

Appreciating Your Child's Personal Style

By Caron Goode

Each of us has our own style. Personal style is a natural predisposition toward time, stress, people, tasks, and situations. It is also the foundation on which preferences, reactions, and life values are built. When parents understand their child's personal style, communication and interaction become easier and more effective. This can help parents achieve the behavioral results they want, and the harmony they desire.

There are four personal styles: behavioral, cognitive, interpersonal, and affective. There are bits and pieces of each personal style in all of us. However, one is typically dominant. In my family, I am the creative one, the dreamer. My personal style is affective. Much to the dismay of my highly organized daughter, I am a bit scattered and slow to move. She has a very logical thought process and works every option through before taking action. My thoughts, on the other hand, tend to lean more towards the experimental what-if side, and my actions follow suit. I make decisions based on instinct. My cognitive-style daughter uses knowledge as her guide.

In other words, my apple could not have fallen farther from the tree! While this is true, over the years my daughter and I have grown to love, respect, and admire the differences in our individual styles. By identifying your child's personal style, you gain a whole new understanding of his behavior and motives. This information can be used to set guidelines, modify expectations, and iron out problem spots in your relationship. Read on to learn more about the four personal styles in children and the best way to parent each of them.

- **Behavioral** children need freedom and self-expression. They are often bold, willful, productive, competitive, unemotional, and self-reliant. These children rarely talk about their problems or emotions. Instead they set goals, and take action. They like to be leaders, and enjoy recognition. They are independent learners. They prefer real-life examples over abstract thinking or discussion. They also enjoy structure, dislike control, and will question authority if their parents appear incongruent.

Parenting behavioral-style children should include a no-blame, non-emotional approach to communication. Since these children are typically unemotional, demonstrative parents shouldn't take it personally if their child doesn't respond in kind. These children appreciate fairness, logic, honesty, and directness. When assigning tasks, do not give direction. Instead, state the benefit or reward, and ask when and how it will be completed.

- **Cognitive** children need affirmation and understanding. They are deep thinkers who thoroughly examine issues. They value intimacy, respect, and good relationships. These children take instruction well. They also admire expertise and knowledge. They are organized, enjoy working with data, and can be perfectionists. They enjoy math and numbers, and may spend hours at their computers.

Parenting cognitive-style children should involve appreciation and respect. This will go a long way towards developing a good relationship. When assigning these children a task, Remember, they are not competitive and might not respond to rewards for tasks. Instead, lay out the activity and provide the time and freedom necessary to complete it. If the task is unfinished, do not argue with the child or make generalities. These children respond best to calmly stated facts such as, “You didn’t clean your room today.” As opposed to, “You never clean your room.” Parents should offer only constructive suggestions, not criticism. As perfectionists, these children criticize themselves enough without any help.

- **Interpersonal** children need appreciation and trust. They are highly perceptive, and require honesty. These children are the family peacemakers. They worry if there are arguments or illnesses. They feel disharmony deeply, and often internalize it. They are sometimes shy, and value security and stability. Therefore, they don’t transition well unless they are prepared beforehand.

Parenting interpersonal-style children should center on friendly non-threatening communication. These children listen well and are observant. Therefore, modeling behavior for them is key. As peacemakers, they willingly join forces with parents to solve problems. They prefer tasks with graduated stages of difficulty. That way they can easily mark their success. If the hardest problem is presented first, they feel overwhelmed. Then they don’t finish. If parents appreciate these children, they feel great about themselves.

- **Affective** children are highly creative. As adults, they are often called dreamers. They learn by doing. They also need to feel through things before making decisions. They easily live in the world of ideas, and are drawn to expressive outlets like writing. They enjoy variety, like being the center of attention, and crave acknowledgement for their creativity. They also value friendship and easily enjoy life.

Parenting affective-style children should include lots of affection, conversation, and personal attention. Allow them to be creative. Encourage them to participate in drama and group activities. Remember, they rise to challenges that are presented as exciting and fun. Be sure to offer them structure and positive discipline. And, good luck asking these kids to take out the garbage!

Learning to appreciate each personal style, can promote harmony within the family. It can help parents and children make peace with such things as bedtime,

homework, and chores. Plus, by knowing what motivates and interests your child, you will gain a better understanding of who they are as individuals.□

About The Author ...

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