

INSIGHTS

A parenting style for the ages



There's been a great deal of conversation lately about the most appropriate parenting style to raise kids effectively. How do you get cooperation from your child without nagging, yelling or using other less pleasant, coercive means? How do you build a strong connection with your child or young person, so that they you can build a lasting and respectful relationship?

The solution to these dilemmas is easier than you may think. It lies in your ability to assess two different communication styles when you interact with your child. These two styles indicate credibility and approachability. The credible or 'cat' style, as many of the behaviours are cat-like, is the style to use when managing or disciplining children. The approachable style, known as a 'dog' style as many of the behaviours come from the canine world, is used when building positive, healthy relationships. Let's explore a little further and find out how to access each side or style.

Find your inner cat to guide and manage

The 'cat' refers to the credible or authoritative side that we all have but may find difficulty accessing. This cat or credible side is expressed through non-verbal communication – your tone of voice, your posture and your head position.

Speaking with a flat, even voice shows credibility. Keep your head still and body upright when you talk, and your credibility increases dramatically. The quickest way to access your inner cat or credible side is to speak with your palms facing the ground. Most people find that when they do so they naturally speak with a clipped voice, still head and body and a serious expression on your face.

When you speak from your cat or credible side people will usually believe what you have to say. Cat body language gives you authority.

Guide like a cat by speaking calmly, quietly and staying still when you speak. 'Cats' will also withdraw eye contact rather than stand and argue, so look away or respectfully move away rather than become involved in a pointless argument with a child.

'Cats' also look for ways to manage visually (with such things as rosters or charts) or by moving close and whispering, rather than repeating themselves. If 'cats' repeat themselves, they are more likely to lower their voice than raise it to get attention. These cat behaviours work well when guiding and managing children and teenagers.

Use your inner dog to nurture and build relationships

We also have a 'dog' side to our nature. This is the approachable, conversational, relationship-building side. When you access this side, you generally speak with lots of inflection in your voice. Your head will bob up and down. You'll probably lean forward as you speak, and you'll smile a lot. The quickest way to access your dog side or approachable side is to speak with your palms up.

parenting*ideas

Many of us feel more comfortable with the dog or approachable side than with the cat side of our nature. If you are in a management position at work, you probably spend more time accessing your cat or credible side than your dog or approachable side. Highly effective managers, like highly effective parents will move seamlessly between the two, accessing their dog when networking and relationship-building, then finding their cat for negotiations or when making decisions.

Bring your cat and dog to your parenting

As a parent you can make subtle adjustments to your communication to increase your effectiveness. Consciously alter your style to suit different situations rather than let your moods dictate your communication style. It takes effort and practice to move between the two styles. Do it often and you'll find switching from cat to dog and back again becomes an ingrained parenting pattern.

Get your cat and dog wrong and you'll be ineffective. Manage or discipline like a dog and you'll do one of three things – whine to get cooperation, become frustrated if children or teenagers ignore you, or do nothing because you don't want to offend your children. Build relationships like a cat and you'll be seen as distant, stiff and unapproachable.

Get the mix right and you'll be able to give your children exactly what they need. That is, the leadership and safety that cats provide and the nurturance and encouragement that comes naturally to dogs.

In closing

The cat-dog approach spans many different parenting styles and importantly, accommodates for the emotional needs of children and teenagers. It also provides tools for parents who view parenting as an individual endeavour and for those who see parenting as a group leadership task. The cat-dog approach offers parents the flexibility needed to parent effectively in our current times.



Michael Grose

Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.