

## INSIGHTS

# Collaborative parenting style wins the day during COVID-19



The close quarter living that most of us have experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic has tested the patience and communications skills of even the most assured parent. The constancy of members living together is a test of family management skills, revealing any flaws or limitations that exist.

Those that rely on a coercive (“do as I say”) approach probably discovered that dominance works well in small doses, but fails miserably over the long-term, with family harmony severely impacted.

Parents who use a laissez-faire (“she’ll be right”) approach may have found that one or more children struggled with a lack of structure. In the absence of positive leadership, a child more than likely stepped up to fill the void, rendering parents with limited influence.

Those who used a parallel (“you go your way, I’ll go mine”) approach may have experienced a relatively quiet parental existence, but this will more than likely come at the expense of group cohesion and children’s mental health.

## Collaborative family leadership

Life in the family cocoon has suited parents that use a more inclusive, collaborative parenting style. This is a style that gives children a voice, commensurate with their developmental stages, in how the family conducts itself.

## Features of a collaborative family

Parents who adopt a collaborative approach impact family culture in positive ways, so that their family becomes a collaborative unit. Here are some features shared by collaborative families:

### Respect is a key value

This style of leadership treats kids with respect but importantly, expects respectful, considerate behaviour from children in return. When kids fail or forget to practise respectful treatment of others they are respectfully brought into line and reminded of their responsibility to others.

### Kids contribute

Kids in collaborative families generally help out without being paid. A jobs’ roster is the preferred method for ensuring kids contribute as authority is diverted from parent and rests with the group instead.

## Language is cooperative

Parents who adopt a collaborative approach generally use language that invites children to cooperate. They also use the word “We” a great deal. “We’re relying on you to set the table before dinner” reminds a child or teenager of their contribution to the family good.

## Rituals are strong

Collaborative families also use rituals such as mealtimes, special days and the like to build strong family bonds. These structured get-togethers are balanced with plenty of informal, fun activities where members can enjoy each other’s company.

## Decision-making is shared

Most parents who successfully adopt a collaborative leadership style have a process that engages kids in family decision-making and resolution of conflict between siblings. A regular family meeting or council is a common forum used by collaborative family leaders. These meetings may take time to get right and some effort to convince all family members of their benefits, however once they’re embedded they become an invaluable part of a family’s culture.

There are many ways and methods you can use to successfully raise a family, however not every method stands up to the scrutiny close of quarter living we’ve been encountering. With more time at our disposal, a wonderful opportunity exists to implement a collaborative leadership style, that will bring benefits well after the COVID-19 pandemic.



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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.