

PARENTING IN TRANSITION: AUTHORITY, BOUNDARIES, AND GENTLE APPROACHES

by:

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Research in child development consistently shows that parenting styles shape not only family dynamics but also children's behavior, self-esteem, and school performance (National Geographic, 2023). In traditional Filipino families, many parents were raised under authoritarian or strict discipline models, where obedience and respect were reinforced through firm rules and, at times, corporal punishment. This legacy continues to influence how many adults today understand discipline and boundary-setting in child-rearing.

As parenting perspectives evolve, developmental psychology literature highlights the growing influence of gentle parenting. This approach emphasizes empathy, open communication, respect, and emotional support while still maintaining appropriate boundaries. Studies suggest that children raised under gentle parenting tend to develop stronger social and emotional skills because they internalize values rather than comply out of fear (EBSCO, 2021). However, experts caution that gentle parenting can be misapplied or misunderstood as permissiveness. When consistent expectations and clear limits are absent, its effectiveness may be weakened (iCare Philippines, 2023).

Local research further supports the impact of parenting style on children's outcomes. A study of senior high school students in Bohol, Philippines, revealed that the emotional climate created by parents—including both warmth and discipline—correlates significantly with students' self-esteem and academic performance (University of Bohol, 2021). Similarly, research conducted in Surigao del Norte found that some Filipino parents successfully adopt balanced, gentle forms of discipline that encourage self-control

and emotional regulation rather than harsh punishment, demonstrating that gentle parenting principles can be adapted within traditionally strict cultural contexts (Villar et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, educational reports indicate that when gentle parenting is misunderstood as permissive parenting, children may interpret flexibility as a lack of limits, leading to challenges in self-regulation and classroom behavior (iCare Philippines, 2023). In contrast, studies on authoritative parenting—which combines warmth with clear expectations—consistently show that children raised with empathetic, yet firm boundaries demonstrate stronger social-emotional development, empathy, and classroom engagement compared to those raised solely under authoritarian approaches (AARE Research Index, 2022).

These findings are particularly relevant in the Philippine educational context. While gentle parenting emphasizes empathy and emotional understanding, classroom observations reveal that some students may misinterpret such approaches as leniency.

Without clear boundaries and consistent consequences, disciplinary measures may not be taken seriously, potentially affecting classroom order and fairness (iCare Philippines, 2023). Thus, the challenge for educators is not whether to be empathetic, but how to integrate empathy with structure.

This balance becomes even more crucial when viewed alongside legal and institutional mandates. In the Philippines, teachers must uphold child protection standards under Republic Act No. 7610, or the Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act, as well as Department of Education (DepEd) guidelines on child protection (DepEd, 2019). These policies prioritize children's rights and well-being while also affirming that maintaining a safe and structured learning environment is part of a teacher's duty of care. Therefore, even when adopting principles aligned with gentle parenting, teachers are required to implement clear, fair, and consistent disciplinary strategies that protect students while promoting respect and self-regulation.

Research suggests that combining empathy with structured boundaries – often described as authoritative discipline—effectively supports both emotional development and classroom management (AARE Research Index, 2022; University of Bohol, 2021). Teachers are encouraged to communicate expectations clearly, follow through consistently on consequences, and model respectful behavior. In doing so, students understand the limits of acceptable conduct while feeling supported and valued.

Ultimately, parenting and teaching in transition require thoughtful balance. Excessive rigidity may harm relationships and emotional development, yet excessive leniency may compromise safety, learning, and accountability. Child protection policies reinforce that educators are called not only to nurture but also to establish predictable, safe, and accountable environments. When empathy is integrated with consistent guidance and cultural sensitivity, gentle parenting principles can strengthen children’s emotional intelligence, self-regulation, and long-term development—even within families and schools shaped by traditional disciplinary backgrounds.

The Official Website of DepED Division of Bataan

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