

Relationship **RX**

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A photograph of a family of four in a bright room with large windows. The father is kneeling on the left, smiling broadly and hugging a baby. The mother is on the right, also smiling and hugging the baby. A young girl in a yellow floral dress is standing next to the mother, hugging her. The scene is warm and intimate, with natural light streaming in from the windows.

PARENTING
E-BOOK

DON'T PULL A BRANGELINA!

Ramp Up Communication & Intimacy Today To Prevent Different Parenting Styles From Destroying Your Marriage

Marriage is challenging, and so is parenting. Sometimes parenting can make marriage seem impossibly difficult, particularly when you have different parenting styles.

Studies show that for two-thirds of couples, marital satisfaction dips in a year or two after childbirth and often never recovers. Children can certainly strain limited resources, such as time, energy, and money. This pressure intensifies when spouses have different approaches to raising children—sometimes approaches that are so different, they lead to fights.

How can you prevent different parenting styles from hijacking your family's happiness? And what about that other one-third of couples, the ones who stay happy after having kids? What's their secret?

PARENTING STYLES

According to media reports, different parenting styles were a key factor in Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie's divorce. But in the same way that opposites attract, your kids can actually benefit from you and your spouse's differing parenting styles—if the two of you can handle these differences in a mature and effective way.

There are three basic types of parenting styles. Each is a continuum, and chances are you and your partner fall at different places along that continuum.

Authoritarian

Authoritarian parents believe that rules are meant to be followed. Children are expected to be obedient and unquestioning, and parents are in control. Always knowing what's expected of them and knowing that the adults are in charge can make a child feel safe and secure.

However, this style of parenting can also lead to mood disorders, especially as a child gets older. A child may feel that they have no say in their own life, that their feelings and opinions don't matter. These children may become angry and resentful or lie to get around their parents' strict boundaries.

Do you know the good cop/bad cop routine? The authoritarian parent definitely goes the “tough love” route.

Permissive

The permissive parent often says yes. Rules are made but not enforced, and you may see yourself as a “friend” to your child more than an authority figure. Children’s thoughts and opinions are highly valued, which is a good thing, but a lack of boundaries may make kids feel overwhelmed and like no one is in control.

The permissive parent is the foil to the authoritarian parent, the “good cop” to the bad cop.

Authoritative

Authoritative parents create caring environments for their children, where boundaries are enforced, but everyone’s thoughts and feelings are important. Kids thrive with affection and consistency, and authoritative parenting provides plenty of both. Positive behavior is rewarded and poor behavior comes with consequences—but consequences that actually make sense in relation to the behavior.

WHEN PUSH COMES TO SHOVE

Authoritative parenting is about balance. It's marked by knowing when to set limits and when to pull back. Kids do the best when parents parent authoritatively.

Sometimes one parent is authoritarian and one is permissive. If parents are communicating effectively, with mutual respect and trust, they can play off each other's strengths and help each other become aware of weakness. A permissive parent can reign in an authoritarian parent, and an authoritarian can help a permissive parent create discipline and boundaries. Compromise is critically important in parenting, although the discussions that lead to this compromise should never happen in front of a child. Parents should show up as a united front for their children.

What happens when two dysfunctional parenting styles don't balance each other out?

If parents aren't able to have mutually respectful conversations about parenting and if they lack the self-awareness to hear constructive criticism, then a child may wind up confused, overwhelmed, stressed, and unsure of their parents' expectations.

That child may adapt by playing the parents off of one another, trying to get sympathy from the permissive parent when the authoritarian parent enforces a boundary, and in the process, increasing the conflict between the parents.

Parents with differing parenting styles have to be careful to keep a child from getting in the middle of their conflict. If something comes up that you're not prepared to deal with, step away. Tell the child, "Mom and Dad are going to need a moment to talk about this, and while we figure it out, we need you to put this game on hold/ hang out in your room, etc."

Neglectful or Abusive Parenting

Sometimes the line between authoritarian parenting and abusive parenting or permissive parenting and neglectful parenting is blurry. It's especially hard to recognize unhealthy patterns if they were present in your own childhood home. If you suspect that your parenting style or your partners' parenting style is physically or verbally abusive or neglectful (you often don't know where the kids are, what they're up to, or if they're getting their homework done, eating regular meals, bathing regularly, etc.), then you should seek professional help.

HOW TO GET ON THE SAME PAGE AS YOUR PARTNER/CO-PARENT

Work through your own issues to understand where your parenting style comes from.

How were you raised? What do you think was healthy about how you were raised, and what was less-healthy? What do you want to pass on to your children from your own childhood and what do you definitely not want to pass on?

Your partner should do this work as well. This work needs to be done separately but should be shared and used as a basis for discussion among partners. Sometimes this work requires the help of professional tools and resources.

Don't compete. Collaborate and compromise.

If you and your spouse are involved in a struggle of wills, everyone loses—most of all, your child. Communication is key here. After you've identified your parenting styles, talk with your partner about how these styles can complement each other to the benefit of your child.

Read and discuss parenting books with your partner. Set aside time to discuss the values you hope to instill in your children and how you plan to do this. Talk about rewards and discipline and establish some ground rules. These rules may be things like no corporal punishment, reward a kid with a chosen activity rather than junk food, etc. Have a plan for when something comes up in your child's presence that you need to discuss in private so that you can present a united front. It's easier to decide ahead of time how to handle an unexpected situation than when emotions are high. Sometimes it's helpful to have a written list of your parenting ground rules that both partners sign.

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Understand that it may come down to trial and error.

Part of compromise is being willing to test your co-parent's approach for a while, even if it's not the path you prefer. Maybe a doctor recommended your child take ADHD meds. One parent is in, but the other wants to try only behavioral therapy and other approaches. One of you may have to be willing to try the other parent's approach for a set period of months, with the understanding that if the situation doesn't improve, you'll then try the other parent's method. This is agreeing to disagree in the most cordial and effective way possible.

Show unity in front of your child.

This is a biggie. Even if you think the way your partner has handled a situation is completely counterproductive, wait until you're not around your child to bring it up. It's stressful for children when their parents fight, and that stress can be compounded when the fight is about them.

Also, respect boundaries. Step-parents should leave discipline up to bio-parents and only weigh in behind the scenes.

Forgive each other.

You're going to make mistakes. So is your spouse. Acknowledge these mistakes and learn from them, rather than playing defense. Apologize when necessary. Be gracious when your spouse apologizes, and apologize to your children when your mistakes have negatively impacted their lives.

WHEN YOU'VE COME TO AN IMPASSE

Sometimes you can talk and talk about a parenting issue, and you still don't feel as if you've gained clarity. In those times, there are a few questions you can ask yourselves to reach a final decision.

Which parent will be affected more?

If your child wants to add another lesson to a busy after-school schedule, let the parent who chauffeurs the child to all these lessons make the decision.

Which parent feels more strongly about the issue?

If you eat meat, but your spouse is vegetarian and invested in raising your children as vegetarians—and your pediatrician has given the okay—why not let your spouse win this round? (Remember, good parents, are flexible parents. Things can always be renegotiated down the road, when children are old enough to make more decisions on their own.)

Which parent has more experience in the matter?

If your child is having a hard time reading and you don't think it's a big deal, but your spouse tutored children in reading for years and thinks your kid needs extra help, trust their judgement.

INGREDIENTS FOR A HEALTHY MARRIAGE

Children can be a strain on any marriage, but a healthy marriage is more resilient. Remember that one-third of couples we mentioned earlier, who report happy marriages even after having children? Let's talk about how they do it.

Focus on fun.

You and your spouse are the foundation of your family. You have to take care of yourselves and your own relationship, in order to take the best possible care of your children. To raise happy children, you and your spouse need to enjoy each other and make regular time for fun, whether that's a weekly date night, a monthly weekend away while the kids stay with the grandparents, or an occasional night in, when you send the kids to stay with friends.

Regular and playful sex is a key part of maintaining a solid foundation for your family. Mix it up. Try experimenting with toys. Play games. Make and share lists of things that you love or that make you feel loved, sexually and otherwise, or of personal goals and the things you'd like to try (in and out of the bedroom!).

Maintain curiosity about each other as people, rather than always thinking of each other as parents. Cultivate friendship and flirtation in whatever way works for you. Be playful with each other, both while engaging the kids, and when you're on your own as a couple.

Create connections.

As a couple and as a family, you need a common culture that binds everyone together.

You and your spouse can create this culture through sharing your goals, values, and vision for your family and creating daily, weekly, and holiday rituals that support this vision.

Maybe you have different parenting styles, but it's important to both of you that your children grow up to be community-minded. What kind of ritual will you design to ensure this happens? Maybe you'll volunteer together one Saturday each month, and everyone in the family will take turns choosing which organizations you'll help. Maybe you'll do chores for elderly neighbors.

Finding common ground and a shared value system deepens your admiration and respect for your spouse. Daily rituals, such as a commitment to exercise together or to tell your spouse one thing you appreciate about them every night before bed, also play an important role in the connection.

Communicate effectively, especially during conflict.

Be aware of your body language and try to keep it open and inviting when you're having a heated discussion, rather than closed and defensive. Avoid "you" statements and focus on "I" statements, and avoid hyperbole, such as "always" and "never."

Rather than saying, "You always let Sally get away with not cleaning the playroom, and then I have to deal with the tantrum when the baby breaks her toys," say, "I feel frustrated when I come home and the playroom is a mess, especially if Sally is upset because the baby got into her toys. I would appreciate it if you would enforce the clean-after-playing rule."

BE A TEAM, EVEN WHEN YOU DISAGREE

Different parenting styles can be stressful, but as long as parents have a strong relationship, based on mutual respect, kindness, and intimacy, they can work through these differences and come out as stronger parents. Kids are going to deal with inconsistency in the real world because not everyone communicates or relates in the same way. If they learn to navigate these differences in the safe and secure environment of a loving home, and if parents learn to navigate these differences in the safe and secure environment of a healthy relationship, everyone will be better served.

Want to improve intimacy in your marriage? The [Intimacy Now](#) program is a self-paced course you can do alone or with a partner to learn how to take better care of that most foundational relationship—your relationship with your spouse. It comes with a money-back guarantee, so you really have nothing to lose. Don't you want to learn to be a better partner, in order to be a better parent?