

What type of parent are you?

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By Jamie Sotonoff

Among the wide variety of parenting styles, which one is the best? Tiger moms? Helicopter moms? Free-range moms?

The question can be endlessly debated, but experts say every type of parent has produced happy, confident and capable children. Even the son of accused killer Drew Peterson, the Bolingbrook police officer, is the valedictorian of his high school and ran his first marathon last year, according to a recent news report.

The "Handbook of Child Psychology" concludes that many factors influence a child's development: their culture, personality, family size, parental background, socioeconomic status, educational level, religion — and their family's unique mix of parenting styles.

"Most people are a blend of parenting styles," said Dana Burke, a special-education teacher and behavior consultant at ABC Moms, Inc. in Naperville. "Even under the same household, there's conflict and inconsistency ... Dad will say, 'You're grounded!' and Mom will say, 'Yeah, you can go out.' Or there are different parenting styles that work with different (child) personalities."

Here are some common parenting styles. While each one is identified as a type of mom, it applies to dads, too.

Which type are you?

Tiger Mom: A hot topic right now thanks to Amy Chau's best-selling book, "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother," this type of mom is a strict parent who demands excellence and punishes anything that falls short of it. There are no sleepovers or play dates, hours of piano or violin practice (no other instrument allowed), no grades below an A (not even A-), and a ban on video games.

The books says this strict Asian parenting style teaches discipline and produces high-achieving children, unlike the less disciplined Western parenting styles.

Butterfly Mom: This type of parent allows children to be who they truly are, not what society expects them to be, says Butterfly Mom Annie Burnside of Wilmette, author of "Soul to Soul Parenting" (\$16, Wyatt-MacKenzie)

"To me, it's about the voice of the child's soul, and what lies in the heart of that child," she said. "My deepest desire is that my children are very comfortable in their own skin ... not driven by external goals."

Sometimes it takes courage for Butterfly Mom to go against the tide. A Butterfly Mom whose son loved fabrics all of his life went against her husband's wishes and gave the boy a sewing machine at age 12 and he loved it. A New Trier High School student who was passionate about plants and gardening chose not to go to college like the other 98 percent of the student body and instead worked happily at Chicago's Green City Market.

“We're all here on our own path, said Burnside, who's also a public speaker and teacher. “Everything stems from the inside out and not the outside in. There are millions of paths up the mountaintop.”

Helicopter Mom: The helicopter mom swoops in to handle every crisis and advocate on every level for their child. This mother is the child's personal attendant. If they forget their homework, she will stop what she's doing and drive it over to the school. Helicopter Moms prefer to prepare the path for their child, rather than prepare their child for the path.

Free-range Mom: Remember when Lenore Skenazy let her 9-year-old son ride the New York City subway home by himself? The Wilmette native and freerangekids.com columnist was dubbed “The Worst Mother in the World” because of her experiment, but she argued it is important to teach children independence. Things we wouldn't have thought twice about a generation ago — walking to school, for example — are now things parents are fearful to let their children do alone.

The Missional Mom: Naperville author and mother of three Helen Lee says Missional Moms are purposeful mothers who don't give in to the suburban pressure to focus on their children, and instead raises their children to be socially conscious. It's a faith-based parenting style, but applies to any faith.

“You're not thinking about your own family so much, but trying to encourage moms to remember that we're part of a global society. We're so privileged and we should remember that,” says Lee, author of “The Missional Mom,” (\$13.99, Moody).

The Happy Mom: Meagan Francis, a St. Joseph, Mich., mother of five, said a Happy Mom strives to create a happy family life for everyone, including the parents.

“If we're doing things because we think they'll be better in the end, but we're miserable in the meantime, we're not doing any favors by our kids,” she said. “But when we parent in a way that feels natural to us, we end up being better parents.”

Happy Moms don't have a narrow view of success, and don't believe that sitting and listening to their child practice violin for five hours a day, like a Tiger Mom would do, necessarily produces higher achieving or happier children.

The idea behind the Happy Mom is to parent to your own values and priorities, rather than do what's expected of you or your children.

“I'm not saying don't try ... you just have to parent in a way you can live with,” said Francis, author of “The Happiest Mom: 10 Secrets to Enjoying Motherhood” (\$14.95, Weldon Owen).

Laid-Back Mom: This type of parent doesn't get too upset or involved with anything, and tends to go with the flow. If their child gets an A, great. If they get a C, oh well, you'll do better next time. This low-key, low-stress parenting style has similar traits similar to the “Deluded Parent,” or the “Oblivious Parent,” as defined by teacher/blogger Linda Williams (LindaJWilliams.net). Deluded or oblivious parents will ignore poor behavior or school performance and blame it on a “phase,” Williams said.

Dry Cleaner Mom: This type of mom or dad doesn't spend time mentoring their child or giving them the one-on-one time they need. Instead, they prefer to hire someone else to do it, abdicating the parenting responsibilities, said **Tim Elmore**, author of “**Generation iY: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future.**”

Available Mom: This parent doesn't have the toxic fear, judgment and ego that many parents have, and is fully available — emotionally — to her children, says John Duffy, a LaGrange clinical psychologist, parenting expert and author of “The Available Parent: Radical Optimism in Raising Teens and Tweens.” (\$15.95, Viva Editions).

The Yes Mom: This is a mom who works outside the home and is determined to make every minute with the kids count. Every moment must be important and a memory, says Rachna Rasad, who owns the Naperville baby sitters on-demand service, SeekingSitters Chicagoland.

By-the-Book Mom: This is a mom who has bookshelves full of child-rearing books, like “Raise a Brilliant Child” or “Kiddie Makeover,” Rasad says. The By-the-Book Mom is focused on what other parents are doing or the latest thing the experts are saying.

The Friend Mom: This is a mom who wants to be friends with their child and is too afraid to parent, says Amy Kossoff Smith, founder of MomTiniLounge.com. Friend Moms view their children as equals, and finds it difficult to discipline them.

Regardless of what parenting style that's used, Burke believes every style of parent has good intentions and wants to do right by their kids.

“Parents are just looking for strategies to make thing going more smoothly in the home,” Burke said. “Consistency and predictability are what changes behavior ... so focus on the things you can control to influence your child.”