen and not heard." Many parents raised in the dictator style of parenting wanted to raise their children differently, but became too lenient, trying to be their children's friend. Under the Permissive style of parenting, the children become the family leaders and get "their way" too often. In these households, there is little respect for order and routine. Children raised in this environment do not learn respect or self-control. We've all experienced the unruly child stating, "I don't want to do that, and you can't make me!"
- Authoritative or Active Style - The Active style of parenting provides a middle ground between the dictator and doormat styles. The rights and responsibilities of family members are respected and there is order and routine. The parent retains the leadership role and encourages cooperation and stimulates learning. Allowing children choices, but still establishing rules and expectations, creates an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual respect. For example, a parent can make a rule that homework must be done every night, but the child can be given a choice to set a time when it will be done. Choices can be given based on the child's age and level of responsibility.

Giving choices, setting logical consequences for misbehavior and holding Family Meetings are just a few of the methods you can use to establish your values within the family. Talk with your teens about behaviors and activities you won't allow, such as drugs, alcohol and sexual activity. Get their input as to what the consequence should be for a given misbehavior. When a consequence is established before the event, the teen is more likely to accept the consequence without rebellion. Hold a Family Meeting and let your children know what your values are and what you expect of them. Then ask for their suggestions for logical consequences. It's important for your children to understand what is acceptable behavior, and what is not. Then determine some consequences together. You can even create a poster or memo board that can be on display to reinforce these consequences. Freedom of speech is a right given to all American citizens. Why not make it one in your family?

To learn more about effective parenting skills, visit the Active Parenting Online Video Library. These helpful videos are offered free of charge by the ACFC in partnership with Active Parenting. Guidance and help are available for parents of children of all ages. To access the Online Video Library, go to the **ACFC website**, click on the Active Parenting tab, and follow the instructions on how to view the videos.



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