



Parenting Paradigms and Paediatric Oral Health: A Review

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ABSTRACT:

Parenting approaches significantly influence children's oral health behaviors and their experiences in pediatric dentistry. The interplay between family dynamics and dental care can shape a child's cooperation and anxiety levels during dental visits. Pediatric dentists benefit from understanding parental factors that impact children's oral health attitudes and behaviors. Awareness of these influences allows for more empathetic and tailored interactions with young patients. This article gives an insight on the different parenting styles and their influence on in-office managing strategies

1. Introduction

The early years of a child's life are profoundly shaped by their family environment, with parenting style emerging as a pivotal factor in influencing their personality, growth, and development. A parent's distinctive approach to nurturing their child, characterized by unique attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours, lays the foundation for their child's future interactions and experiences. ⁽¹⁾ One critical context where parenting style plays a significant role is in paediatric dentistry, where managing uncooperative behaviour is a persistent challenge. Uncooperative children can hinder effective treatment, leading to delayed care, compromised outcomes, and increased reliance on advanced interventions like sedation or general anaesthesia. ⁽²⁾ Given the importance of early dental experiences in shaping lifelong oral health attitudes, effective behaviour management strategies are essential for ensuring successful treatment outcomes, building trust, and fostering a positive dental experience for children. By understanding the interplay between parenting styles and child behaviour in dental settings, dentists can develop targeted approaches to promote positive outcomes and improve the overall dental experience for young patients.

This article discusses the relationship between parenting styles and behaviour management strategies in paediatric dentistry, aiming to enhance dental professionals' understanding of child behaviour.

2. Parenting Styles

Diana Baumrind's ⁽²⁾ work built upon earlier research and identified three parenting styles:

1. Authoritarian
2. Authoritative
3. Permissive

Her research laid the groundwork for understanding the impact of parenting styles on child development. The Maccoby and Martin model ⁽¹⁹⁸³⁾ ⁽³⁾ classifies parenting styles into four categories based on two key dimensions: parental responsiveness and demandingness. The fourth category was added to Baumrind's classification which is the "Neglectful".

Characteristics of Different Parenting Styles:

Authoritative Parenting:

Authoritative parenting includes characteristics Balancing autonomy with guidance. These parents cultivate warm, nurturing relationships with their



children, built on mutual respect and trust. They establish clear expectations and guidelines, providing a sense of structure and stability ^(1,5). Children raised in this environment benefit from healthy communication, allowing them to contribute to goal-setting and expectation discussions. When mistakes occur, parents opt for constructive discipline, focusing on teaching and guiding rather than punishing, to help their children learn and grow. As a result, they develop essential life skills, including responsibility, confidence, and self-regulation. These parents engage in open and frequent communication with their children, setting clear expectations and working collaboratively towards shared goals. Characterized by their warm yet firm approach, they express positive emotions and affection, creating a nurturing environment ^(5,6). By doing so, they encourage independent behavior and self-reliance in their children, helping them develop confidence and self-assurance. Children learn to manage negative emotions effectively, leading to positive social behavior and emotional well-being.

Authoritarian Parenting

Parents with an authoritarian approach impose strict rules without explanation, expecting blind obedience from their children. One-way communication leaves little room for discussion or negotiation, and mistakes are typically met with punishment. High expectations are set, but support is often lacking ^(1,6). This "cold and firm" parenting style is marked by frequent negative emotions, creating a rigid environment that prioritizes compliance over understanding or emotional connection ⁽⁵⁾. Children raised by authoritarian parents often prioritize obedience over self-expression, behaving well mainly to avoid punishment. This rigid upbringing can lead to a range of negative outcomes, including increased aggression, social struggles, low self-esteem, and difficulty with decision-making ^(1,8,9). These children may also experience emotional challenges like shyness and inflexibility. Moreover, harsh discipline can provoke rebellion, and they may adopt unhealthy habits like poor eating and excessive screen time ^(10,11).

Permissive Parenting:

Permissive parents are warm and nurturing, similar to authoritative parents, but they set few to no expectations for their children. This indulgent style is characterized by a reluctance to deny their children's demands, often

blurring the lines between parent and peer ^(1,12). With an open communication style, parents prioritize responsiveness to their children's emotional needs but fail to establish necessary boundaries or limits. While they give their children autonomy to make choices, this lack of structure can impact their development and decision-making skills. These parents often give their children significant autonomy in decision-making, but without providing adequate guidance or oversight ⁽¹²⁾. With minimal parental expectations, children may exhibit fewer disciplinary issues, but this lack of structure can have other negative consequences. The absence of rules and guidance can lead to unhealthy habits, such as poor eating behaviors, which increase the risk of obesity and lifestyle diseases ^(10,11). These children are also more likely to engage in excessive screen time, watching TV or playing video games. Furthermore, they may struggle with impulsivity, aggression, and emotional regulation, leading to poorer academic performance, delinquent behavior, substance abuse, and antisocial tendencies ⁽¹²⁾.

Neglectful Parenting:

Neglectful parents are characterized by a lack of both demands and responsiveness, showing little interest in their children's lives or needs. Communication is limited, and they fail to set disciplinary boundaries or provide guidance. This parenting style, also known as indifferent or uninvolved parenting, is often considered the most detrimental, leaving children without support, structure, or emotional connection. Parents often come from dysfunctional families where they themselves experienced neglect in their childhood ⁽¹³⁾. Additionally, they may struggle with underlying psychological issues, such as depression or substance abuse, which can further hinder their ability to provide adequate care and support for their children ⁽¹³⁾. Children of neglectful parents often experience excessive freedom due to parental disengagement. With too much freedom and not enough guidance, they may struggle academically, socially, and emotionally, leading to issues like low self-esteem, impulsivity, and poor emotional regulation. This upbringing can also increase their risk for serious problems, including depression, substance abuse, and even abusive behavior, potentially perpetuating a cycle of neglect ^(13,14).



3. Challenges in the Dental Office

A child's behaviour in a dental setting is influenced by multiple factors, but parental attitudes towards their child's needs and dental care significantly impact how well the child responds to treatment.

Research has extensively explored how parenting styles influence children's behavior in dental settings, aiming to identify effective strategies for managing their care and improving treatment outcomes. It is evident that, children raised in authoritative environment tend to exhibit positive behaviour (15,16,17) than those raised by authoritarian and permissive parents. Key to fostering this positivity in a dental setup are open communication, responsiveness to the child's needs, and consistent rule-setting, which encourage cooperation and good behaviour (16). Research suggests that authoritarian mothers can increase anxiety in college students, while authoritative fathers can have a calming effect (18). Dentists can leverage this insight to determine which parents would be beneficial to have present in the treatment room, potentially reducing anxiety in young patients (16).

Children from authoritarian households may exhibit poor behaviour in dental settings due to difficulties in social interactions, often appearing shy or nervous around unfamiliar people, including dental professionals. Dental visits can be daunting for these children, triggering fear and reluctance. When coupled with anxious or uncooperative parents, this dynamic can become even more challenging for dental professionals to navigate, potentially complicating treatment (19).

Permissive parenting may lead to unruly behavior in kids, which can manifest as uncooperative and difficult-to-manage behavior in dental settings. These parents are usually uninvolved in children's behaviour but when frustration escalates, they may lash out at their children in anger, potentially leading to verbal or physical outbursts (19).

4. Home Oral Care

The parenting approach has a profound impact on the development of children's oral hygiene habits. By instilling healthy habits and regular dental care, parents can set their children up for a lifetime of good oral health. Researchers have shown that, children from authoritative households had lower rates of dental caries. The authors

suggest that this disparity is probably because these parents use reasoning and explanation to guide their kids' behaviour, promoting better oral health habits rather than strict demands (20). The higher caries risk in children of authoritarian parents was unexpected, a finding noted by Howstein (21), suggesting that despite this parenting style's emphasis on strict rules, oral health may not be a priority, and healthy habits aren't being enforced. Permissive parents tend to have limited influence over their children's food habits leading to improper or poor oral hygiene (22).

5. Conclusion

The shifting paradigm of parenting styles, marked by a rise in pampering approaches, has profound implications for children's oral health behaviors. As dental professionals navigate this evolving landscape, it is essential to recognize the impact of parenting styles on shaping children's attitudes and habits towards oral hygiene. By acknowledging these changes, dental practitioners can tailor their approaches to effectively engage and empower parents and children, fostering a collaborative effort to promote optimal oral health outcomes. Ultimately, this understanding will enable dental professionals to develop targeted strategies that address the unique needs of modern families, bridging the gap between parenting styles and oral health practices.

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