

Parenting Solo: That's My Style

Written by Michelle Greenlee Harris, Columnist
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One thing I am not is a fashionista. I can't say I have a particular style that I subscribe to. My look wouldn't exactly be referred to as chic, corporate or elegant per say. My clothes tend to change with my mood, the weather and whatever is on the clearance rack.

My parenting style is just as fluid. I'm sure I have been all over the parental spectrum since screaming my baby out all those years ago. Parenting experts say that most moms and dads fall into five main groups: instinctive, attachment, helicopter, authoritative and permissive. At some point I think I have been in every one of these categories.

Instinctive parents are the funniest. People take pride in describing themselves as old school, but the clinical term is instinctive. Instinct is defined as an innate or inborn pattern of behavior. Old school is old fashioned, meaning you did what those before you did. The problem is bad things can be passed down as easily as good things. I do have some old school values – some positive – some negative. I think parenting by instinct is fine as long as you have some checks and balances in place to evaluate whether the things you are teaching your children are working – for them and for you.

Attachment parenting describes the warm and fuzzy parent. These are the folks who run to a child every time they whimper. Its what I call the marshmallow parent. Ok, I admit that does describe me occasionally. At times I have wanted to lasso the moon for my child. This is the type of parent that prefers to give birth without drugs, to share a bed with their offspring and to shy away from corporal punishment. I'm attached to my kid but no drugs during labor? You must be kidding!

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Helicopter parents tend to hover over their children. I have occasionally piloted a parental chopper. I know I have to bring it in for a landing before my child goes to college. Helicopter parents take overprotection to Olympic levels and that lasts well into their children's adult lives. Copter moms and dads have been known to lobby their offsprings' college professors for better grades and meet with their baby's bosses to protest a poor evaluation. I mean enough already.

Authoritative parents are the "my way or the highway parents". I don't get to be that parent very often but when I do it's a doozy. This parent is not completely hardnosed. They are known to be slightly more supportive and a bit more nurturing than what was considered an authoritative parent from a generation ago. This type of parenting can be highly effective, as long as discipline is dispensed with compassion.

Permissive parents are the folks who would rather be a pal than a parent. They don't think their children have much self control so they tend to let them do what they want. My sister – the epitome of the authoritative parent- thinks that I am one these permissive moms but trust me, that is not the case. Marshmallow yes – permissive no. I know my daughter has self control and I expect her to live up to her full potential. My baby and I do have the same personality so I actually like her (in addition to loving her). If we were not mother and daughter, we could be friends. But if it ever seems like we are getting too chummy, she is the one confused – not me. It only takes one warning to remind her that her friends don't live at our house.

Parenting styles mimic fashion in that, what works for one may not work for another. The best way to find out what works for you is to get inside your own head and figure out what you are trying to accomplish. Once you know where you're going – you can figure out the best way to get there.