

The National Effective Parenting Initiative



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What is Effective Parenting?

by Kerby T. Alvy, Ph.D.

As the founder of the National Effective Parenting Initiative, a coalition of individuals and organizations that advocates, celebrates and promotes effective parenting and parenting education, I am often asked what does "effective parenting" mean? How is it defined?

This is an extraordinarily challenging question because the job of raising children is complex and involves carrying out a wide range of responsibilities.

Parents are responsible for providing the basic resources that are needed, like a home, food and clothing. They are also responsible for taking good care of these resources, such as insuring that the home environment is safe and clean, and that foods and beverages are healthy and nutritious.

They are responsible for protecting children from physical or psychological harm, such as protecting them from predators, prejudice, and discrimination, as well as protecting them from diseases, from bullies, gangs and violence.

Within the extended family of relatives, parents are advocates for insuring that children's needs and rights are upheld and respected. This advocacy responsibility extends into the community. Parents do not only transport children back and forth from child care, school and health care settings, but they also have to be vigilant that their children are properly cared for in these out-of-home environments.

And even more encompassing, parents are responsible for guiding and nurturing all facets of children's development, including their social, emotional and thinking and educational development. Parents are their children's first and foremost teachers, guidance counselors and nurturers.

Thus, there could be definitions of effectiveness that apply to each of these areas of parental responsibilities, such as what it means to be an effective provider, protector, advocate, guide or nurturer.

A General Definition of Effective Parenting

Here's a general definition that I find useful:

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Effective parenting refers to carrying out the responsibilities of raising and relating to children in such a manner that the child is well prepared to realize his or her full potential as a human being. It is a style of raising children that increases the chances of a child becoming the most capable person and adult he or she can be.

In terms of parental responsibilities for guiding and nurturing their children's development, there is a good deal of research over the last forty to fifty years to indicate what styles are the most effective.

For example, in guiding a child's emotional development, which includes helping a child feel worthy and capable, and in guiding a child's social development, which includes helping them learn how to get along with others, and even in guiding their educational development, which involves helping them learn how to do well at school, there has been a great deal of research that points toward a style of parenting that is very effective.

Let's refer to that as the "Productive Parenting Style".

First and possibly foremost, this style is reflected in and defined by **parents who convey a great deal of parental acceptance and warmth** in how they talk to, touch and relate to their children. These are parents who regularly seek out and enjoy the company of their children, who are satisfied with their children and their characteristics and abilities. They are sensitive to their children's needs and viewpoints, and they provide a great deal of positive reinforcement.

In addition, parents who approach their children in this productive style **are fair and firm in their disciplinary actions**. They clearly explain what is expected of their children and set very clear limits on their children's behavior. They are vigilant about enforcing family rules, thereby establishing their authority and providing standards by which their children can judge their competence and progress. They use commands and sanctions when necessary, and do not give in to children's coercive demands.

Parents who use and reflect this style also **make age-appropriate demands on their children for mature behavior**. For example, expecting a ten year old not to have temper tantrums where they fall on the floor and kick and scream is an age-appropriate demand or expectation. Expecting a two-year old toddler to express frustration without having a tantrum is not an age-g geared demand because a child that young has very few other means of expressing intense feelings.

These parents **are also very responsive to the cues emanating from their children's behavior**, beginning by being sensitive to the movements and cries of infants, and continuing to be responsive and sensitive to the behavior of older children and teenagers.

This style is further characterized by parents who **are very much involved in the lives of the children**, demonstrating how important the children are to them. These parents make their children a priority in their lives.

Research study after research study, including Stanley Coopersmith's classic work in the 1960s on

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the antecedents of self-esteem and continuing to this day in the work of such authorities as Diana Baumrind, have shown that this style of parenting is consistently associated with and contributes to children becoming

Independent
Highly competent in social and academic pursuits
Socially responsible
Able to control aggression
Self-confident
Popular with peers and others, and
High in self-esteem

In addition, studies that have followed these productively parented children into adulthood have shown that they are most likely to have successful careers and healthy marriages.

Now, the “Productive Parenting Style,” like all styles of parenting, are developed and learned through experience. This means that the “Productive Parenting Style” can be taught and learned.

And that is where parenting education comes in.

Our nation now has an amazing array of carefully constructed parenting and family skill-building programs which teach the content, concepts and skills that make up the “Productive Parenting Style.” These programs teach parents how best to communicate and understand children; how best to manage the inevitable conflicts that occur in relating to growing children; and how best to encourage and promote healthy growth of all facets of a child’s development. To mention just a few, our country now has many such fine educational programs as:

Active Parenting

Confident Parenting

Creating Lasting Family Connections

Effective Black Parenting

The Incredible Years

Los Ninos Bien Educados

Nurturing

Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T.)

Parenting Wisely

Parents Forum

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Parents Toolshop

Strengthening Families

Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP), etc.

And we have other parenting programs that have been developed on an individual basis by people and organizations who have utilized the National Extension Parent Education Model or other similar, professionally-evolved frameworks about what parents need to know in order to be maximally effective.

Thus, participating in these parenting and family education programs is one of the surest ways to learn, refine and be supported in using the “Productive Parenting Style.”

Unfortunately, most parents are unaware that they can learn and/or refine the “Productive Parenting Style” through these excellent educational programs, and very few if any community makes available the full spectrum of these important programs.

This lack of awareness and lack of availability of programs to promote effective parenting is one of the main reasons that the National Effective Parenting Initiative was established. It is shortsighted that our nation does not routinely make available to every parent the programs and opportunities to be as effective as possible in raising America’s children.

When parents are effective through employing the “Productive Parenting Style,” there are numerous benefits to everyone, the children, the family and the community. As we have seen, effectively raised children are the most likely to become cooperative, peaceful and productive adults, and become fine marriage partners and parents.

Kerby T. Alvy, Ph.D. is a nationally and internationally respected authority on parenting and parenting education. He is the Executive Director and Founder of the Center for the Improvement of Child Caring (www.ciccparenting.org), which has received worldwide acclaim for creating, delivering and disseminating model parent training programs. He is also the Founder and a Founding Board Member of the National Effective Parenting Initiative (www.EffectiveParentingUSA.org).

Dr. Alvy is a prolific author of books and articles on parenting, parent education, child development, and child abuse prevention, as well as authoring and co-authoring parenting education programs and seminars. His latest book, *The Positive Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy and Successful Children, Birth Through Adolescence*, will be published in November 2007 by Columbia University’s Teachers College Press.