

Which Parenting Role Fits This Situation?

Read the article first. This worksheet accompanies *The Four Roles of Parenting* at ThoughtsFromATherapist.com, which explains each role, the dialectic inside it, and why development is not a schedule. Search “four roles of parenting” on the site to find it.

Management, teaching, mentorship, and nurturance are present from the beginning. They are not four stages that replace one another. Their proportions change with the child, the situation, the stakes, and the capacity being developed, so the same teenager can need different roles in different parts of the same day. No role is more developed than another. The question is whether the role fits the person, the capacity, the stakes, and the moment. We map the mix we offer now, area by area, then work one situation through. A few words per space is enough.

ROLE ONE Management	Temporary external structure while the child develops internal structure. Management also protects the boundaries of other people. We manage what the child cannot yet safely or relationally carry, and leave enough room for capacity to emerge through experience. <i>Am I preventing a fall the child could recover from, and learn from?</i>
ROLE TWO Teaching	Makes danger legible and gives the child knowledge they do not yet have. Teaching has diminishing returns once information is no longer the central need, and it works less well when its purpose is to relieve our anxiety. <i>Am I teaching how to cook an egg, or how I like my egg?</i>
ROLE THREE Mentorship	Influence without constant intervention. Children watch how we handle frustration, power, mistakes, and repair. We offer a life they can observe without treating it as the template they are obligated to follow. <i>Am I inviting them into my world on my terms, or letting their interests shape what we share?</i>
ROLE FOUR Nurturance	The form of care the other person can receive. Its language changes again and again, and it does not disappear. We remain emotionally available without making development painless. <i>Am I comforting, or removing a consequence that belongs to them?</i>

A WORKED EXAMPLE: A TEENAGER WHO WANTS THE CAR

THE SITUATION	A teenager wants access to the car.
THE STAKE	Real. The consequences of an error may exceed the developmental value of letting natural consequence teach the lesson.
LEARNING OR CATASTROPHE	Not something to learn by trial and error alone. Remembering agreements and attending to basic responsibilities when no one is standing beside them gives relevant information.
THE MIX	Management around access. Teaching for the knowledge driving carries. Mentorship in how we drive ourselves. Nurturance when something goes wrong.
STILL MANAGED	Their autonomy exists alongside my need for sleep. If the blender runs at two in the morning, I manage the blender.
OVERREACH CHECK	Brushing teeth and driving a car are different capacities. One missed brushing does not justify an early curfew.

The mix, area by area

Split ten points across the four roles for each area: how much of each we offer now, not how much we think we should.

AREA
Health and the
body

Out of 10: manage _____ · teach _____ · mentor _____ · nurture _____

WHAT THIS AREA ASKS OF ME NOW

AREA
Money

Out of 10: manage _____ · teach _____ · mentor _____ · nurture _____

WHAT THIS AREA ASKS OF ME NOW

AREA
School and work

Out of 10: manage _____ · teach _____ · mentor _____ · nurture _____

WHAT THIS AREA ASKS OF ME NOW

AREA
Friends

Out of 10: manage _____ · teach _____ · mentor _____ · nurture _____

WHAT THIS AREA ASKS OF ME NOW

AREA
Phone and
technology

Out of 10: manage _____ · teach _____ · mentor _____ · nurture _____

WHAT THIS AREA ASKS OF ME NOW

AREA
Driving and
getting around

Out of 10: manage _____ · teach _____ · mentor _____ · nurture _____

WHAT THIS AREA ASKS OF ME NOW

AREA
Chores and the
household

Out of 10: manage _____ · teach _____ · mentor _____ · nurture _____

WHAT THIS AREA ASKS OF ME NOW

AREA
Feelings and hard
days

Out of 10: manage _____ · teach _____ · mentor _____ · nurture _____

WHAT THIS AREA ASKS OF ME NOW

READING THE MAP

Look for the area where the mix and the capacity disagree: more management than the stakes require, or less than the child can carry yet.

WHERE THE MIX FITS:

WHERE IT NO LONGER FITS:

One situation, worked through

Choose a situation from the map where the role feels unclear.

THE SITUATION

What is happening, and what is the child asking for or avoiding?

THE STAKE

What could happen

What could go wrong, and to whom? Does it touch someone else's boundaries?

THE CONSEQUENCE

Learning or catastrophe

Can the consequence become learning without becoming catastrophe?

- ☐ Real, and containable. A recoverable mistake
- ☐ It could exceed what the child can carry
- ☐ It lands on other people's sleep, safety, or space
- ☐ I am unsure, and want to find out more

THE ADVERSITY

How ridiculous is it?

Some adversity builds strength. Some is so disproportionate or senseless that it builds helplessness instead.

- ☐ Difficult and developmentally appropriate: patience may be the lesson
- ☐ Nonsensical, a double bind, or belligerent: advocacy is the lesson

THE FIT

The role, or the mix

Which role fits this person, this capacity, these stakes, and this moment?

THE OVERREACH CHECK

Each role has its own way of reaching too far. One honest line for each.

MANAGEMENT: AM I PREVENTING A FALL THEY COULD LEARN FROM?

TEACHING: AM I TEACHING THE EGG, OR HOW I LIKE MY EGG?

MENTORSHIP: WHOSE WORLD ARE WE SHARING, MINE OR THEIRS?

NURTURANCE: AM I COMFORTING, OR TAKING THE LESSON AWAY?

My grip

Control and care grow intertwined, so loosening control can feel like loosening care. They are not the same thing.

CARE OR CONTROL

Control began as care, and it worked. The question is whether its form still fits.

WHAT I AM HOLDING ON TO IN THIS SITUATION:

WHAT THE TIGHTENING PROTECTS ME FROM:

WHAT HOLDING THE SAME RESPONSIBILITY WITH A LOOSER GRIP WOULD LOOK LIKE:

ONE ADJUSTMENT THIS WEEK

Small is fine. One area, one role.

THE AREA, AND THE ROLE I WILL SHIFT TOWARD:

WHAT I WILL TOLERATE WATCHING:

HOW I WILL STAY AVAILABLE IF IT GOES BADLY:

AFTERWARD

What happened, what the child carried, and what I carried.

FROM THE ARTICLE HOW PARENTING MADE ME MORE CONTROLLING

THE GRIP

Descending rough terrain on a mountain bike, gripping the handlebars as tight as possible. It does not make us safer. It makes the body rigid.

THE ADAPTATION

Control was part of the job with very young children, and it worked. The trouble begins when the environment changes and the adaptation does not.

THE REVERSAL

At first, good parenting requires intervention. Eventually, it requires tolerating non-intervention.

A LOOSER GRIP

Not becoming less responsible. Holding responsibility with a looser grip.

Natural consequence is not what happens when parenting stops. It is one of the ways development happens.