



Parenting on the Same Page: Talk about Parenting in Ways that Work

We grow in relationships by working out differences. Every marriage is a “cross-cultural” experience – we each come from unique families with unique stories from and about those families. Partners establish a new culture when they come together. The more intentional the culture, the stronger the family ties. Couples rarely talk about family differences before having children, so easy for parenting styles to clash based on different backgrounds and assumptions.

Parents must take action steps to resolve expected differences in parenting and family values: come to a compromise on practices with which both parents are comfortable. These three steps help parents get on the same page:

Step 1 – Create Safety

Cannot reach a compromise until we feel physically and emotionally safe. Won't reach agreement in the heat of an argument. Both brains must be calm and receptive. Positive communication skills are required and avoid criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling.

Step 2 – Brainstorm agreements

Without too much discussion or analysis, just take a few moments to brainstorm some parenting practices on which you both agree. Maybe it is homework before screen time, maybe it is speaking respectfully to kids and each other, maybe it is sitting down to dinner together on a regular basis. Celebrate your agreements.

Step 3 – Celebrate differences

One parent may be great at roughhousing, the other at storytelling. You don't have to do things in exactly the same way to be effective parenting partners. Create space for one parent to do what they do best, while you step back into support mode and vice versa.





Step 4 – Identify your priorities

What are you absolutely not willing to compromise because it is too important for you? Define these issues clearly before you start talking. Be flexible on as many issues as possible and be firm about your strong values. Discuss how you came to these priorities. Talk about your hopes and dreams for your kids.

Step 5 – Listen, listen, listen

Maybe you are the parent who reads all the books and takes all the classes. Make sure you listen carefully to your partner's priorities and make sure you understand their point of view and the source of their ideas – their own childhood, what they see in other families, their worries about the future. Your first goal is to “get” your partner and help them feel understood and respected.

Step 6 – Be willing to be influenced

Listen with an open mind and heart to your partner's point of view. Gottman: “You can only be influential if you accept influence.” Compromise never feels perfect. Everyone gains something and loses something. Most important is to feel understood, respected and honored in your dreams. Reach for flexibility and recognize the value of parenting as a team and how that will help your child feel safe and supported.

Step 7 – Explore options

Read books, articles, or blog posts from reliable sources or watch videos about different strategies and talk about how they line up with each of your priorities and goals. Talk with parents you respect and consider taking an onsite or online parenting class together to learn new ways of addressing challenges. Revisit, revise and work on flexibility as you try new approaches and work to find common ground.

Step 8 – Be patient and positive

Recognize that change takes time and focus on progress not perfection. Notice and celebrate any positive changes in self or other. Notice and discuss any improvement you see in your children's behavior. Understand that things may get worse before they get better. Ask for feedback and talk about what is going right – just like you do with your kids!

EXERCISE:

- Open, honest conversation telling each other your parenting beliefs, goals and ideals
- Remain respectful
- Reflect back to your partner the important points you hear, check for understanding
- Name your most important needs



- Try to connect how these needs are connected to your childhood and other sources of your beliefs
- Talk about what your beliefs mean to you and what you fear will happen if you bend about these beliefs

Answer the following questions together:

- I feel that you are a good parent because _____.
- I feel that my role as a parent is to _____.
- My parents were _____ and I feel that was _____.
- Discipline means _____.
- It's most important to me for my child to be _____.
- My goal in raising my child is _____.

Make a plan and review it weekly for a while:

1. Together make a list of common behavior challenges your children display.
2. Explore options – talk with others, read, look online for ways to address specific challenges
3. Propose a plan of action to respond to these challenges that you can both support.
4. Take time to come to an agreement of each plan of action. Remember to be flexible whenever possible.
5. Review the plan considering your and your partner's most important needs, values and beliefs.
6. Make a plan to check in weekly (for perhaps a few weeks) about how united your approach has been and reflect on the outcomes in terms of children's behavior and your relationships with the children and each other.

