

Involved Parenting **Ruth A. Peters, Ph.D.**

What is the definition of strict parenting?

Strict parenting refers to a hands-on approach to raising kids. This means a great deal of parental involvement and attention, letting kids know that you are watching their behavior, raising the bar in terms of behavioral and accomplishment expectations, and forming and keeping clear and fair rules for all of the kids.

Is it the same as being an authoritative or autocratic parent?

No. Strict parenting is not on the same level as authoritative or autocratic parenting. Autocratic and even authoritative parenting often do not take into account the feelings, wishes, and nature of the individual child. Strict parenting does--knowing what each child needs in terms of freedoms, opportunities to explore, yet setting reasonable guidelines are the hallmark of the *strict yet fair* parent. Strict parents are successful because they often take their children's ideas into account when setting rules and consequences--the strictness is more in terms of consistency of discipline, not in terms of the robotic-like consequences of the autocratic parent or the rigidity of the authoritative parent. Strict parents can be flexible--but the zone of acceptable behavior is clear to the child. Parents can be authoritative and not involved (setting rules but not following through), whereas strict parents set rules that are fair and they take the time to follow through by watching kid behavior such as curfew, TV viewing, school grades, etc.

Does the word “strict” refer just to discipline?

No--strict means involvement, follow-through and consistency. Conferencing with the teachers is indicative of a strict parent who makes the rule that homework should be done, and if not, there will be a conference and a plan made to change the child's behavior. Then the strict parent remembers to check the plan each day to see if the kid has completed the work and is ready to turn it in. Discipline is the meting out of consequences—both positive and negative. There may not be a punishment per se for poor homework follow-through--it may result in the school conference and the institution of a new homework plan. This is indicative of the involvement that the strict parent is willing to devote time and effort to.

Is it a good or bad thing (strict parenting)?—

Generally it is a good thing, if used in moderation. If the bar is set too high for the individual child (grade expectations are not reasonable), or the parent's strictness is ridiculous (lining up shoes in the closet) then the strictness becomes more neurosis than parenting. Folks have to pick their battles--I try to focus on safety, educational achievement, social skills, and responsible and respectful behaviors. Aside from those, the bar can be lowered. Also, the teen/tween study mentioned in my previous email can be used here to show that strict parenting leads to less risk-taking behavior on the part of their children.

How strict is too strict?(Examples?)

Too strict may be: expectations that are too high for the individual child (expecting an Average IQ kid to achieve all A's or to be admitted to all Honors classes), not allowing for a few "screw-ups" that inevitably occur (glasses of milk knocked over, possessions lost, some homework assignments forgotten, some yakking in class). Not allowing a kid to be a kid, or always expecting excellent judgment and common sense are not realistic--these don't always occur with children. Expecting little ones to easily accept change (a new baby sitter) without fussing, or intolerance of a grade-schooler who wants to sleep in Mom's bed after seeing a scary movie are examples of neurotic or ineffective strictness

Are moms or dads generally stricter?

Dads usually come across as more strict--but it's generally more bark than bite. They have louder, deeper voices and therefore often receive more compliance from their kids. However, Moms are usually the ones (at least traditionally) who have had to spend more time with the kids, and therefore set up the rules and met out the consequences regarding homework, cleaning bedrooms and general behavior. So, many Moms are actually viewed by kids as the rule-setters and the involved parent, although thankfully, this is changing rapidly as Dads become more involved.

Are kids resentful of strict parents?

Not if they don't know any better! If kids are raised with clear, concise, **fair**, and consistent rules I believe that they actually thrive on this type of parenting, although they may not want to admit it! Kids with boundaries know how far to go and where their folks draw the line. Parents who are **consistently inconsistent** are seen as not strict, yet are often viewed by their kids as very unfair. Strict parents are usually seen as tough, but fair by their kids. They may talk about how easy Johnny has it at his home, but given the choice, most kids will choose to "keep" their rules if they are fair and the kids have had a voice in setting them.

Do they rebel more than kids raised by lenient parents?

Generally not--if Mom and Dad are fair in their strictness. Neurotic picking on the tiny stuff, making mountains out of molehill parents can be strict, but unreasonable, and children may rebel against that. But kids who are raised by **reasonable and fair** strict parents often grow up to raise their own children in this way. Those whose folks were too militaristic, having too many unnecessary rules that weren't really important, tend to do a 180-and become laissez-faire parents themselves.

What if Mom and dad have different parenting styles, say lenient and strict? ("Well, Mom said I could do it!!") How should a couple approach that?

Agree to disagree--and do it in the bedroom out of hearing range of the kids. They should discuss first what they do agree on (our kids will do their homework, come in by curfew, not be allowed to physically hit each other, etc.). Whether they have to make their beds each day, say please and thank you, or eat all of their dinner are debatable issues that Mom and Dad can work with and compromise on. If in doubt, though, on the big stuff (moral, physical danger, health and safety, education and responsibility)--it's best to error in terms of being too strict than too lenient.

Does a parenting style influence children, their behavior and the kind of adults they become? (How will strict, indulgent or disengaged parenting styles affect children in the long run?)

Reasonable strictness leads to the development of adults who are capable of handling frustration tolerance, are responsible, and who have good self-control. Indulged kids may become adults who still feel entitled and do not have a good work ethic--these folks often are bitter and resentful, as the real world does not cater to their whims, as their indulgent parents did. Children of disengaged parents often mirror the behavior of the peer group that raised them—after all, if Mom and Dad are uninvolved, it's the peer group who is setting the rules. Now, that's really scary!

Is it better to be strict or lenient?

Let's look at some different age groups:

Toddlers - have to watch them all the time but can you be too strict with them? Will they understand?

Watch these kids with eyes behind your head! (Mainly for safety issues, but also to establish rules and guidelines that they use as toddlers and to grow into as they mature.) If you're too **controlling**, not strict, your child may not have the opportunities to explore relationships, playground equipment, and emotions. Don't confuse **controlling** with **strictness**--setting rules is fine, controlling your little one's environment too closely is confining.

6- 10 years old. Should they be having more responsibility? What kind of parenting style works best with them?

Institute family meetings to set up the guidelines and rules-- kids having input into rules and consequences are important. As children grow, so goes up the bar. Kids can do so much more than we expect of them. For instance, both of mine at age five set their own alarm clocks at night and got themselves up for school. Of course I was watching to be sure that it occurred--by they did it! I would never have believed that little ones can do that--but the more you expect of kids, if it is within their cognitive and physical ability, the more they will accomplish--and feel good about themselves. The more they do, the more self-esteem grows--that's how the work ethic is fostered and achieved.

Tweens and Teens - a study was done by Columbia University which looked at the difference between kids in this age group who had “hands-on” and “hands-off” parents? What does each term mean? And who fared better? (maybe here is where you can talk a little about the study)

Rainy--can you take this from the email that I sent to you yesterday--my fingers are starting to hurt!

How can a parent become more “hands on” without being too strict? (general ideas - probably more for older kids)

(some information in the article you sent - plus if you could come up with 5 or 6 ideas we could add a graphic and wrap up the segment nicely here.)

- Don't just make rules--follow through with them. Move the TV or the computer to a public family area so that it's easier for you to be consistent.
- Don't set up too many activities for you or your kids--if you're overwhelmed, odds are that you won't follow through.

- Don't set up ridiculous consequences (“You lose your bike for a year”)--both you and the kid know that you won't follow through with that one!
- Always call the "other parent" ahead of time when setting up activities such as visits or sleep overs so that you know it will be supervised--don't cave in when your kid accuses you of being overprotective. Don't buy in to "but Johnny's Mom lets him eat whatever he wants whenever he wants". Most likely Johnny's Mom doesn't, or if she does, your kid shouldn't be hanging around with Johnny in the first place!
- Be prepared to give up some of your freedoms in order to follow through with the family rules. For instance, you can't watch TV at dinner if the kids can't. As children model your behavior, you shouldn't miss work for a bad hair day and neither should they miss school. If you don't want them to be cruel to others, neither should your verbiage display cruelty. If you want them to be respectful, watch your language and your respect level to you partner and the kids.