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A report which investigates how parenting style influences the development of character in young children. The report concludes that parents who combine warmth and consistency are the most successful in developing character capabilities in their children.

Parenting, through the way it shapes **character**, is the most important determinant of a child's life chances. The foundations for our character are laid before the age of five. This puts a huge emphasis on parenting, but whatever the parental background, it is confidence, warmth and consistent discipline that matter most.

Character counts. The endeavours that make up a good life - developing caring, positive relationships; learning and educating ourselves; planning for the future, for life chances and economic success. - are underpinned by character capabilities such as empathy, application and emotional control. Character is integral to our future success and wellbeing. Character, something we tend to think of as a 'soft skill', has the most profound effect on a person's life. Far from a 'soft' skill, character is integral to our future success and wellbeing.

Character capabilities or social skills

- **Empathy** is an ability to put yourself in another person's shoes, and to act in a way that is sensitive to other people's perspectives. The recognition that there are other people in the world who you have to treat with a certain amount of respect is a crucial life skill.
- **Determination** or **Application** is about perseverance and initiative. Self motivation. The ability to concentrate and stick with tasks.
- **Emotional Control - self regulation, self discipline, self control**, involves the ability to keep emotions under control as well as the ability to bounce back. Anger management is essential. Parents have a key role to play in building self-control, precisely through setting boundaries and rules that force children to learn how not to give in to short-term pleasures and to commit to things over the long haul. Self-regulation is about whether someone can control emotions and bounce back from disappointment

Tough Love, confident Parenting, a balance of warmth and consistent discipline.

The type of parenting most likely to instill these characteristics was defined as 'tough love', combining affection with discipline. Calm, confident, consistent and reassuring parenting. Strong boundaries and good emotional support. Children who receive a combination of warmth and discipline from their parents. Consistent rule-setting and authoritative parenting. It is confidence, warmth and consistent discipline that matter most. Children who receive a combination of affection and discipline are far more likely to develop qualities such as self-control, empathy and determination. Tough love is setting clear, non-negotiable boundaries instilled by discussion and affection, being firm but fair, with consistency. Along with clear boundaries must come clear sanctions, which are agreed beforehand so children are aware - in line with their age and stage - of what consequences any misbehaviour carries. Tough love means combining warmth with consistent discipline. The children of parents who adopt a "tough love" approach - combining consistent love and affection with clear boundaries and discipline - are twice as likely to develop good character capabilities by the age of five, as children with "disengaged" parents. Tough love

is successful because it builds up the child's self-esteem while teaching them restraint and respect for others. The 'tough' bit of the equation is about children realising 'we can't have exactly what we want immediately when we want it'.

TOUGH LOVE TIPS

- *Praise your children for good behaviour. Tell them you love them and give them a hug to reinforce the message.*
 - *Lay down boundaries, such as bed times and the length of time that can be spent on the computer or watching television, and stick to them.*
 - *Make clear what sanctions will result from bad behaviour, so children know the consequences of their actions*
 - *Always keep your promises and carry out threatened sanctions.*
 - *Be consistent and never give in to a tantrum, however tempting or embarrassing the situation; if you do, it gives your child carte blanche to repeat the behaviour.*
 - *Ensure both parents adopt the same approach, so the children don't play one adult off against the other.*
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- **Authoritarian Parenting.** Authoritarian parents make their children live by their rules, without much regard for the child's feelings or perspective.
 - **Laissez Faire,** 'hands off' non confrontational Parenting. Laissez-faire parents are non-confrontational and run a democratic household that allows children to develop at their own pace, often let bad behaviour slide and are given to giving in to their children's wants and demands.
 - **Disengaged Parenting.** Disengaged parents are hands-off or, worse, hostile, paying little attention to the wants or needs of their children. In families where parents are disengaged, children are three times more likely to develop negative characteristics. In the most extreme cases, the researchers found children could become emotionally insensitive or "callous". Callous children grow up lacking a sense of empathy and guilt, and learn to see others in a purely instrumental way.

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When children don't know what the rules are, it's because the adults haven't set any, or at least haven't enforced the rules with any degree of conviction.

Consistency, consequences, firmness and fairness may not offer a quick fix, but then effective parenting is about the long view. Our reward is the satisfaction of watching our children develop into happy, well-adjusted people.

Informed by: [Demos pamphlet](#)

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