

**“Do you know what parenting style you use?”** While exploring this topic with parents, I have found that often people will parent their children the same way that they were parented. But not always! Sometimes parents decide that they don’t want to repeat the way that they were raised, and they choose new methods that reflect their personal values...

The three basic styles of parenting are often categorized as authoritarian, permissive and structured. [Barbara Coloroso](#) is a teacher, author and internationally recognized speaker who discusses parenting styles using images that help illustrate these concepts: She calls them the brick wall, jellyfish and backbone families. In her book, [Kids Are Worth It! Giving Your Child the Gift of Inner Discipline](#), Coloroso describes characteristics of each.<sup>1</sup>

In **the brick wall family**, parents are obsessed with order, control, and obedience. Threats and bribes are used to enforce strict rules and children don’t learn to think for themselves. There is no room for negotiation, and love is conditional based on conformity. Coloroso says children from brick wall families lack self-esteem and are at risk of sexual promiscuity, drug abuse and suicide.

The **jellyfish family** is at the other extreme, with no structure, rules or guidelines. There is a lack of consistency and safe boundaries. Arbitrary punishments and rewards take place in an environment of chaos, and emotions rule the behavior of parents and children. Coloroso says these kids are also at risk due to lack of self-esteem.

The **backbone family** is somewhere in the middle. Coloroso points out the six critical messages parents send to their children in the way they treat them:

- |  |                                  |
|--|----------------------------------|
| 1. I believe in you.                     | 4. You are listened to.          |
| 2. I trust you.                          | 5. You are cared for.            |
| 3. I know you can handle life situations | 6. You are very important to me. |

A backbone family loves unconditionally and teaches children to think for themselves to solve problems. Children are at low risk because of the on-going interactions with their parents that foster self-esteem.

Although parents may use a mixture of styles at various times, striving to be a backbone family is best to help children develop inner discipline by combining love and respect with consistent, fair expectations.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Coloroso, *Kids Are Worth It! Giving Your Child the Gift of Inner Discipline*, (Harper Collins Publishers, New York, 1994, 2001, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Carolyn Penniman, [What is your parenting style? - MSU Extension](#) , Michigan State University Extension, December 18, 2013, (accessed December 28, 2022).

Storytelling in small groups or personal reflection. One by one, each person shares their answer to the first prompt below. Then go to the next question and so forth. A person can pass.

- 1) Share about what was your parent’s main style of parenting; “the Brick Wall Family, the Jellyfish Family, or the Back-Bone Family?”**  
(Or did one parent mainly use one style and the other a different style?)
- 2) Tell us about a childhood experience that clearly fits into one of the three styles of parenting: Brick Wall, Jellyfish, or Back-Bone.**
- 3) Share, from the three styles, how you most often parent your children. (Or if you do not have children, what style do you see yourself parenting children? Or leading a business?)**
- 4) Share any insights you have learned about your own family parenting styles or through listening to others share about the styles of parenting in their families.**

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