Picture this: Your oldest child wants to stay up and play video games with your partner. Being that it is an hour past your child’s bedtime, you say, “Not tonight, you have five more minutes” and leave the room. It is getting late, so you go to check on your child, only to find they are still playing games with your partner. You walk into the room saying, “Time to shut that off and get ready for bed” to your child. You shoot a look to your co-parent and say, “Thanks a lot.” As you leave the room, you overhear your co-parent say, “I would let you stay up, but you know how they can be.”

All parenting teams have differences in how they handle situations with their kids. Differences in parenting approaches can be good for kids, helping them to be learn how to be more flexible and adaptable in the future. Conflict which is not resolved in a healthy way, though, can cause stress for children and this stress can become toxic over time.

The good news is, working as a parenting team and communicating so both parents feel respected is possible. Here are some strategies to try:

1. Make an honest attempt to understand each other.

It can be extremely difficult to truly understand your co-parent’s perspective, especially during a disagreement. When listening to your co-parent, it can be easy to roll your eyes when they share their thoughts because you know all too well that they never follow through. Whenever possible, try to listen to your co-parent as if they were a stranger who you knew very little about. This can help you to understand where they are coming from without mixing in your own ideas about what they might mean based on you expect of them.

1. Think before speaking.

The saying, “It’s not what you say, it’s how you say it,” applies to communicating with your co-parent. A lot of times, a parent does not disagree with what their co-parent is saying to them, but they feel disrespected by how it is said. Instead of saying “You always let Jack play outside alone and one day he’s going to get hurt and it’ll be your fault,” you could try, “Could you please make sure Jack doesn’t play outside alone? I’m worried he might hurt himself.” Using phrases like “I feel…” or “In my opinion…” and asking your co-parent to do something instead of telling them, can go a long way in making sure communication is positive.

1. Recognize when it is time to finish the conversation later.

Sometimes, a conversation might get to the point where you or your co-parent become too upset to be able to see each other’s point of view or compromise. Other times, you may find that the place or time is not appropriate for a certain discussion, such as if you are in from of the kids. When the conversation is no longer productive or supportive to both co-parents, it can be helpful to step away from the conversation and allow both parents to cool off before coming back to the conversation later.

References

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