Teamwork is key when parents disagree

A door slams. A voice is raised. A child is caught in the middle. We might not realise it, but parenting arguments and parental conflict can have a lasting impact on our children[6]. When we disagree as parents, we can be overcome by stress and other emotions. It's normal to have a difference of opinion, but it's how we manage these disagreements that matters. As parents or carers, we are our kids' main role models. When children see that their parents can work together to resolve issues, they learn that they can do the same. Showing them how to resolve conflicts calmly will help set them up for life. Like a sports team works together to win, or co-workers collaborate on a project, teamwork skills are just as important in becoming a parenting team.

How to resolve parenting conflicts

Every family is unique. We've all been raised differently and had a range of life experiences. This means our ideas about how to raise children can be different as well. Disagreeing on parenting at times is very common. Your approach to parenting can be different from the approach of your partner, co-parent, or other kin-carers.

Whatever the makeup of your family – two parents, co-parents, grandparents, or carers – working together can support your child's growth and wellbeing. It can be as simple as learning a few strategies to help you better navigate conflict – together. Here are some top tips on using teamwork skills to resolve parenting conflicts:

Reduce parenting arguments by managing behaviour together

When your child acts out or does something you don't approve of, this can be challenging as parents. Backing each other up about how to respond to difficult behaviour can help you become a good team.

Having an agreed-upon and consistent approach about boundaries and rules also keeps your child feeling safe and secure[4]. This may mean jointly setting screen time limits, a bedtime, or a curfew for teenagers. Try to reach shared solutions without one of you becoming too 'strict' or the other being too 'soft.' Butting heads and ping-ponging against each other is not helpful for your child. They won't know what to do and who to listen to unless you tell them the same thing.

If there aren't clear rules, your child could challenge them, leading to further conflict.

Share household chores to limit parenting conflicts

Parental arguments can easily happen over household chores like cooking and cleaning. Most people don't like doing laundry or mopping floors, especially after a busy day or week, so planning to share these tasks may help.

It might be as simple as family meal-prepping on weekends or creating a cleaning roster. You decide together. Actively listen to each other and discuss ideas openly. Find ways to involve your child so that

they share in the responsibility. Find age-appropriate tasks that they can benefit from, like tidying their room, or (for teenagers) making their school lunch. Help each other manage home responsibilities, before the dishes pile up and the arguments start over who will wash them.

Maintain a positive home environment even when parents disagree

Family relationships are one of the main sources of child happiness and a positive home environment is linked directly with that[2].

Homes with a negative atmosphere have been linked to mental health and behavioural concerns[3]. On the other hand, a positive family dynamic including good parental communication is more likely to help children and adolescents develop feelings of freedom, love, and happiness[1].

For these reasons, it is best to avoid arguing in front of your child, particularly about them. When you do disagree, consider the other person's feelings and try to see things from their perspective without making assumptions.

Work as a team to fairly solve problems

As a member of the team that is your family, you each have a role to play. Whether you are a two-parent household or not, you can be role models for your kids, particularly when you disagree[5].

Using open communication that avoids aggression and is respectful is key to this. Heated or frequent parenting conflicts can have a lasting impact on children's wellbeing and social behaviour. Compromising and calmly figuring out solutions together can reduce stress hormones for the whole family[6].

Every person has their strengths and weaknesses, so use your strengths where your partner may struggle. For example, if your partner finds it hard to be consistent and calm when disciplining the kids, support them by encouraging them and noticing their efforts.

Everyone wins in this parenting game if you can combine skill sets and work together to form a positive team.

Create a better work and family balance

A common goal among parenting teams is creating a better balance between work and family. It's very easy for the stress of a busy day to slip into family time in the evening. You might find yourself still thinking about a frustrating meeting or a too-long to-do list, and not be present with your children. Or perhaps it leaves you feeling too tired to really connect with your partner. It is healthy to have some distance between the two for a happier home life.

Part of this is prioritising your relationships, such as with your partner and children or other family members and friends. Try carving out time that is just for your family, and it doesn't have to be large chunks of time at once. Do more of what you all enjoy, like playing a game together, a movie night or going out for dinner.

The more fun you have together, the more positive your relationships will be, which can lead to less conflict[6].

It is important to note that successful parenting does not mean staying in an unhealthy relationship, as this can impact on you and your child's wellbeing. If you need help or support, please call 0808 2000 247.

[1] Izzo, F., Baiocco, R., & Pistella, J. (2022). Children's and adolescents' happiness and family functioning: A systematic literature review. Int J Environ Res Public Health,19(24):16593.
[2] Maftei, A., Holman, A. C., & Cârlig, E. R. (2020). Does your child think you're happy? Exploring the associations between children's happiness and parenting styles. Children and Youth Services Review, 115, 105074. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105074
[3] Hess, S. (2022). Effects of inter-parental conflict on children's social well-being and the mediation role of parenting behavior. Applied Research Quality Life, 17, 2059–2085.
[4] Bergström, M., Salari, R., Hjern, A., Hognäs, R., Bergqvist, K., & Fransson, E. Importance of living arrangements and coparenting quality for young children's mental health after parental divorce: A cross-sectional parental survey. BMJ Paediatr Open, 26;5(1):e000657.
[5] Ambros, T., Coltro, B. P., Vieira, M. L., & Lopes, F. M. (2022). Coparenting and child behavior in the context of divorce: A systematic review. Psicologia: teoria e prática, 24(1), 1-23.
[6] Campbell, C. G. (2023). Two decades of coparenting research: A scoping review. Marriage & Family Review, 59(6), 379-411.