

DEMOCRACY BEGINS WITH THE PARENT

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What Is Parenting?

Parenting is both an action and an attitude toward raising children. For example, changing a child's clothes is an act; how the clothes are taken off the child and how the parent reacts to changing the clothes is an attitude. Telling a child to put a bicycle away is an action on the verbal level; how the child is told and how often the child has to be told indicates an attitude of how the parent views a child, and reveals a person's style of parenting. For our purposes, parenting can be defined as what the parent does in the process of being a parent.

In the earliest days of our lives, we begin to develop beliefs about who we are, what is important in life, and how we want to be as parents, if we choose to be parents. Yet many of these beliefs we have about the role of parent may be misconceptions or have a different emphasis because of social change.

Myths About Parenting

Every parent has a number of "pet ideas" about how to raise a child. These ideas are developed from various experiences, such as observing and interacting with one's own parents, education, and culture. However, some of these "pet ideas" are unrealistic and may be detrimental to the parent-child relationship. Such widely accepted, but actually unrealistic ideas are called "myths."

In order to do the best possible job, parents must challenge these myths and replace them with new beliefs. Paul Hauck, a noted psychologist, has found the following myths to be rather widespread among American parents. An examination of these myths and their counterparts can lead to a more sensible approach to parenting. (Hauck, 1967).

Myth 1: *A child must not question or disagree with parents.*

Fact: To encourage mutual respect between parent and child, questioning and/or disagreement should be encouraged. An understanding of, but not necessarily agreement with, each person's point of view should result. Denying a child the right to question or disagree with parents:

- Places the parent in the position of a dictator.
- Silences the child, which in and of itself does not mean agreement.
- May create guilt feelings in the child.
- Denies the child the opportunity to learn to reason.
- Builds feelings of resentment.

Myth 2: *A child and the child's behavior are the same.*

Fact: A parent must realize the difference between the **behavior** of the child and the **human being** in the child. The child should be accepted as a person who is worthy of a parent's respect and dignity; only the **behavior** should be found unacceptable. Objectional behavior may occur because of a child's:

- low intelligence
- ignorance or lack of skill
- emotional instability
- attempt to get even
- effort to be noticed
- seeming inability to live up to parental standards

The wise parent considers why the misbehavior is occurring. Once the reason for misbehavior has been established, the parent can begin to help the child correct the misbehavior.

Myth 3: *Punishment, guilt and blame are effective methods of child management.*

Fact: For a long time, some parents have punished their children in anger, letting the children think they were bad for misbehaving, and instilling guilt for not being obedient.

Physical punishment, blame and guilt tend to create emotional disturbance and misconduct rather than reduce them. Discipline should be applied by a parent in a *deliberate, calm and reasonable* manner, focusing on the problem rather than on the child.

Myth 4: *Children learn more from what a parent says than from what a parent does.*

Fact: Actions speak louder than words, and children are better imitators than listeners.

Myth 5: *A child must not be frustrated.*

Fact: Frustration is a part of life, and it should not be denied the child. Instead, a parent should try to help the child learn how to handle frustrations, if possible, or otherwise live with frustration.

Myth 6: *Spare the rod and spoil the child.*

Fact: Unfair and excessive penalties are likely to cause resentment in the child, who may then deliberately defy the parents, either consciously or subconsciously.

Myth 7: *A child can "upset" the parent.*

Fact: A child's actions can frustrate a parent, but only the parent can "upset" oneself.

Myth 8: *A child must earn a parent's love.*

Fact: A sincere parent expresses love in the parent-child relationship, and as a result, the child need not worry about being loved. Having this security, a child can then concentrate on what is at hand.

Myth 9: *A child should be calmed first, a parent second.*

Fact: A parent who is overly excited cannot deal rationally and effectively with a child.

Myth 10: *A child's misbehavior is normal.*

Fact: Any lively child will get into some mischief, but a happy child is not likely to misbehave, or do something which the child knows is against the parent's wishes.

Social Change and Parenting

Recent movements toward social equality — between races, women and men, and children and adults — have presented challenges to everyone. In particular, social equality between children and parents has presented a challenge that most parents are not prepared to deal with or have not been persuaded to face.

In the autocratic society, in which many of today's parents were reared, the parent-child relationships were basically superior (parent) and inferior (child). Traditional discipline for children revolved around reward and punishment; the parent was the person who made and enforced the rules, while the children were expected to submit. Today, children view themselves as having basic rights, which are to be treated with dignity and respect. Children, today, are not willing to submit to arbitrary rules set down by adults, they want to know the why of rules. Today's children expect to be involved in making rules and enforcing the rules of both the family and society.

In our highly specialized, democratic society, the autocratic style of parenting, as well as the overpermissive style, have become both inappropriate and ineffective. In too many cases, autocratic and permissive parenting styles, have failed to give parents and society what is wanted most — accountable children who grow into self-confident, responsible decision makers. To achieve this goal, parenting styles need to be developed in which social equality is recognized and parent-child relationships are based on democratic principles. The following chart describes three of today's prevalent parenting styles — authoritarian, permissive and democratic/responsible. Use it to examine your own parenting style and as a guide to developing the parenting style that let's you feel most comfortable.

Comparative Parenting Styles

A simple procedure for determining your parenting style is to check your feelings and your child's responses to your attempts to correct misbehavior or problems. To do this, answer the following questions:

1. What are my own feelings and reactions to my child's behavior?
2. How does my child respond to my attempts at interaction?

Parenting Style	Parent's Behavior	Message Sent To Child	Possible Reaction In Child
1. Authoritarian	Parent applies the principles of obedience as being good, and obedience without question as very good. Parent insists child obey and conform to the wishes of the parent without questions, complaints, or defiance. Parent is aloof — no real relationship with the child.	I am in power; I will impose my will on you to do what I want you to do. I am superior. Parent uses force, threat, intimidation to bring about desired behavior.	Child becomes defensive, fearful. Child will react in any number of ways; for example, child might become defensive or fearful, hostile or helpless; may show signs of guilt and anxiety — child may begin to fight, be defiant, rebel or conspire against parent and others. Does not learn to rely on self — lacks self-direction.

Parenting Style	Parent's Behavior	Message Sent To Child	Possible Reaction In Child
2. Permissive	Parent tends to avoid expressing expectations and directions which would give child an indication of what is expected. Parent will waiver or be indecisive.	Anything you do is all right with me. I'll listen to you, but don't expect me to make your decisions.	Child is more creative, assertive and shows more feeling than a child brought up in an authoritarian home. Child may grow up to be insecure and lacking in self-direction. Many times the decisions this child makes are impractical or illegal.
3. Democratic/ Responsible	Permits choices. Encourages independence. Believes in and respects child. Provides for successful experiences and allows child to make own decisions. Expects child to contribute to society. Gives responsibility. Knows when to say no and what to do after saying no.	I believe in you. You are equal to me in the sense that we are both human beings; true, I've had more experience, but I respect you as a fellow human being. You're important.	Child feels self-confident; tries, contributes, cooperates, solves problems and becomes a resourceful person. Child develops self-reliance and become responsible for own actions. Child learns to make decisions and accepts consequences of decision. Child believes in and respects self and others. Child has courage to try new experiences and is tolerant of mistakes made by self and others. Child accepts others as equal and respects the rights of others.

What Is a Democratic Parenting Style?

Before going further, we should agree on just what is meant by democratic parenting. This is no easy job. Definitions are tricky and sometimes inadequate, especially when they deal with an idea, a point of view, or a way of life. Briefly, democracy is a form of government wherein the source of political authority is in the people rather than in a ruler. In the non-political area, in family life and parenting, democracy can be thought of as having its authority in the total family group rather than in one or both parents.

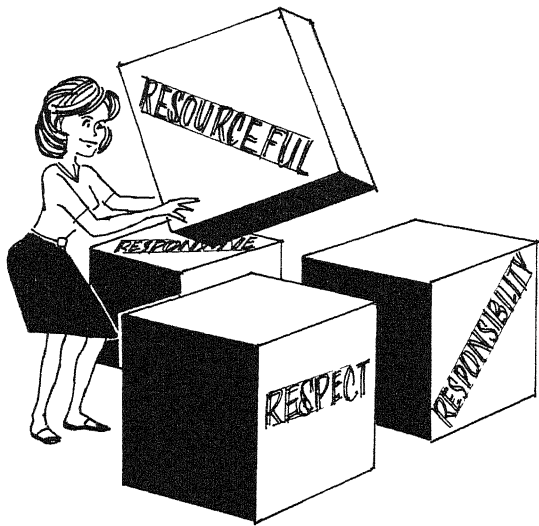
The democratic parenting style is based on equality, mutual respect and responsibility. **Equality** expresses the human worth and dignity of each person. **Mutual respect** involves having high regard for a person as a human being. **Responsibility** is the acceptance of certain limits within a society. Whether these limits are prescribed by the society or by the natural order of the universe, each member must be able to distinguish between right and wrong and to think and act rationally. These are three of the most significant principles on which democratic parent-training procedures are based.

The democratic parent permits choice, but more importantly, provides opportunities for the child to make decisions, within limits, and to be accountable for these decisions.

Parenting and the Four R's

To be a democratic parent, a person must learn a new set of R's — respect, responsibility, resourcefulness, responsiveness. Parents should also help each child to achieve the four R's.





Democratic parents don't just happen; they become that way through learning about, analyzing and trying out new skills — and through a personal commitment to apply the democratic process in their own parent-child relationship.

The following principles related to parent-child relationships will help a parent raise an emotionally healthy, mature, fun-loving and socially responsible adult.

1. A parent-child relationship is based on mutual respect and democratic involvement permitting certain amounts of freedom that encourage equality, dignity and responsibility not only to self but to others.
2. A responsible parent communicates respect, love and support that assure the child value as an individual. This is accomplished through verbal and non-verbal communication, allowing the child to feel cared for and accepted.
3. A responsible parent seeks to know and understand basic human behavior not only as it applies to the developing child, but to self as well.
4. The parent is the person who has the greater influence in the parent-child relationship; how the parent uses the influence determines the emotional health of the child.

By now, it probably has become clear that a parent must make behavior and attitude changes if one is to expect a change in the child's behavior and attitude. The purpose of this series on parenting, therefore, is 1) to help a parent challenge outmoded methods and ideas of raising children, in order to become *responsible* parents, not just *good* parents; 2) to help a parent relate more effectively to the child and their children's children; and 3) to help parent meet the challenges of raising a child in a democratic society.

1. **Respect.** The child who is shown respect will develop respect for self and others. If shown respect, the child will be considerate of the feelings of other people and will treat them fairly.

A child will become respectful if treated respectfully.

2. **Responsibility.** The child who is given responsibility will contribute to the family's well-being. If given responsibility, the child will participate willingly in family life activities and take responsibilities outside the home.

A child will become responsible by being responsible.

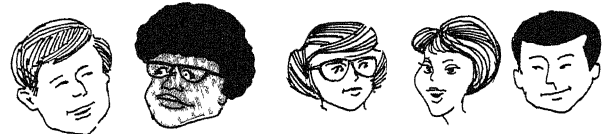
3. **Resourcefulness.** The child who is resourceful can care for self. This child can entertain self, meet new people and deal with new situations. Independence and self-reliance are being developed.

A child will become resourceful if permitted to solve life's problems.

4. **Responsiveness.** The child who is treated in a friendly, affectionate and loving manner will probably be friendly, affectionate and loving. This child will like other people, and people in turn will enjoy being with the child. This child will enjoy life.

A child will become responsive when treated fairly with love and respect if a parent:

1. Treats the child consistently in respectful ways as a person.
2. Requires the child to use the child's own resources to solve problems.
3. Encourages the child with friendly and loving attitudes.

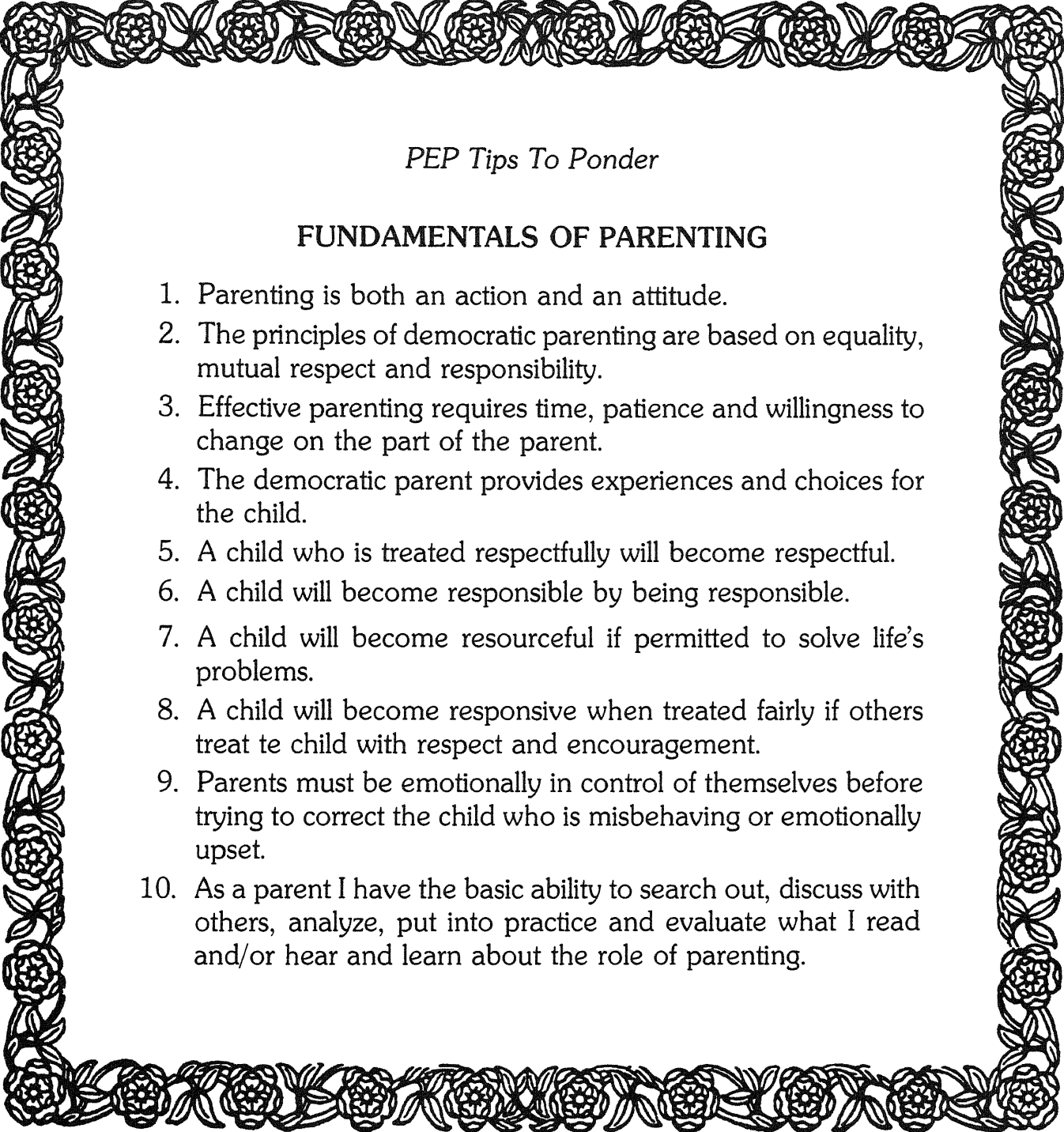


To Think About and To Talk About — For Discussion

1. What changes in society have required changes in parenting?
2. Why is it important today for a person to have preparation for parenting?
3. What is meant by democratic parenting style?
4. Why is it important to examine our "pet ideas" about how to raise a child?
5. What are the Four R's of parenting?
6. To become a democratic parent, what is important for each person to do?
7. Is it more important for parents to concentrate on changing the child's behavior or changing their own behavior? If yes, why?

Working Towards Democratic Parenthood

Society has long recognized the need for special education and preparation for success at most jobs, but little formal education has been available for the role of parenting. Only recently have people agreed that preparation can enhance the task of being a parent. As parents develop their parenting skills, families can become better organized, more effective and happier, and have more fun.



PEP Tips To Ponder

FUNDAMENTALS OF PARENTING

1. Parenting is both an action and an attitude.
2. The principles of democratic parenting are based on equality, mutual respect and responsibility.
3. Effective parenting requires time, patience and willingness to change on the part of the parent.
4. The democratic parent provides experiences and choices for the child.
5. A child who is treated respectfully will become respectful.
6. A child will become responsible by being responsible.
7. A child will become resourceful if permitted to solve life's problems.
8. A child will become responsive when treated fairly if others treat te child with respect and encouragement.
9. Parents must be emotionally in control of themselves before trying to correct the child who is misbehaving or emotionally upset.
10. As a parent I have the basic ability to search out, discuss with others, analyze, put into practice and evaluate what I read and/or hear and learn about the role of parenting.

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Parent-Child Situation

The following are situations in which parents might find themselves during any given day. In your opinion, is the parent's action helping the child develop into a responsible, self-sufficient human being or is the parent creating an irresponsible, unresponsive adult?

Situation	Parent's Action	Helping	Not Helping
1. Jimmy, age 15, disagrees with father.	Father acknowledges that Jimmy disagrees with him by saying "Sounds like you have some ideas of your own about what we are talking about. I'd like to hear them."		
2. Mother objects very strongly to 7-year-old Susie's behavior shown at a friend's birthday party.	Mother's statement to Susie: "I'm really disappointed in how you behaved at the birthday party."		
3. Sally, age 12, has brought home a most impressive report card.	Father states: "I'll bet you're really proud of yourself for getting those grades. I'm glad to see that all that work you did has paid off."		
4. Harry, age 12, is highly frustrated about not being able to hit the baseball.	Father states: "That's okay, son, we'll work at it a little tomorrow night and soon you'll be able to hit the ball."		
5. Mother and Mary, who is age five, have just been going around and around about getting Mary to calm down.	Mother yells at the top of her voice: "If you don't quit arguing with me I will spank you."		

At-Home Activity

Observe your child for a period of a week. During this time period, notice what strengths and assets the child has in getting along with people, doing things for self and others, and in general just what the child does in order to promote good parent-child relationships. At the end of each day tell your child three positive strengths or assets which you observed.

At the end of a week analyze your child's behavior by using the following criteria:

1. Describe how you felt when you saw the child performing these activities.
2. Describe how you responded to the child and how the child responded to you.
3. At the end of the week, decide if you have seen any change in your child's behavior and in your behavior.

Resources

1. Dinkmeyer, Don and McKay, Gary O. *Raising A RESPONSIBLE child*. New York. Simon and Schuster, 1973.
2. Dreikurs, M. D., Rudolf, and Soltz, Vicki. *Children The Challenge*. New York. Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1964.
3. Dreikurs, M. D., Rudolf, *Coping with CHILDREN'S Misbehavior — A Parent's Guide*. New York. Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1972.
4. Greenberg, Kenneth R. *A Tiger By The Tail — Parenting In A Troubled Society*. Chicago. Nelson Hall, 1974.
5. Hauck, Paul A. *A Rational Management of CHILDREN*. New York. Libra Publishers, 1967.

MY BLUEPRINT FOR IMPROVING MY PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

1. In my parent-child relationship, I am specifically concerned that:

2. My usual response to this specific parent-child relationship concern includes one or more of the following:

(Place a check mark beside the concern(s) you consider most unacceptable.)

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Talking, Lecturing | <input type="checkbox"/> Getting Angry | <input type="checkbox"/> Threatening, Yelling
Warning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Staring, Nagging | <input type="checkbox"/> Analyzing | <input type="checkbox"/> Criticizing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Giving Orders, Commands | <input type="checkbox"/> Punishing, Removing
Privileges, Shaming | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

3. I believe that, during the past week, in my own parent-child relationship I:

	More	Less	About the Same		More	Less	About the Same
Acted More Calmly				Used Natural and Logical Consequences			
Acted Instead of Reacted				Stimulated Independence			
Listened				Used Rational Thinking			
Acted Firmly and Kindly				Stimulated Responsible Decision Making			
Encouraged Rather than Discouraged				Enjoyed My Parent-Child Relationship			
Communicated Love and Mutual Respect				Took Time For Myself			
Withdrew From Conflict That Didn't Involve Me							

4. The Atmosphere in our family has changed to one of:

	More	Less	About the Same		More	Less	About the Same
Friendliness				Self-Discipline			
Cooperation				Planning and Working Together			
Mutual Respect				Fun With Family Members			
Understanding				Distrust			
Tension and Strife				Confusion			
Involvement							

5. This week I learned:

6. I plan to change my parent-child behavior by: