

#4

Authority-Based Parenting teaches self-control to kids by gradually giving up control over them while Power-Based Parenting fears losing control.

It quickly becomes all too clear to the young couple driving home from the hospital-having just given birth to a brand new baby boy or girl-that they are now in total and complete control of an absolutely helpless human being. They'd better be aware of it, because it's the truth! That little baby is in control of nothing and it is clear that someone has got to take full charge if he is to survive and thrive.

And yet, in spite of the necessity of initially taking over full and complete control of that "new product", it is eventually necessary that this young mom and dad begin gradually to give over to that infant some control over his own life. Done properly, this transition will take place over a long period of time (about eighteen years, I'd say) and will occur in line with the social, emotional, and physical maturity that will also occur.

This transition of control from Mom and Dad to their newborn baby will not only be a very gradual process, but also will likely take place by trial and error and hit and miss. But for the sake and well being of their new baby, it must nonetheless happen.

So far so good. Few would argue the point thus far. Of course we parents initially have total control; of course we must transfer that control to our kids. And certainly, this transition is accomplished over a period of time, and often in less than perfect fashion. The differences between the two parenting styles of authority-based parents and power-based parents is not usually seen in the desired outcome; neither style of parenting wants to be now and forever more in control of their kids-some just want to be in full control right now. Both parenting styles would probably say their desire is to ultimately produce an adult child who is no longer under their care and control.

The differences can be seen more clearly in the form and style with which the attempt is made to complete that task.

This is where further distinctions need to be drawn between authority-based parenting and power-based parenting. In this area of control, there are a number of distinctive differences to be found between the two parenting styles.

Authority-based parenting

Authority-based parents are consistently on the lookout for circumstances that appear safe to release just a little more control to their kids. Since they value the notion of setting their kids free in a safe and gradual fashion, they are willing to face a certain degree of risk in doing so. And their risks are based on continually gathering the ever-changing data that comes their way, evaluating it, and where appropriate, adjusting their level of control.

When authority-based parents consistently let their kids stretch their ever growing wings by letting go of the control we have over them, we send a very clear message that further fosters the goal of raising truly great kids. "We (I) trust you", "we have confidence in your abilities", "we are here to support you and your efforts as you grow". These are but a few of the nurturing messages our kids receive from us that in turn, encourages their growth and confidence. Messages like these give them healthy and positive expectations to live up to, and as they do, they will be more likely to grow confident and self-assured. And during the entire process, they will know that we are still there in the form of a safety net to keep them relatively protected during their trial and error efforts to gain self-control.

Power-based parenting

Power-based parents, on the other hand, seem determined to maintain as much control over their kids, and for as long as they can. They are usually in no hurry to relinquish their parental control, and in some instances, they even resist the idea. Since transferring their control over

to their kids is not a high priority, they do not look for circumstances in which they can take the risks of letting go. They may simply be too frightened to do so, they may not think it is worth the effort, or they may not see the importance in doing so (for more on this, refer to question #7 in PARENTING WITH AN ATTITUDE).

Whatever the reasons might be, messages are sent to kids who are raised with little encouragement to develop a healthy balance of control over their own lives. These messages interfere with, and run contrary to, the notion of raising great kids.

Messages such as, "I (we) don't trust you to gradually take over the controls", or, "I am afraid of giving up my controls over you", inevitably get translated loosely into, "I must not be capable of controlling myself", "I need others to be in control of me", and, "I should be afraid of being in control of my own circumstances". These messages and conclusions having been drawn then, have the tendency to turn into self-fulfilling prophecies for our kids; if they conclude that they are not capable of having control over their own lives, then as they grow older, they will be more likely to set out in life to live down to those expectations we have for them. For more about how our expectations affect our efforts to raise great kids, refer to question #1 in PARENTING WITH AN ATTITUDE.

What's a parent to do?

Since our kids tend to either live up or down to the expectations we have of them, it is important for us to consider seriously the messages we convey to them through either excessive control, or through our efforts to give up the control to them. Through gradually giving up the controls, authority-based parents more consistently send a message of trust and confidence. Power-based parents, on the other hand, convey quite the opposite message: that they are not trusted, that they do not have confidence in them, that it is somehow not safe, and that they are expected to remain under control until further notice.

If we are to raise truly great kids, it is important to effectively use our god-given authority in their lives. And in order to accomplish this, it is important that we recognize the very fine line that exists between our use of power, and our use of authority. Although there are a number of useful characteristic differences, none are more important than this issue of control.

Discussion questions

Did your parents use authority-based parenting or did they use power-based parenting?

Depending on which they used, how did their approach affect you then? How about now?

Which category of parenting styles would you place yourself in as a parent?

How does your current approach regarding the transfer of control seem to be working?

Do your kids seem to be developing an appropriate degree of being in control of their own lives?

As a parent, what struggles (if any) do you have with giving up control, giving your kids room to take safe risks, and in allowing them the freedom to learn through trial and error?

Are there new risks you need to take as a parent that will help develop in your kids more appropriate and gradual control over their own lives?

