



When Parents Have Opposing Parenting Styles

By Judy Arnall

Parenting can be a real challenge for partners who don't always agree in their parenting styles. Luckily, there are some tips for a more peaceful atmosphere at home.

1. Striving for a united front is difficult.

Let's imagine that you have had two hours sleep and just lost your job. How would you react to your 8 year old spilling his spaghetti dinner on your new white carpet? Let's also suppose your partner won a half million-dollar lottery and had 14 hours sleep last night. How would he react to the same spillage?

I would bet money that each parent would react very differently to the same behavior. So why do we expect parents to present a united front to their children? Do both parents have the exact same feelings, stresses, expectations and parenting style? They don't. Parents are not consistent with each other, nor can they honestly present a united front to their children that would be consistent all the time.

2. Children can handle different ways of doing things.

My son Scotty, was two years old and learned that when he shopped with Daddy, he had to stay in the cart and sit in the little basket. But when he shopped with Mommy, he could hang off the cart and run around. He never attempted to get out with Daddy, and always tried with Mommy!

If any parent has ever tried to explain to their child the different voice tones expected in different environments, they would know that children can handle different expectations. Church voices, playground voices, inside voices, and naptime voices all have different volumes. Children can tell the difference and don't get confused when different environments call for a different standard of behavior. They learn they can run on the playground and not at church. They can jump on Grandma's sofa because Grandma lets them, but not at home. They have to clean up the toys at daycare but don't have to at Daddy's house, and sometimes have to at Mommy's house. Don't worry that they can become confused. They don't.

3. It's okay to agree to disagree.

Instead of a united front, it's better to create an "equal team." It's all right to disagree on how things should be handled. There are many right ways to parent and a few wrong ways. Opposing parents can discuss issues and identify the absolute non-negotiable ones in private and then present their agreed upon ones to the children. Ideally, this is what should take place. However, what really happens, is that one parent usually doesn't agree but will go along to present the united front to the children. The children can sense this and know there is some wiggle room to work on Mom or Dad, whoever is the parent without 100% buy-in. Children are not dumb. They know when one parent is not being totally honest. It's better for all concerned if both parents are honest with their feelings and viewpoints, but support the one parent who feels the strongest about the issue. The parent that feels the strongest will deal with it. Who is this more important for? Who has the stronger feelings about the issue?

4. The partner in the trenches is the "expert" about their child.

One thing to keep in mind is that unless a person spends 14 hours a day with a child, they rarely have the insight to know what it entails to parent that long. People who spend little time with children are idealists in their parenting: partners at work, friends, relatives, and medical professionals. They may be the experts of parenting that tell you what you 'should' do. Unfortunately, they are not around to hear you say "no" twenty times in a day and only hear the one "yes" you

wearily espouse at the end of a long day. They think you are being too permissive. When dealing with children for long hours, you have to take the pragmatists approach, not the idealists. You do what works! If you relent, even a small bit at the end of a long day, don't beat yourself up for it! It's okay.

5. There are no perfect parents. Perfection in parenting is impossible. Do what you can for MOST of the time and you are an excellent parent!

6. What one partner starts, they should finish. It's not fair to set a punishment on a child and then ask an unwilling partner to support you in carrying it out. If Dad grounds the child, then leaves town on a business trip for two days, is it really fair to ask Mom to carry out the punishment while he is gone? If parents are divorced and living in separate houses, do not expect the other parent to carry out the punishments you have issued. They may not share the same parenting style.

7. Agree on several core values before you have children if possible.

When you became pregnant, chances are you and your partner talked about what you valued and believed in parenting. Try and come up with three core values you share and will work towards. In our family, my husband and I came up with: 1. No hitting anyone, 2. Rudeness is not acceptable between anyone regardless of age, and 3. We agreed we would raise our children at home rather than bring in outside care. Your families' three parenting core values might be unique to your family.

8. Being supportive of your partner's ruling doesn't mean agreement.

You can state a different viewpoint, but support your partner on his choice. Don't undermine him to the children. The key here is to be SUPPORTIVE, not UNITED. Honest communication is preferable. A simple statement to your child, such as, "I don't feel as strongly about the sleepover, as your dad does, but his feelings are important to me, and I think you need to go and discuss this with him if you disagree with his decision."

Keep in mind that these eight rules will help to guide both of you toward a more peaceful parenting experience, more honest communication, and less guilt for not following the parenting books advice!

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