

Parenting may be one of the toughest jobs in the world. One of the challenges of raising children is parenting with a united front with your spouse or partner. Why? People are different. Everyone has different backgrounds, needs, behaviors, and parenting styles.

If your daughter says she will be in at 9 o'clock in the evening but does not come in until 10 o'clock, do you and your partner agree on a consequence, if any?

When caregivers form a united front, children get the consistency they need. Lack of consistency from parents can lead to children feeling confused about expectations, and having problems linking a “cause” with the resulting “effect.”<sup>1</sup> If your son knows that when he does *this (the cause)*, then *that (the effect or consequence)* will happen, no matter who is home or under what conditions, he is more likely to make wise choices.

### **Children Push To Feel Safe**

Children naturally need to feel stability and consistency in their life. At the same time, they naturally push boundaries that are set for them, whether it's a rule on clearing the dinner table or a limit on computer time. That's because children need firm and consistent limits to see whether and how their parent or guardian will respond. Children need parents and other adults to reaffirm their safety, security, and sense of well-being.

A united front with shared expectations and agreed upon discipline can decrease the number of times a child tries to test boundaries. Consider this: your daughter asks for an ice cream and you tell her not until after dinner. She asks the same thing of your partner and immediately gets an ice cream bar. If a child realizes she can get different answers from her parents, she is more likely to try to manipulate them to get what she wants.

Most children, especially those entering teenage years, know parents' weaknesses and how to manipulate them. However, with a united front, your daughter knows that what you say will be the same as what your partner says or does.

### **Don't Undermine Authority of the Other**

Parenting with a united front means neither undermines a partner's authority as a parent—even as kids grow up and expectations change. Adults may need to routinely review their expectations and modify decisions so they can agree on rules. When parents discuss how well the rules—and consequences—are working for each child, they can decide together what kinds of changes may be more effective. The goal of these discussions is to reach agreement so that both partners can back each other up in front of the children.<sup>2</sup>

Be consistent and supportive of your spouse and try not to disagree in front of the children. Talk privately and sort out your feelings and ideas without your child's involvement. After you and your partner discuss concerns and jointly agree that a punishment needs to be revised, talk with your child. Sometimes explaining the change

is appropriate—“I’m sorry I reacted too quickly” or “I didn’t understand the seriousness of your behavior.”

### **Partnership is the Center of Family**

The partner relationship between the adults who do most of the child rearing is generally considered the center of a family. In a two-parent family, both partners need to nurture their relationship to keep it vital: it takes two to make it work. When both partners contribute to that adult relationship, the parenting bond with the kids can be stronger.

Parenting together as a united front will help you and your partner enjoy shared child-rearing responsibilities, which also helps build stronger, more secure, and more resilient children.<sup>2</sup>

How can parents develop a strong partnership and work together on rules and expectations for children? What are some of the building blocks that can contribute to a united front?

- Communicating personal needs and expectations clearly
- Spending time together
- Staying emotionally and physically connected
- Managing conflict together
- Understanding developmental stages of children and sharing expectations are essential for parenting with a united front.<sup>3</sup>

The most important relationship in a family is often the one between parents or partners. When you work together, you show your child that you are a strong team and that you agree on things—from curfews to pre-dinner ice cream to consequences for breaking family rules.