

6 Signs That You're a Dysfunctional Parent

Let's for a moment take God out of the picture of our families. Frightening, perhaps, but something we actually do without even thinking about it. When we choose to "go it alone" in this thing called parenting, the result is inevitable dysfunction that has no promise of the abundant life.

Sin is a reality of our lives. Without God's love and forgiveness, the spiritually healthy family is impossible. Without God's help, dysfunction is our only option.

Some dysfunction is the reality of living in an imperfect world with imperfect people, but it will be especially present when we omit God from our lives.

While there are probably hundreds, if not thousands, of types of dysfunction in today's families, let's unpack six dysfunctional parenting styles that without God's redemption will leave a negative impact on our families. You might be surprised to see yourself fall into one of these categories:

1) The Double-Minded Parent

Some may call you a Double-Minded parent, but you call it being *emotionally healthy*. After all, just because you are a Christian, what is wrong with making sure that you are whole and happy and indulge in all that this life has to offer? You see adulthood as a time to fulfill all your dreams in this life, and your children are just one small part of those dreams. You think about how wonderful it is to have all that God offers, as well as what the world offers too! These are the mantras that you live by:

- "I have worked hard my whole life—now it's time for me!"

- “God wants me to be happy, so I know that He is OK with my making choices that fulfill my needs even over my children’s, because their day will come when they are older.”
- “Who says you can’t have it all?”
- “Of course I love God, but this world is pretty cool too, don’t you think?” ☐

Children raised by the Double-Minded parent will often grow up having codependent tendencies, seeking acceptance from others, being unrealistic in their view of “self,” and feeling insecure. They are confused about what it means to follow Christ, and might avoid their parents in adulthood.

2) The I-Can’t-Say-No Parent

The world is such a negative place. The home should be a positive place where one can say “Why not?” I-Can’t-Say-No parents love to say yes because when they do, everyone seems happy. These parents think that becoming a mom or dad is a perfect way to expand their social life as well. They truly enjoy the company of their children and don’t see a need for hierarchy in the family sector.

In order to cultivate a “friendship” from an early age with their children, these parents make sure that they confide in their children and seek their opinions at every turn. These parents also sacrifice many personal opportunities for the sake of their children’s needs. An I-Can’t-Say-No parent might try to justify his or her actions by saying:

- “I want to give my child all that I didn’t have when I was growing up.”
- “Discipline is exhausting for me and my child—so I don’t do it! I create no boundaries, and therefore there is no need. Besides, I really, really, really want my kids to

like me.”

- “Unpopular no more, I now have a junior companion in life!”
- “Sure, I rely on my child for emotional and social support—that’s what friends do!”
- “In order to create intimacy and trust, I don’t have any boundaries on the topics that I discuss with my child.”
- “I had a kid because I want to spoil someone. I like to spend money and be generous—what’s so bad about that?”
- “My child is very mature for her age.” □

Children raised by the I-Can’t-Say-No parent often grow up too quickly, suffer from chronic boredom, think that rules don’t apply to them, become poor money managers, are unable to cultivate healthy emotional boundaries with others, and have an unhealthy attachment to you in adulthood.

3) The Driver Parent

While the parent who has always been referred to as “driven” will see this as a compliment, others will label this way of parenting with a raised eyebrow of judgment. If you are a Driver parent, you view being driven as the secret to your success, and you want this same success (if not more) for your child. You wonder why people are always telling you to “lighten up” in the way you interact with your child, while you conjure up these justifications:

- “I am driven and have been successful, so why would I let my child waste one second of his day?”
- “Childhood is overrated—we need to start thinking of

college now!”

- “I love to vicariously live through my □child’s life. It makes me so much more of an involved parent when I feel that we are “both” succeeding!”
- “Everyone else is my daughter’s competition—and they had better get out of the way. There’s room for only one at the top.”

Children raised by the Driver parent will often grow up feeling anxious or depressed (or both), and dissatisfied with their accomplishments. They often struggle with addiction and are unable to “play” or relax.

4) The Micro-Managing Parent

As the Micro-Managing parent, you desire only the best for your kids. Because you are the adult and they are the children, how could your kids possibly know what is best for them? You have made some good (and bad) decisions in your life, and why wouldn’t you want to pass on this wisdom to your children? These are statements you might use to reassure yourself you are on the right track:

- “I know what is right. It’s my job to make sure my child doesn’t make a mistake!”
- “Everything is done the way I want it, or I do it myself. Since my standards are so high, it’s just easier that way for everyone.”
- “My kids don’t understand that I make all their decisions for their own good.”
- “The world is a dangerous place—period! Someday my kids will thank me for protecting them.”

Children raised by the Micro-Managing parent will often grow up doubting themselves, feeling driven to perfection, struggling with headaches and stomachaches, and developing eating disorders.

5) The Criticizing Parent

The Criticizing parent is one who can't help but point out what is wrong. To him or her, it's obvious what needs to be fixed, and consequently this parent calls attention to the problem so it can be corrected. As a Criticizing parent, you argue that this is a gift to your child, while others say you are being cruel with your words. You question how else your child will get the "thick skin" needed to survive in a harsh world and believe that you're doing her a favor by "toughening" her up.

To feel reassured, a Criticizing parent might make these justifications:

- "Life is tough. I didn't get a free pass; why should he?"
- "Of course I constantly criticize my child (even in public). It keeps her ego under control."
- "I never praise my child because then he will never strive for better. It's the only way to get ahead in this life."
- "I don't encourage my child's interests—she will probably change her mind soon anyhow. What a waste of time and money."
- "If I don't point out his faults, someone else will. Wouldn't he rather it come from me than from a stranger?" □

Children raised by the Criticizing parent will often grow up

bullying others, feeling insecure, blaming others for their mistakes, and being pessimistic about the future.

6) The Absentee Parent

The Absentee parent is just that—absent from the daily events of their children's lives. In your mind the big moments in life are not losing teeth, hitting a home run in Little League, or a dance recital. The big moments are the ones that you are providing and planning for, such as college, weddings and retirement. You can justify your absence because of the following reasons:

- "I recognize that my child would rather have all today's 'stuff' than me, so I work long hours to provide for his current and future needs."
- "My absence is a good way for my children to learn independence."
- "My nanny (or babysitter) is younger and more fun than I am."
- "I deny my child emotional bonding when I am home so that our time away is easier on her." □

Children raised by an Absentee parent often grow up too fast, become sexually promiscuous, have low self-worth, and demand inordinate attention from others.

But There's Hope ... The Spiritually Healthy Parent

In contrast to the six dysfunctional parenting styles stands the offer of hope from God that we may live in relationship with Him, pursuing His kingdom while living on His script. While far from perfect, the Spiritually Healthy parent is a parent who walks each day, step by step, with God as his or

her guide.

Becoming a spiritually healthy family means you will allow God to call the shots for you and your family members and that you look to Him to give you wisdom instead of relying on your own strength and “great ideas.” Because you realize you are a work in progress yourself, you offer your children grace when needed, while helping them see the correct path that God desires all His children to follow.

You recite the following things each day, because, deep down you know them to be true:

- “I recognize that my child has been entrusted to me by God and that I need His guidance to raise her.”
- “I know I live in a sinful world, but I will seek to put God’s character on display in my home in everyday situations.”
- “I know there is a higher calling as a parent than controlling my child’s behavior—and that is forming his faith.”
- “I seek to grow spiritually myself, knowing that the overflow of this will have a positive impact on my child.”

Children raised by the Spiritually Healthy parent often grow up knowing God, loving others, living a life of meaning and recognizing that this world is not their ultimate home.

Go deeper and explore the practical remedies for each of these parenting styles in the book Becoming a Spiritually Healthy Family: Avoiding the 6 Dysfunctional Parenting Styles by Michelle Anthony. Dr. Michelle Anthony is the vice president of Learning Resources at David C Cook and the author of Becoming a Spiritually Healthy Family and Spiritual Parenting. Anthony has graduate degrees in Christian education, theology and leadership and more than 25 years of church ministry

experience as a children's and family pastor. Visit

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