

Special Report

What's your parenting style?

Your child has finished playing and the floor looks like a bomb site. You ask him to clear his toys away but he refuses.

Do you sigh and do it yourself? Shout until he tidies them? Bribe him with the promise of sweets? Or do you get down to his level and calmly explain why you want the toys put away?

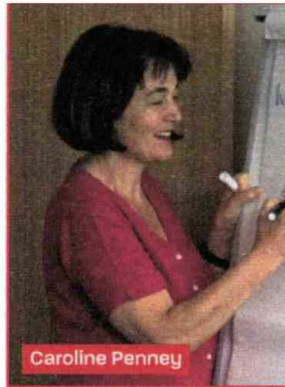
The first response is passive, the second aggressive, the third manipulative and the final approach is assertive.

Which type are you?

Caroline Penney is the specialist trainer on a course called Being a Parent, in Southwark, south London.

She says: 'A parent can be one of the parenting types or all four at different times, but parenting styles tend to be hardwired.'

'Parents often follow the pattern they have experienced. So a person who was smacked or yelled at as a child may



Caroline Penney

go on to do the same.

'On the other hand, a parent may veer completely from what they experienced to try not to be like their parents — so someone who experienced aggression may go to extremes to be very passive to break the cycle.'

How can you recognise which parent type you are?

Passive parents will do anything for a quiet life. Manipulative parents can often see their approach

reflected in their own child's behaviour.

Caroline says: 'If your child is saying, "I'll only eat my dinner if you promise to take me on a trip," they've probably learnt it from you!'

She adds: 'Aggressive parenting is easier to spot. You know if you're shouting too much or if your time with your child is unpleasant rather than enjoyable — or if your child seems frightened of you.'

What are the effects of different styles on children?

She says: 'Obviously aggressive parenting frightens the child but passive parenting can also make the child feel unsafe. The child doesn't learn about rules or boundaries so they push and push to try to find some. They need boundaries to feel secure.'

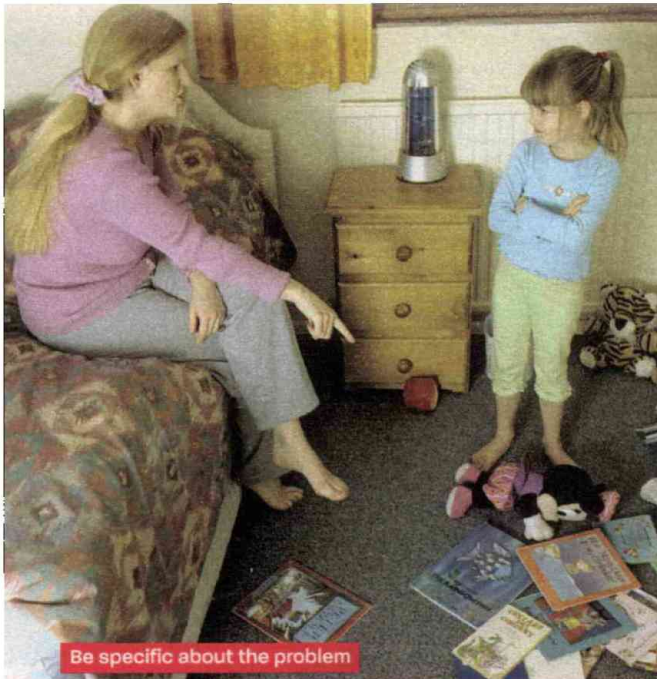
The best approach, Caroline believes, is to try to be an assertive parent — fair, firm and

'Kids need boundaries to feel secure'



explaining your actions.
‘If for example your child leaves wet towels on the floor, don’t just pick them up yourself but don’t yell or bribe either. The key to

being assertive is clarity. ‘Be specific about the problem. Say: “It’s upset me that you’ve left the towels on the floor.” Then explain how it



affects you. “Now I’ll have to wash them again.”

‘Then say what you want. “Next time you can help me by picking up your towels.” That’s assertive parenting.’

So far 200 parents have taken part in the Being a Parent course which may soon be rolled out across Britain. It covers a range of issues including setting boundaries and self-esteem as well as parenting types.

Caroline says: ‘In the sessions we use role play to discover the different parenting types. One person is the parent and another plays the child.’

‘The parent approaches a situation in different ways — starting off aggressively, shouting at the child to clear the toys away, next being manipulative, then passive, then finally assertive, talking to the child firmly on his level.’

‘At the end the “child” is asked how he felt during each example and it is interesting how it brings home to a person how it feels as a child to be smacked, for instance, or yelled at, or simply allowed to do nothing.’

Julie Cook