



LOVE notes

Brought to you by The Alabama Community Healthy Marriage Initiative • www.alabamamarriage.org • 1-888-4TOGETHER

The Couple that Parents Together, Stays Together

Okay, research does not exactly show that a couple's ability to parent together predicts whether or not they break up or get divorced. However, researchers have found that couples who feel better about their ability to cooperate with one another to be effective parents report that they have higher quality couple and parent-child relationships. If you could improve your couple relationship quality AND improve your parenting skills all at the same time, would you be willing to try? Here is how it can work for you!

Parenting as a Team

So what is the big deal with having different styles of parenting? Well, disagreements over parenting that strain your parenting relationship can affect your couple relationship also. Couples who are not supportive of each other's parenting have more anxiety, hostility, and defensiveness in their relationships. When you are frustrated and angry with a spouse or partner who just got done undermining your authority at bedtime, chances are you will not feel like being loving and affectionate once

the kids go to bed. Even more, when you are frustrated over your parenting disagreements, your children are less likely to have positive experiences with you or your partner. Research shows that when couples are supportive of one another's parenting, not only do they have a more satisfying couple relationship, but they are also better parents!

Parenting Battles: Mom vs. Dad

Before getting married or entering into a committed relationship couples must have a serious discussion about their expectations of a future life together. This often includes discussing their desire for children, how many children, and even what they want to name their children. While many couples talk about whether or not they want to be parents, fewer discuss what KIND of parents they want to be. For some, this can lead to problems.

Fast forward several years and several children later, and this leaves some couples in a parenting battle. Janet and Matt are a per-

fect example of this. Janet likes to have an organized home, and prides herself on running a "tight ship" with their children. While she is very loving and affectionate, she also likes to have a lot of routines and set very clear expectations for their kids. Matt often works late nights, and when he comes home at the end the day, Janet's "tight ship" turns to chaos. Matt's parents were less strict about rules, and he doesn't share Janet's love of routine. When Janet says "no," Matt says "yes." When she says, "8 o'clock, time for bed," Matt chimes in, "Oh, let's just watch one more show, or read one more book."

Scenarios such as this are not uncommon, especially when one parent does a lot of the parenting on their own. It can be especially hard to get on the same page as parents when you don't have a lot of opportunity to practice. Also, the parent who spends less time with the children due to work or traveling often wants to spend the precious time he or she does have with them having fun instead of disciplining and enforcing rules.

The purpose of this publication is the dissemination of technical information. Funding is provided through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services—Healthy Marriage Demonstration Grant #90-FE-0001/04-5. The opinion, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this document and associated materials are those of the author(s), and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families.

©2010 Alabama Community Healthy Marriage Initiative





LOVE notes

Brought to you by The Alabama Community Healthy Marriage Initiative • www.alabamamarriage.org • 1-888-4TOGETHER

continued

This can easily set the stage for conflict since one parent can become "the favorite," while the other is seen as the "rule enforcer."

1-2-3 Go Team!

Improving your ability to parent as a team can be as simple as putting in the time to try! Set special time aside for "parental debriefing", a time when you are not with your children when you specifically focus on your parenting. Talk about what went well that day and where things could have gone better. Finally, expect that you might need to compromise. Effective parenting is a team effort and you might not be able to do everything your way. However, giving a little in some areas can help you gain a lot more when it comes to couple relationship quality and being effective parents. Many communities offer low-cost or free parenting classes which can provide you with an opportunity to have real discussions about the pros and cons of different parenting styles and allow you to decide together how you will become a stronger parenting team.

Specifically in the case of the working parent and at-home parent, it can be helpful to do a quick debriefing just before or immediately upon getting home. This can help the returning parent understand what situation he or she is walking into and to best step into the situation. For example, if you know that your child has just been grounded or is being punished for poor behavior then you will see that it might not be the best idea to walk into the house and suggest going out for ice-cream sundaes. On the other side of the situation, it might help for the working parent(s) and children to set aside special time just for them, such as game or story time. This can take away the need to compete for your children's affection and allow for more quality parenting time on a daily basis.

References:

McHale, J. P., & Lindahl, K. M. (Eds.). (2011). *Coparenting: A conceptual and clinical examination of family systems*. Washing-

ton, DC: American Psychological Association.

Morrill, M. I., Hines, D. A., Mahmood, S., & Cordova, J. V. (2010). Pathways between marriage and parenting for wives and husbands: The role of coparenting. *Family Process*, 49, 59-73.

The purpose of this publication is the dissemination of technical information. Funding is provided through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services—Healthy Marriage Demonstration Grant #90-FE-0001/04-5. The opinion, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this document and associated materials are those of the author(s), and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families.

©2010 Alabama Community Healthy Marriage Initiative

