

A balanced parenting style shows love and respect

Am I being too strict with my kids or do I let them get away with too much? Should I be less protective of my son or will he get hurt if I don't keep a firm grip on him? Many parents feel unsure, at times, about the way they are raising their children.

Today, parents may raise their children one way, but see and hear about many other approaches in the homes of friends, on TV, in books and magazines, and in classrooms and parenting groups. No wonder many parents are confused.

One of the concerns many parents have, for example, is whether to take a "laid back" or a more "restrictive" approach to parenting. Actually, you should do both. On one hand children need freedom. They need to be permitted to explore their world, use their senses, and make mistakes. Opportunities like these give children room to grow and develop. And on the other hand, children need limits. They want guidance, advice, responsibility, and

Lori McMechan

PARENTING POINTS

Lori McMechan is a parenting group facilitator at the Elspeth Reid Family Resource Centre, a facility of Child and Family Services of Western Manitoba.
» 255 Ninth St., Brandon
» 726-6280

routine.

Too much freedom overwhelms children. When parents let children do anything they want, children feel abandoned. They think their parents don't care about them. Over-indulged children often become self-centered and demanding, and have trouble getting along with others.

Too many limits smother children. Parents who do everything for their children interfere with their growth. If children never learn to take care of themselves, they are

more likely to get hurt when their parents are not around. Overprotected children can become passive and overly dependent. When parents are too strict, rebellion and resentment are likely side effects.

It is important to find the right balance between being too indulgent and too restrictive. Each situation below describes one approach that is clearly "too soft", one that is "too hard", and one that is "just right" and shows a balance between the two extremes.

Your five-year-old wants to choose her own clothes and dress herself for school.

• **Too hard** — You choose her clothes and help her dress to make sure she gets everything on just right.

• **Too soft** — You let her wear anything she wants. She can dress herself, even if her shirt is too small and her pants are clearly dirty.

• **Just right** — You give her the choice of two or three items each day and leave time for her to dress herself, standing by to help if she wants it.

Your three-year-old starts to quarrel with his best friend.

• **Too hard** — At the first sign of a disagreement you intervene, separate the children and send the friend

home.

• **Too soft** — You leave them to solve things themselves, even when it starts to get physical.

• **Just right** — When you hear the children arguing, you stand by to see if they can resolve their disagreement without force. If they start hitting each other, you put a stop to their fighting and help them talk things out.

Your six-year-old hates to go to bed.

• **Too hard** — You insist on lights out at 7:30 p.m. every night.

• **Too soft** — You let him go to bed whenever he wants. You usually end up carrying

him to bed.

• **Just right** — You set a regular bedtime when he must go to his room. If he isn't sleepy, he can look at books in bed for a while, but he stays in his room.

How you raise your children will depend on you, your child, and the situation. Some children can handle more freedom and responsibility than others. And some situations need more control than others. What is important is that your style of parenting be reasonable and motivated by love and respect for your child.