



The Evolution of Early Childhood Parenting Patterns From an Authoritarian Style to a Responsive Approach

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Abstract

Early childhood parenting is a crucial foundation for developing character, social skills, and emotional intelligence from an early age. One significant shift in parenting practices is the transition from a rigid authoritarian style to a responsive approach that emphasizes empathy, communication, and respect for children's individual needs. However, in reality, many parents still implement authoritarian parenting without considering the principles of child development. This article aims to theoretically examine the basic concepts, characteristics, and factors influencing the transition from authoritarian to responsive parenting in early childhood, as well as its implications for child development. This research uses a literature review method by reviewing various scientific articles, developmental theories, and relevant parenting policies. The analysis was conducted descriptively and qualitatively by identifying key themes, such as the principles of two-way communication, positive discipline, emotional attachment, and the role of the family and social environment in shaping parenting patterns. The study results indicate that responsive parenting can increase children's self-confidence, strengthen social skills, and foster healthy emotional regulation. Key factors for the success of this transition include increased parenting literacy, community support, and active parental involvement in children's learning processes. This study provides a theoretical contribution that can be used as a reference in developing parenting strategies that are more in line with the principles of early childhood development.

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INTRODUCTION

Parenting plays a fundamental role in shaping the personality and development of early childhood, including emotional, social, and cognitive aspects (Kong & Yasmin, 2022). At this stage of life, children are highly susceptible to environmental influences and interpersonal relationships, particularly with their parents. Historically, authoritarian parenting has been the dominant model adopted by many families. This parenting style

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emphasizes control, absolute obedience, and harsh discipline. While considered effective in instilling order and obedience, this approach often neglects children's emotional needs and limits their space for expression and autonomy.

On the other hand, the challenges of raising children in the digital age and fast-paced lifestyle have brought their own pressures for today's parents. Children are growing up in an environment full of digital distractions (Novianti et al., 2023), with easy access to technology but a lack of meaningful human interaction. Common concerns have emerged: children are prone to tantrums, lack empathy, and exhibit behaviors considered disrespectful (Widya et al., 2024). This condition cannot be separated from the quality of parenting that changes according to the dynamics of the times, where emotional closeness and warm communication are often displaced by busy daily routines and parental work pressures.

These social changes demand changes in the way parents support their children. A responsive approach presents an alternative that better aligns with the developmental needs of early childhood. This approach emphasizes the importance of listening to children, responding appropriately to their emotions, and building relationships based on compassion and empathy (Aisah & Aprilia, 2023). Theoretically, a responsive approach relates to the dimensions of *parental responsiveness*. In parenting theory, responsiveness refers to a parent's ability to demonstrate warmth, acceptance, and responsiveness to their child's needs and signals. This responsiveness is a key factor in creating a safe emotional environment for children (Iwasaki et al., 2023). Research shows that responsive parents tend to encourage children to actively explore their environment, ask questions, and develop curiosity (*epistemic curiosity*) plays an important role in the learning process and cognitive development of children from an early age. In contrast to the authoritarian approach, responsive parenting values children as whole individuals, with feelings, desires, and the right to grow in an emotionally safe environment (Nurli & Sartika, 2025).

The foundation of a person's personality is largely formed in early life. Therefore, parenting styles implemented early in life will have a long-term impact on how children view themselves, interact with others, and face life's challenges. In this article, the author explores the evolution of parenting styles from an authoritarian style to a responsive approach, highlighting changing family values, the influence of the digital context, and the implications for early childhood social-emotional development. This study is expected to provide a critical perspective and alternative solutions to address the challenges of parenting in the contemporary era.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method (*library research*). This approach was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of early childhood parenting patterns, particularly the comparison between authoritarian and responsive parenting patterns, and their roles in shaping children's personalities. The literature review was conducted by collecting, reviewing, and analyzing various relevant literature sources related to parenting patterns, early childhood development, and the formation of children's character and personality.

The data sources for this study consisted of national and international journal articles, as well as other academic publications related to the research topic. Literature selection was conducted purposively, taking into account the relevance and credibility of the sources, as well as their contribution to the discussion on parenting patterns and early childhood personality development.

The data collection procedure was carried out by searching various scientific databases such as Google Scholar, indexed journals, and other academic sources. The literature obtained was then selected based on topic relevance, year of publication, and source credibility. Next, the literature is classified based on the discussion themes,

namely: (1) the concept of authoritarian parenting, (2) the concept of responsive parenting, (3) factors that influence early childhood parenting, and (4) the impact of parenting on the formation of children's personalities. This classification aims to facilitate the analysis process and identify the relationship between the concepts studied. The classified literature is then arranged systematically according to the research focus.

Data analysis was carried out using content analysis techniques (*content analysis*), namely by reviewing the literature in depth to identify concepts, patterns, and relationships between parenting styles and the development of children's personalities. The results of the analysis were then interpreted descriptively and qualitatively and synthesized to produce a comprehensive understanding. Based on the results of this synthesis, theoretical conclusions and recommendations were drawn regarding the importance of implementing appropriate parenting styles in supporting the personality development of early childhood.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Importance of Early Childhood Parenting

Parenting styles applied to early childhood not only influence immediate behavior but also have profound and long-term impacts on personality development (Prime et al., 2023). The relationship established between children and parents serves as an early reflection of how children understand the world, develop self-concept, and determine how they interact with others later in life. Warmth, consistency, and empathy foster a sense of emotional security, which lays the foundation for self-confidence, emotional management, and healthy social skills (Mulyana & Kamil, 2026).

The early childhood period is known as the golden age, namely the age range of 0 to 6 years which is considered to be very decisive in determining the direction of a child's overall development (Amiliya & Susanti, 2024). During this period, the brain experiences its most rapid growth and is highly sensitive to environmental stimulation. Children absorb a wide range of information and experiences with extraordinary receptivity, so every interaction and response from parents or caregivers leaves a lasting imprint on their long-term memory. This golden age is not only crucial for developing cognitive and language skills, but also for shaping a child's emotional and social structure, which will impact their adult life.

Like planting a tree, early parenting is like shaping the direction of a young tree. If a child is guided with clear direction, watered with love, and given the space to grow according to their needs from an early age, they are more likely to grow strong and healthy. However, if their direction is crooked from the start due to violence, inconsistency, or neglect, it will be very difficult to change their shape as they grow older. This metaphor illustrates the importance of investing in appropriate parenting in early life as it determines a child's long-term personality.

On the other hand, authoritarian, cold, or inconsistent parenting styles can leave psychological scars that are difficult to erase (Rambe, 2024). Children who grow up in stressful or affection-deprived environments tend to have difficulty building interpersonal relationships, have low self-esteem, and exhibit aggressive or socially withdrawn behaviors. Over the long term, they may struggle with decision-making, healthy emotional expression, and even become susceptible to anxiety disorders and depression.

Research in the field of developmental psychology shows that the parenting style received in childhood can influence the parenting style they will practice as adults (E. I. E. Putri et al., 2022). In other words, parenting styles not only shape individuals but are also passed down across generations. Therefore, appropriate intervention from an early age is strategic in developing resilient, adaptive, and well-

characterized personalities. Responsive parenting, which balances emotional closeness and establishing clear boundaries, has been shown to be more effective in fostering emotionally and socially healthy individuals.

Awareness of these long-term impacts is crucial in the context of parenting education, child protection policies, and early childhood education practices. Understanding that every small interaction in early childhood has a significant impact on the future can help parents and educators become more aware and thoughtful in providing parenting styles that are attentive, compassionate, and respectful of children's individuality.

Comparison of Authoritarian and Responsive Parenting Styles

Parenting style plays a central role in shaping a child's character, emotions, and social behavior. Two approaches frequently highlighted in the developmental trajectory of parenting are authoritarian and responsive parenting. Each reflects different values, goals, and approaches to educating and nurturing children, particularly in early childhood, when they are highly vulnerable to emotional and social influences.

Authoritarian parenting is characterized by high control, strict discipline, and rigid expectations of compliance without much room for dialogue (Saniy et al., 2025). People with this style tend to emphasize rules and punishment, and provide little explanation or adequate emotional support. This approach is often accompanied by a loud voice, stern facial expressions, and immediate punishment for mistakes (Brown et al., 2023). Harsh discipline may make children appear submissive or obedient, but it tends to create fear and false obedience. Children raised in authoritarian environments often display obedience on the surface, but underlying this tendency is fear, anxiety, low self-esteem, and difficulty expressing emotions openly. They can grow up to be afraid of making mistakes, lack initiative, or, conversely, rebellious when outside of parental supervision. This style also often hinders the development of independence because children are accustomed to being directed without being given the space to make their own decisions.

In contrast, responsive parenting (or often referred to as democratic or supportive parenting) places more emphasis on emotional closeness, open communication, and recognition of children's needs and feelings (Gowasa, 2026). Responsive parents educate with empathy, set clear boundaries, and open dialogue. They are willing to listen, explain rules, and involve children in age-appropriate decision-making. This approach doesn't eliminate rules, but rather provides understanding and a sense of security when they are implemented. While limits and structure remain, this approach creates a supportive environment for children's psychological growth (Belza et al., 2023). Children raised with this style tend to be more independent, confident, empathetic, and able to form healthy social relationships because they are accustomed to understanding cause and effect and are trusted to explore the world responsibly (Levickis et al., 2023).

In early childhood education, the differences between these two styles can be clearly seen in everyday life. For example, in a situation where a child accidentally breaks a glass, an authoritarian parent might immediately scold or punish the child with something like, "Why are you so careless? You're so difficult to manage!" The child may cry because they are afraid, feel misunderstood, and even become reluctant to help because they are worried about making a mistake. The long-term effect is that the child grows up with a persistent sense of tension and guilt. In contrast, a responsive parent will react more calmly, for example, saying, "It's okay, you didn't mean to. Let's clean it up together. But next time, please be more careful with it." This response not only provides a sense of security but also builds responsibility and

empathy in the child. The child learns that mistakes are part of the learning process, not something to be feared.

Different responses in small situations like this reflect a much larger parenting philosophy: whether children are shaped by pressure or by nurturing. Responsive styles not only help children learn to manage their emotions but also foster a trusting relationship between child and parent. This relationship is a crucial foundation for a child's healthy psychosocial development and strengthens adaptive skills in facing life's challenges.

The shift from authoritarian to responsive parenting doesn't mean weakening parental authority, but rather balancing it with emotional closeness and respect for children's rights as individuals. In the modern era, when children grow up in challenging environments such as exposure to technology, social pressures, and complex family dynamics, a responsive approach becomes even more relevant and necessary. This approach not only enables children to survive difficult situations but also empowers them to develop into resilient, adaptive individuals with strong character.

The Key to Forming a Good Child's Personality

Developing a child's positive personality is not an instant process, but rather the result of a consistent interaction between parenting styles, the environment, and experiences received from an early age. A healthy personality is reflected in a child's ability to manage emotions, interact positively with others, have self-confidence, and distinguish between good and bad behavior (Silaen, 2026). Therefore, there are several important keys that parents and educators need to consider in optimally shaping a child's personality. One of the main keys is consistent affection. Children who grow up in an environment full of love and care will feel emotionally secure (Wulandari, 2024). This sense of security forms the foundation for developing self-confidence and the courage to explore the environment. Affection is expressed not only through words, but also through presence, touch, attention, and a warm response to a child's needs. Children who feel loved are more likely to develop empathy and respect for others.

Furthermore, exemplary parenting plays a crucial role in shaping a child's personality. In the context of parenting, young children are excellent imitators; they learn more from what they see than from what they hear. Therefore, parenting demonstrated through parents' daily behavior, such as honesty, patience, discipline, and responsibility, directly serves as an example for children to emulate. Thus, parenting serves not only as a means of controlling behavior but also as a primary model for character formation. The next key to parenting is the application of positive discipline. In modern parenting approaches, discipline is no longer understood as punishment, but rather as a process of guiding children to understand the limits and consequences of every action. Parenting that implements positive discipline is carried out through explanations, two-way communication, and the imposition of consequences that are educational, not intimidating. Through such parenting, children learn to develop responsibility, self-control, and the ability to make independent decisions.

Furthermore, in parenting patterns, effective communication is also an important factor in shaping a child's personality (S. Putri et al., 2024). Parents who listen attentively to their children will help them feel valued and understood. Two-way communication allows children to express their feelings, desires, and thoughts more openly. This significantly impacts the development of language skills, social skills, and emotional intelligence. Furthermore, good parenting also provides opportunities for children to become independent according to their developmental stage. Children need space to experiment, make simple decisions, and solve small

problems independently. While the results may not always be perfect, these experiences will help children develop a sense of responsibility and self-confidence. In this regard, parents act as guides, not as controllers.

Finally, consistency in parenting patterns is the main foundation in the formation of a child's personality (Sartika et al., 2026). Changing rules or inconsistent parental attitudes can confuse children and hinder the process of internalizing values. Conversely, consistency helps children understand what is expected of them and builds a sense of security in their daily lives. By paying attention to these key factors, the development of a child's personality focuses not only on the end result but also on the process the child goes through at each stage of development. A good personality grows from positive experiences, warm relationships, and appropriate guidance. Therefore, the role of parents and educators is crucial in implementing appropriate parenting patterns, which include role models, positive discipline, effective communication, providing opportunities for independence, and consistency in parenting. These various aspects are interconnected and form an important foundation for developing a child's personality that is healthy, confident, and able to adapt optimally in their social life.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that there has been an evolution in early childhood parenting patterns from an authoritarian style to a responsive approach. This shift is influenced by social changes, scientific developments, and increasing parental awareness of the importance of emotional and psychological aspects in child development. Parenting patterns that previously emphasized control, absolute obedience, and rigid discipline have gradually transformed into approaches that emphasize warmth, two-way communication, and sensitive responses to children's needs. This change indicates that children are no longer viewed as objects to be controlled, but rather as individuals who need to be understood and accompanied in their developmental process. The evolution towards a responsive parenting pattern has a positive impact on children's personality development, particularly in building self-confidence, the ability to manage emotions, and healthy social skills. Thus, the responsive approach is a more relevant and adaptive form of parenting in addressing the challenges of child development in the modern era and supporting the formation of optimal child personalities from an early age.

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