

Royalton Family Corner



Having trouble with discipline? Get on the same page with your partner

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As parents, we are constantly trying to read and better understand our children. We learn to recognize their moods, sense their feelings and identify what triggers negative and positive emotions. Our children are doing the same with us. Even infants pick up on cues from their parents and learn incredibly early on that crying evokes a response.

All this learning morphs as our children grow and mature, and over time, children learn to recognize who to go to depending on their needs and wants ("Dad! Mom won't let me...!"). Oftentimes, depending on how we were raised by our own parents, our parenting styles and methods of disciplining can greatly differ from that of our partner. We may butt heads on how to best discipline our children and tension can build over time, causing a parenting divide (good cop/bad cop).

This conflict comes up frequently in my house, especially as we continue to spend long days and evenings together under one roof juggling work, day-to-day tasks and plans for the upcoming school year. My husband is much stricter and more rigid with our three kids whereas I find giving – and adhering to – punishment more difficult. It's simply not my style and we sometimes struggle. In the middle of disciplining our kids, my husband and I can end up bickering with each other and pointing fingers at our different techniques. All of this

happens in front of our kids, resulting in an extremely uncomfortable (and confusing) situation for our family.

I did some online research regarding different parenting styles and came across the Center for Parenting Education. The experts there advise that our children need us to provide them with both nurturing (providing children with understanding, acceptance, support and time among other basics like medical care and shelter) and structure (giving direction, using discipline, following through with consequences, setting limits and holding children accountable for the behavior). They note that when a parent is in the nurturing role, he/she accepts their children as they are and does not expect any changes in behavior. In the structure role, the parent expects a change in behavior and a show of growth, maturity and ability. There are benefits to both roles and a blend is best: when a parent is nurturing, a child feels listened to, worthy and trusting while the structure role gives kids experience in making decisions, tolerating disappointment and learning from their mistakes. Both roles are vital but sometimes hard to balance and enact, says Certified Parenting Educator Debra MacDonald, who is based outside of Philadelphia.

During a difficult situation where disciplining is needed, she recommends parents remove themselves from the scene and take a private moment to discuss behavioral consequences. It is important to be a united

front, MacDonald notes. If the situation is heated and you can't step away to have a quick private talk with your partner, be sure to take time later to discuss the ways you both could have handled it better, she says. Understanding your partner's temperament, and your children's, are also important when it comes to parenting styles.

"If, for example, I'm outgoing and I approach a new situation head-on in an outgoing way, but I know my son is more reserved and wants a lay of the land before going in, than I shouldn't expect him to be immediately social at first. We shouldn't expect certain behaviors if that's not their temperament. We have to remember that everyone has a different temperament – your partner, you and your children, and it dic-

tates how you parent," MacDonald said.

Above all, communication and discussion with your partner are key. If you can, try to get on the same page before you go into a situation where bad behavior could be triggered. Have a game plan for how to handle those difficult situations so you don't blow your top and lose control. When discipline is needed, take yourself out of the equation and focus only on your child – not on how you wish your partner would have responded, MacDonald says.

"Try to really get that communication going and review situations you've already had and talk about how you can handle it better next time," MacDonald said. "The more you're able to understand each other, the better."



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