

## STEPS TO DISCUSSING PARENTING WITH YOUR PARTNER

1. Sit down together and talk about your views on parenting. Here are some questions to talk about:

- What goals do you have for your child (say by the time he is 15), and what values do you want him to learn?
  - What do you think are appropriate ways to discipline your child?
  - Who will be/is responsible for caring for the child most of the time and how will the other parent support the primary caregiver? How will you divide up the care of the child?
  - If parents are not living together, how will you arrange for the child to see the non-custodial parent? What will the transportation, time, financial and other arrangements be for your child? How will you make sure you don't put the child in the middle?
  - What are/will be your rules about food, bedtime, activities, chores and other daily routines?
  - What parts of parenting do you think you are good at, and which parts are more difficult for you? What are your partner's strengths and weaknesses as a parent?
2. Make a list of what you DO agree on, and identify the standards of behavior that you agree are realistic for your child's age. Also list any strategies you both think are important. For example, you may disagree about punishments, but you may agree that both parents should set an example of respect and honesty. Or you may agree that it's important to tell him you appreciate it when he does what you ask.
3. After you've identified points of agreement, begin to list areas of disagreement. **Talk openly, calmly and respectfully about what you each believe and where you learned those beliefs.** Together, use your childhood memories to help you identify the things you want to repeat and the things you'd like to leave behind. Identify how incidences in your childhood made you feel, understanding that nobody's childhood is perfect. Do you want to repeat behaviors that left you with negative feelings, such as resentment?
4. Identify ways that you can learn new strategies to replace the old ways that are a source of conflict. Find out about parenting books, classes and counseling that will help you.
5. Check in with each other about how you're doing together as parents. Give new strategies a chance to take hold and give your child a chance to learn that mom and dad are working together. Do not expect your child's behavior to change immediately, just because you are trying a new mutually agreed upon tactic.
6. If, after giving these steps a good try, your levels of conflict continue, seek professional counseling. It will be in the best interests of your child to develop a plan as early as possible.

## SOME TIPS FOR GETTING ALONG WITH THE OTHER PARENT

- Sometimes the reasons for parenting disputes are because one partner thinks that a child is capable of understanding something and the other disagrees. Knowing where your child is developmentally will help you to make better decisions. Do not compare your child to other children. You can use examples based on what they are capable of doing and not doing. For instance, if you ask them to get something out of their toy box, do they understand and go get it? If not expecting your child to be able to understand certain things may be unreasonable.
- Find out what both of your parenting strengths and weaknesses are. Many times both parents want the same things for their kids. Compliment your partner on his/her strengths. Don't just point out your partner's flaws.
- The majority of parenting disagreements are over discipline methods and when it is appropriate to discipline. One parent may think that spanking is the best method and the other may prefer time outs or something else. One of the most effective ways to resolve this issue is to talk about it. Find out the reasons why your partner feels the way he/she does. There are pros and cons to every form of parenting. Talk about why your partner thinks his/her discipline style is the better method. Sometimes talking about it will help you to see each other's point of view.
- If the discussion gets heated, agree to disagree. Fighting about how to parent is only going to make the situation worse. Walk away, take a break and discuss it when you are not angry.
- Plan ahead. Discuss problem situations you are having with your children. For instance, if you are having a problem with your child having temper tantrums, discuss how you think this should be handled. If you have a plan in action, it will be easier for both of you to follow each other's wishes.
- Pick your battles. Some things you may never agree on. You don't have to agree on everything. Find the issues that are most important to you and work on resolving those first.
- Do not argue about parenting in front of your children. This is easier said than done. The best way to handle a situation you don't agree with is not to interrupt but to wait till later and then discuss how you think it could have been handled differently.
- Work on role modeling communication. If your children see that you communicate and problem solve together, they will grow up to do the same. Children often repeat patterns of their own parents