

**Discipline Styles:
Authoritarian vs. Authoritative
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Sara and Nathan have been given crayons and paper to use while their mother prepares dinner. The children share a box of crayons between their two piles of drawing paper. All goes peacefully until Sara finds that the olive-green she needs is being used by her brother. For her own good reasons (being younger, being impatient, because she's hungry, knowing that he wouldn't give it up if she asked, sensing that Mother might pay some close attention if a ruckus ensued, and just **NEEDING** that olive-green crayon), she makes a grab for it. A ruckus ensues.

Locked in a tug-of-war, the children cry out toward the kitchen, "She's taking my crayon!" "I **NEED** it!" The dinner is put on hold. Mother fumes into the room to act as judge, jury, and executioner. She snatches the crayon away. Sara is sent to her room. Nathan is denied further use of the crayons. He must find something else to do - without getting in Mother's way in the kitchen nor getting near Sara's room. Father arrives just in time to catch the execution of the punishments. He gets a quick recap of the altercation and decrees that Nathan, too, should be sent to his room for causing a delay in dinner.

With total disregard for each child's feelings and opinions, the parents have used their position of authority to control the behavior of their children. Parents who arbitrarily mete out restrictions and punishments with more concern for their own needs than the needs of their children are using an "authoritarian" style of discipline. They view themselves as rulers of the roost, with Father even being the final authority over Mother. The message underlying all parent-child conflict is that the parents are in charge. They expect unquestioned obedience at all times. There is no room for bargaining if the punishment does not fit the crime.

Rules and restrictions are constantly given, yet the child can be confused with the inconsistencies. "Use your cars up in your room. I'm trying to read here." "But yesterday you said I couldn't play in my room by myself 'cause I made too much of a mess." "I don't care what I said yesterday. Go play in your room!" The well-used motto of the authoritarian is "Because I said so."

When parents give constant, conflicting orders and punishment, children feel powerless. In a study of children being raised under authoritarians there were some common characteristics in the way these children felt about themselves and the way they related to others.

1. Children were uptight about social comparison. (perhaps, it was because they were unsure of their own worth, since parents were so judgmental.)

2. Children did not initiate activities. (It could be that they feared criticism or were accustomed to parents spelling out what they could and could not do.)
3. Children were ineffective in social interactions. (Maybe it was due to parents' ready interference in sibling disputes, giving solutions that ignore the needs and feelings of those involved.)

Authoritarian discipline does not foster two skills valued in our democratic society: self-reliance and social responsibility. These attributes were found, however, in children whose parents were "authoritative," that is, they used their parental roles to guide and nurture their children. Their style of discipline was more in tune with democracy.

Rules from authoritative parents are few and fast. Parents act as responsible, co-operative heads of the family, enforcing the rules with consistent and relevant consequences. The rules rule. When there is a conflict, the solution comes from the consideration of what will be best for everyone. Every member of the family is deserving of respect.

Rather than demanding a blind obedience to authority, if you keep only a few house rules that are consistently enforced and respectful of everyone, you will be giving your children a model that they can use the rest of their lives.