

When Parents Have Different Parenting Styles

There are many reasons why parents adopt a particular parenting style. Regardless of whether it is the result of their own upbringing, following the trends of society or because they want to be the best, most fair parents they know how to be, the style that is adopted impacts the way children behave. It is typically agreed that when a parent's style is inconsistent there is an increased chance that children's behaviour and ability to meet parental expectations will be as equally inconsistent. Making matters more difficult is the familiar scenario when two parents have different and opposing parenting styles. For this reason this article will focus on possible solutions to counteract the effects of two different parenting styles existing under one roof.

Consistency is key

There is little doubt that it is easier when parents have the same parenting style; however, if we throw honesty and a splash of realism into the mix, we often find it is a rarity for parents to have the same approach. Typically one parent is too soft and the other too firm, one is as consistent as the sun rising and setting while the other ebbs and flows like changing tides. The differences in parenting styles often strains parenting relationships and, unfortunately, can cause irreparable damage to the way households function.

While it would be nice to think that fixing this parenting dilemma is as simple as locating the most ineffective parenting style and changing it, the problem is far more deep seated because values, beliefs and ideals swim the murky depths alongside parenting styles. In other words, to ask someone to change their parenting style is like asking them to change an innate part of their personality.

Even when the most willing of participants aims to change part of themselves, it takes years of self-reflection and is seldom as successful without a professional who can probe, push and support someone out of their comfort zone. Even then the degree of difficulty is high and the success to failure ratios, particularly in the early days, favours failure. As such, it makes sense to reason that changing parenting behaviour just because someone suggests and/or insists upon it is unlikely to do anything but increase parenting conflict. For this reason it seems logical to step outside the box to discover a possible solution to this problem.

Understanding your own style

Rather than analysing another person's parenting style it is far more beneficial to know and understand your own. No parenting style is perfect despite some being more fruitful than others; however, each will be more or less effective depending on emotion levels, sleeplessness, individual upbringings, values, beliefs and a child's and parent's determination levels (to name a few).

Once personal parenting styles are understood, strengths and weaknesses become more obvious. The on flow of this insight means individuals can set themselves goals to improve their own parenting decisions and create greater consistency regarding how they implement household rules. For example, if a parent becomes aware that one of their weaknesses is giving in, they might set themselves a goal of saying no to a child's request and sticking to it.

Acceptance is an elusive key

People who are most successful at relationships tend to have a few things in common. One trait is that they understand that the only thing they can control in a relationship is their own behaviour. While they might not like a particular behaviour in their partner they will not strive to stamp out that behaviour. Instead they will respectfully voice the types of behaviour they will accept and tolerate. Another commonality is that they understand that their own way of doing things is unique to them. It does not mean that they are not out to achieve the same end goal, but favour a different way of getting there, for example, while one person might

make a cup of tea by pouring in the hot water first, another might add the milk to the cup beforehand. The end result is still tea despite there being a slightly different flavour.

When parenting with someone who has a different style to yourself, it may be helpful to see them as the person that makes the tea in a different way. Unless there is a serious problem where their behaviour calls into question a child's right to be physically and emotionally safe, there is no real reason why their way of doing things should be perceived as categorically wrong.

Balancing the good cop and bad cop

When one parent has a more authoritarian parenting style, it is not uncommon for the other parent to overcompensate and become too soft. Naturally the same applies when a parent gets firmer because the other is perceived as being too soft. Becoming a softie to make it fairer on children does not necessarily do children any good. In fact, the major variant in approaches means it makes it more difficult for children to understand the rules and meet household expectations. As such, the focus may need to shy away from how discipline is instilled and shine a light on what parents can agree upon regarding when discipline should be enforced.

Establish a baseline

Rather than focusing a lot of time and effort on changing someone's parenting style it could be more fruitful to focus efforts on what both parents can agree upon. Sitting down and having conversations about the types of behaviours both parents expect can help to establish a starting point. For example, if both parents agree that there is a zero tolerance for children swearing, hitting, and being physically destructive etc. then both parents have something they can jointly implement without giving children mixed messages.

If both parents agree that children are not to hurt others then there is no reason why both parents cannot use their own preferred way of parenting (save abusive tendencies). The firmer parent can crack down on the child and dish out a punishment (because that is what authoritarian parents do) and the softer parent can stop and talk to the child about not doing it again. Naturally each style has different impacts on the child's tendency to replicate the same behaviours again, but on this occasion, this is not the point. Instead the point is that this type of approach has both parents working towards firming the idea that certain behaviours will not be tolerated. The benefits of focusing on agreed rules could be strengthened more if both parents decide upon a minimum punishment for different behaviours. The outcome means that firmer parents can see that parents with a softer side are making sure that children face consequences if and when needed. Alternatively, a maximum punishment can also be discussed to limit the extreme punishments parents with an authoritarian parent style are likely to implement. Another way, although there is no limit to the number of ways this topic could be approached, is to agree that both parents will sit down together and discuss and agree upon a consequence together before it is given to the child/children.

Leaving the other parent to do their thing

As previously mentioned, it is hard not to want to change someone else's behaviour. Yet the success rate of achieving such an outcome is low. By asking oneself if the other parent is instilling the rules, parents will be able to see that the other parent is not out to sabotage efforts. Instead they can choose to realise that the other parent is simply making tea in a different way. When parents fight to make the other see the error of their ways, they frequently ignite a will in the other person that makes them increasingly determined not to change their parenting approach. Instead, letting them deal with children in their own way can help decrease the levels of tension felt when different parenting approaches exist.

Summing it up

It is typical for many households to have two parents with different parenting approaches. When parents have different styles it can create tension and break down relationships. While it would be nice to have both parents share the same parenting style it is seldom the case. Parents are individuals in their own right, with their own unique upbringing, values and beliefs. As such, focusing one's efforts on changing a person's parenting style rarely yields good outcomes. Before starting to analyse what needs to happen to raise well behaved children, it is important that individuals first understand their own parenting style. All parenting styles have flaws and being able to identify individual strengths and weaknesses can help improve individual approaches. Knowing that changing another person's parenting style is practically pointless means that parents can develop a greater acceptance that the key to success relies on working together in different ways. One such way could focus on establishing a baseline for the types of behaviours that will not be tolerated by either parent. When both parents work to instill the idea of unacceptable behaviour there is greater room for parents to deal with these problems in their own unique ways. There will always be a greater and lesser effect on a child's inclination to repeat a particular behaviour depending upon an individual's parenting style; however, the main point being discussed in this article is that parents can better support each other when they create consistency around reiterating the rules rather than the way broken rules are dealt with.

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