

THE FOUR FEEDING STYLES

Being a parent comes with no rule book. One of the most time-consuming and daunting challenges as a parent is feeding your children. All parents want to raise healthy eaters, but a lot goes into planning, preparing and serving all the meals and snacks for your children. Your parenting style, how you were raised and your own relationship with food dictates how you feed your children. There are four main feeding styles; Indulgent, Authoritarian, Uninvolved and Authoritative. Do you know which style best describes you? Being aware of your feeding style and its effect on your children's eating habits is important. You may be strongly one style, a mixture of a few or find yourself falling into different styles in different situations. However, research shows that one feeding style reigns above the rest. Check out, below, what makes each style different and how these styles play a role in your children's relationship with food.

THE INDULGENT FEEDING STYLE

Described as the "Yes" Parent

Characteristics of this feeding style include:

- The rules and limits around food and eating are lax and loose
- Decisions are child-centered, allowing the child to eat whatever they want, whenever they want
- Even if a parent wants to say no and does, yes always prevails
- Food is used as a reward for good behavior, school performance and/or eating vegetables

Children raised with this style:

- Have a tough time self regulating food intake, especially around unhealthy food
- Lack structure around meals and snacks
- May struggle with weight issues as they age

THE AUTHORITARIAN FEEDING STYLE

Described as the "Clean Plate Club"

Characteristics of this feeding style include:

- The rules around food are controlled by the parents without any regards for the child's hunger
- Parents direct child's hunger by directing their child to "take another bite" or "finish your plate"
- Decisions are "parent centered" and often described as the "controlling" style

Children raised with this style:

- Lose sense of hunger and ability to regulate it
- Often eat too much or too little to their needs which can lead to abnormal weight
- Will overindulge or sneak food that is restricted at home

THE UNINVOLVED FEEDING STYLE

Described as the "Inexperienced Cook"

Characteristics of this feeding style include:

- The parents don't food shop regularly leaving cabinets empty or lacking variety of food
- The parents don't feel comfortable cooking and often don't prepare meals
- If meals are prepared they are sporadic and unexpected
- Food and eating isn't as important to parents

Children raised with this style:

- Feel nervous or insecure about food
- Become overly focused on food, asking frequent questions about timing and details
- Can become uninterested in food like parents as they age

THE AUTHORITATIVE FEEDING STYLE

Described as "Love with Limits"

Characteristics of this feeding style include:

- The rules are diplomatic, based on the Division of Responsibilities
- Children are left to independently decide how much they will eat by listening to their hunger and satiety cues
- Parents, considering their children's preference, decide what food is being served which becomes the only option - no argument

Children raised with this style:

- Better at regulating their hunger and consumption
- More secure about their food and eating
- Gain weight appropriately for age and height

You may have guessed it, but research shows that the Authoritative Feeding Style is the best style for your children's health. The Authoritative style provides a supportive environment allowing children to make healthy decisions when it comes to food. The parents are able to maintain boundaries and rules, but also engage their children to listen to their own bodies. When you remove the pressure, children are more adventurous and less likely to overindulge or sneak food. Children raised with this feeding style tend to make healthier choices, accept new foods easily and have a better relationship with food.