

# **AUTHORITARIAN PARENTING: THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN.**

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## BAUMRIND'S PARENTING STYLES

### Parenting Types:

1. Authoritarian
2. Authoritative
3. Permissive
4. Neglectful

In the early 1960's, psychologist Diana Baumrind conducted experiments with parents. These experiments were designed to identify and understand how parents differ in their responses to their children. As a result of the Baumrind study as well as further research, four main styles of parenting were delineated. They are Authoritarian, Authoritative, Permissive, and Neglectful. Each style has its own characteristics as well as effects on children's development. This article will discuss the impact on children of authoritarian parenting.

### AUTHORITARIAN PARENTING

For Authoritarian parents, rules are often more important than relationship. Authoritarian parents have many rules and they enforce them. They expect and demand adherence to high standards. Having high standards for the behavior of children is not necessarily a bad thing. However, the way they go about achieving these high standards hurts the relationship between the parent and child. The authoritarian parent often fails to explain the reasoning for the rules. In fact, they do not engage in much conversation with their children regarding the rules. When children ask, "why?" the response is, "Because I said so." Not only does authoritarian parenting impact the current relationship between parent and child, but this type of parenting can have long-term effects on the emotional development of the child even into adulthood. In addition, the impact of this style of parenting can also be felt in the child's relationship with God.

### THE CURRENT RELATIONSHIP

There is a strong element of fear that pervades an authoritarian household. Much like an authoritarian government, there is compliance with rules, but the compliance is typically not out of love. Children in an authoritarian home comply out of fear. Fear of punishment and fear of the withholding of affection drives these children to comply.

In addition to fear, the child does not feel loved and accepted by their parents. Children are punished for even minor infractions. Often, these punishments do not fit the crime and are overly punitive. Even worse, the punishments often result in relationship consequences which include a withholding of love and affection from the parents to the child. As a result, the child begins to learn that they are loved and accepted for what they do, rather than for who they are. John, a high-school basketball player I met, had this type of relationship with his father. His father would come to all of his games to see him play. While a parent's presence at a child's games should be a source of encouragement, for John it was not. If John had a good

### Current Relationship Consequences:

1. Fear
2. Lack of love and acceptance
3. Lost opportunities for guidance

game, his father was like a “Chatty Kathy” doll on the way home. You could not shut him up. On the other hand, if John’s game did not go as well, there was absolute silence. His father would not speak to him. John learned quickly that there were conditions placed on him to receive love. He was loved if he performed. He was not loved if he did not perform.

Children raised by authoritarian parents often are compliant with parental rules. Authoritarian parents point to this compliance as evidence that their style of parenting is working. However, as with many things in life, there is an opportunity cost to decisions we make. Growing up is difficult, especially in this day and age. There are many times that a child will need help and guidance as they grow. When we seek guidance, we tend to seek it from relationships where we feel loved and accepted. Since children of authoritarian homes do not experience love and acceptance from their parents, they will seek counsel from someone outside the home, or they may seek no counsel at all. While the authoritarian parent may be a good person who has much wisdom to offer, when it comes to the major issues of life, the children do not seek their counsel.

## **RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD**

Often our view of God, who Jesus taught us to call Father, is similar to our view of our earthly father. Since our earthly father is visible to us and God is not, we project our image of our earthly father onto our heavenly Father. When children grow up with demanding authoritarian parents, they often begin to see God the same way. While they may be obedient to God, this obedience is out of fear of punishment rather than a response to acceptance. Real change in our lives comes when we feel accepted, not when we fear punishment. As a result, children who grow up with authoritarian parents often have a

“...We project our image of our earthly father onto our heavenly Father.”

negative view of God. As was stated above regarding their earthly parents, children who hold an authoritarian view of God will likely not seek to build a deep relationship with Him. We do not seek relationship with those whom we fear. Instead, like Adam and Eve, they will seek to hide from God.

## **FUTURE DEVELOPMENT**

In addition to the impact authoritarian parenting has on the current relationship with their parents and their relationship with God, children who grow up in this type of home often experience long-term emotional consequences. These children often have poor social skills, low self-esteem, anger and higher rates of depression and anxiety. In addition, although they may remain compliant, they can develop an overall mistrust of authority.

There are many reasons why these issues may develop in children with authoritarian parents. In an authoritarian home, compliance is expected, while independence is discouraged. Because they are taught to follow rules rather than take initiative, they are more capable of following instructions than becoming leaders. They are taught what to think rather than how to think. As a result, these children remain dependent emotionally into adulthood, sometimes even living in the parental home long after what would be considered emotionally healthy. This lack of independence, both emotional and physical, can result in low self-esteem.

Children growing up in an authoritarian home, like growing up under an authoritarian regime, experience a loss of control over their own lives. When we come to believe that no matter what we do, we cannot gain actual control of our own life, eventually a sense of helplessness ensues. This “learned helplessness” is a major component in the development of depression. This sense of powerlessness does not leave us when we leave the authoritarian parent. Instead, this becomes a deeply entrenched view of ourselves that can take years to overcome and can impact all future relationships including marital and parenting relationships.

Along with a loss of control, children who grow up with authoritarian parents often experience anger at how they are being treated. However, their anger is not typically allowed to be expressed. Often the expression of any form of anger in an authoritarian home results in punishment. Where does the anger go? There are typically two ways that anger gets expressed. The first is in either active or passive rebellion against the parent, or, in the future, toward any form of authority. The second way that anger gets expressed is that the child turns the anger inward toward themselves. This internalization of anger also leads to depression. One reason why in the United States there is less violence against the government than in other countries is that our country’s laws encourage and protect freedom of speech. When people feel that their thoughts and feelings have an outlet, they are less prone to resort to violence. When people are not free to express themselves, they will tend toward helplessness or rebellion.

Finally, children who are raised by authoritarian parents often experience increased anxiety. Because “wrong” decisions result in harsh punishments, they develop what Freud would describe as an overactive superego. The superego, according to Freud, is the moral branch of personality. It develops to guide us to make right decisions and to avoid punishments. For Christians, the



superego includes the Holy Spirit. However, the Holy Spirit is not our only guide to determine the rightness or wrongness of our actions. The superego also includes the internalized values of the important people and structures (like the law) of our lives. As the number of rules increase, so does the superego. Anxiety is both an internal and external manifestation of the struggle to avoid real or perceived punishment. For those with an enlarged superego, the superego acts like the boulder chasing Indiana Jones chasing us through our lives.

In upcoming articles, the three other parenting styles will be discussed along with their impact on children.

### Future Consequences:

1. Poor social skills
2. Low self-esteem
3. Anger
4. Depression
5. Anxiety