

Communication and Co-Parenting



Fatherhood Training Series

Center for the Prevention of Child
Maltreatment/SD Department of Health

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*We see things not as they are, but
as we are....(The Talmud)*



Expanding the Conversation



*There is no such thing as a
baby...*



Mother and Child



Father and Child



Mother and Father and Child



Extended Family and Child



The Reciprocal Feedback Loop





Paternal Orientation and Maternal Orientation



The mother is critically important to the father's relationship with the baby

The father is critically important to the mother's relationship with the baby

Family Orientation




- The relationship between mother and father forms and informs the baby's development and the baby's development forms and informs the relationship between the mother and father



NATURE ABHORS A VACUUM

Four Types of Fathers

- Participator (devotes himself to the baby, sometimes to the exclusion of the mother)
- Renouncer (treats childcare as his partner's sole domain, not his)
- Reciprocator (shares care and improvises when necessary)
- Conflicted (veering inconsistently between all of these positions)



A father who is physically present might nevertheless be experienced as lost, absent, uncaring or non-existent in the young child's inner world, depending on the father's involvement as well as the way in which the mother invests in his participation, and speaks of the father to the child

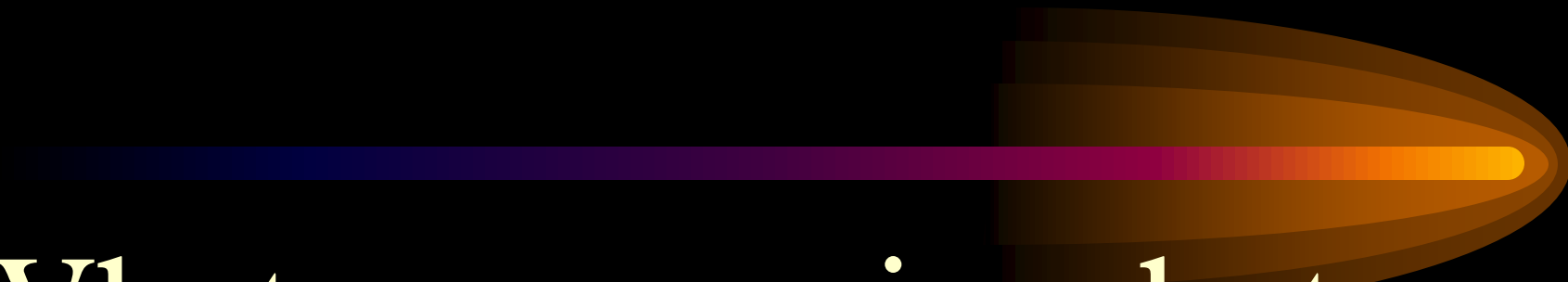
The Basic Co-Parenting Paradigm



No one is to blame for what happens, but each partner is responsible *for what happens...*



"O.K., I admit it, we're lost, but the important thing is to remain focussed on whose fault it is."



What you see is what you
are likely to get



Gender Stereotyping



Maternal Deprivation

VS.

Father Absence



Heterocentrism



Heterocentrism



Co-Parenting



Co-parenting exists no matter what the nature of the parents' partnership is (never married, married, separated, divorced, friendly, hostile, etc.)



What Constitutes Co-Parenting?

- Making decisions together
- Sharing child-care responsibilities
- Striving to agree on who your children are, what they need and want, and how you'll go about giving it to them

What Constitutes Co-Parenting?



- Valuing the differences between you and your partner
- Realizing those differences make family life interesting for the two of you, and make life better for your child

What Constitutes Co-Parenting?



- Putting your children's well-being first when disagreements arise
- Finding a way to talk about conflicts so that you both feel heard and understood
- Committing to finding ways to grow individually and in tandem in response to your ever-changing family

What Constitutes Co-Parenting?

Recognizing and appreciating gender differences that lead you both to think, feel and behave in distinct ways with respect to child-rearing, and with respect to how you express love, anger, fear and sadness to your child and to each other

Evidence for Effective Co-Parenting

- A sense that you are both on the same “team”—the child’s team
- Dividing up childcare “equitably” (not necessarily “equally”)
- Caring together rather than feeling alone
- Working collaboratively to balance work and family responsibilities

Mis-Aligned and Dis-Connected



Aligned and Moving in the Same Direction





Obstacles to Effective Co-Parenting



- Believing your partner is “second in command” and of lesser parenting importance
- Keeping a running tab of what your partner does and does not do (“bean-counting”)
- Micro-managing your partner’s relationship with your child

Obstacles to Effective Co-Parenting



- Expressing unhappiness with your partner in front of others (your child, extended family members, friends)
- Using work and other adult responsibilities as an excuse for not pulling your weight at home (especially for un-fulfilling tasks like laundry, dishes, etc.)

Obstacles to Effective Co-Parenting

- Withholding information from your partner to see if s/he will figure it out for him/herself (passive aggression)
- Interfering with your partner's creativity or spontaneity under the guise of "protecting the child"
- Becoming overly competitive with each other

How Fathers Absent Themselves



- “I’m not good with feelings”
- “I can’t take the crying”
- “She knows best, she’s the mom”
- “Based on the kind of father my own father was, my child will be better off not having me in his/her life”
- “If I have to be second and can’t be first, I’d rather not even play”

How Mothers Exile Fathers



- “He’s not good with feelings”
- “He never wanted this baby anyway”
- “He never babysat or took care of his younger siblings like I have done”
- “Parenthood is my sole area of expertise—if I share it with him, I’ll be less important and less necessary to my baby.”

How Mothers and Fathers are Different



- Mothers feed infants more than fathers do, while fathers vocalize and play more than mothers do
- Fathers tend to excite and surprise children more than women do
- Fathers tend to encourage children to take risks while ensuring safety and security

Attachment v. Affiliation



Attachment v. Affiliation



Attachment v. Affiliation



Infants tend to prefer their mothers
when distressed

Infants tend to prefer their fathers
when they are content or happy





Da Vinci “Madonna and Child”





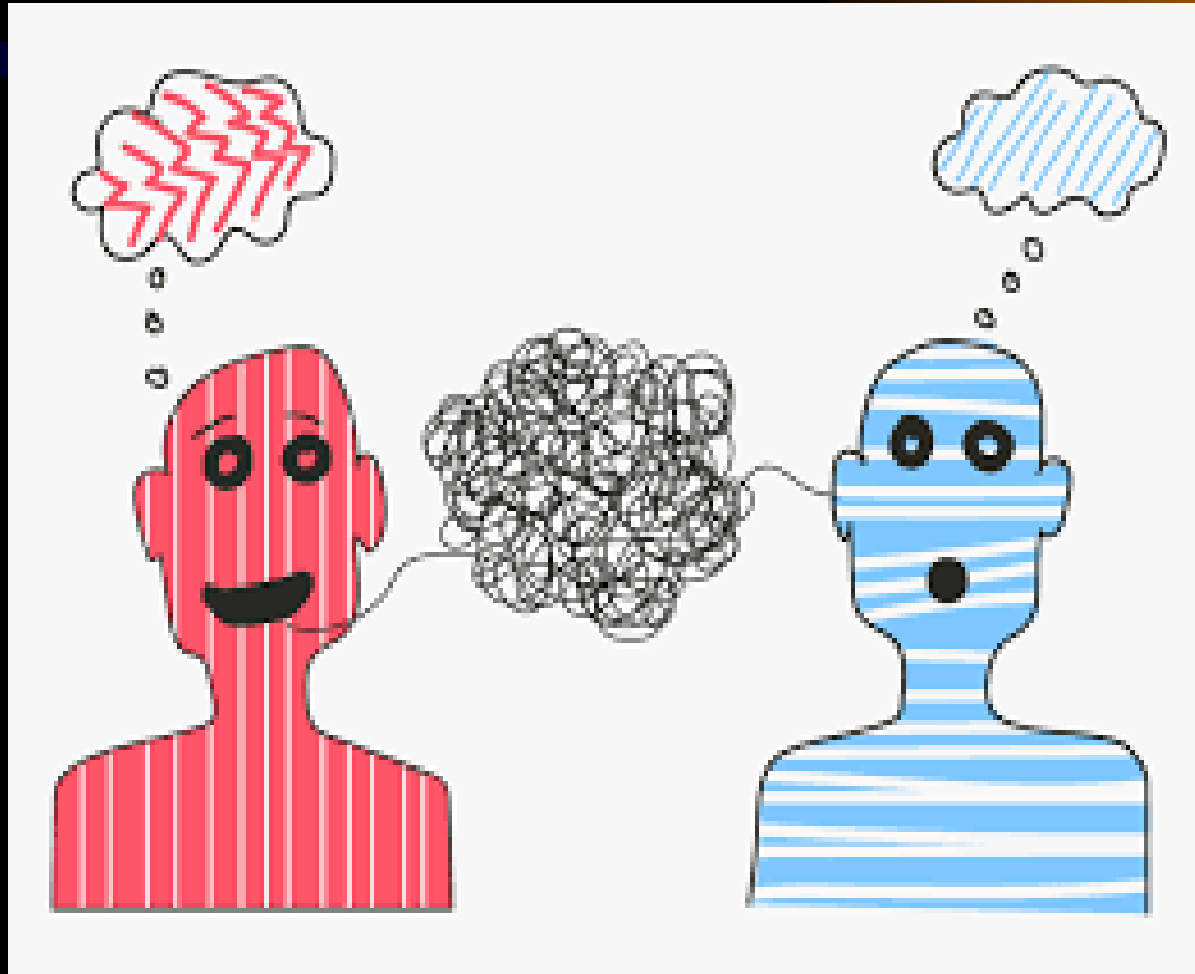
A Part

And

Apart



Communication



Effective Co-Parent Communication



- “I” statements that focus on you rather than your partner:

“I feel angry when you show up late...”

v.

“You’re always late...”

Effective Co-Parent Communication



- Ask questions to clarify what your partner is saying:

“Do you mean when I am 20 minutes late, or when I am very late and don’t let you know ahead of time?”

Effective Co-Parent Communication

- Paraphrase your understanding of what your partner just said to make sure you're on the same page and get the important part of the message:

“It sounds like you feel like I take advantage of you when I am late and you get angry and frustrated.”

Co-Parent Communication

- Pay attention to body language



Conflict



Conflict



Fair and Effective Fighting



The worst fights are
generally caused by our
efforts to avoid fights



Rules for Fair and Effective Fighting



- The partner who has the concern is responsible for bringing it up
- The partner who has the concern should take first responsibility for offering a possible solution that likely requires changes from *both* individuals
- “Your emergency is not my emergency”

Rules for Fair and Effective Fighting



Time-outs can be called by either partner when emotions are becoming too highly-charged...

...but only with a commitment regarding how/when to resume and resolve the disagreement, not with the intent of sweeping it under the rug



5 Communication Detours



- Contempt
- Complaining
- Criticism
- Defensiveness
- Stonewalling

Contempt



“Great timing giving him
sweets right before bed,
making sure that he’ll never
go to sleep!”

Complaining



“Why is it always my job
to make sure that the
diaper bag has diapers and
a bottle in it?

Criticism



“You’re not holding her the right way, and that’s not how you burp a baby!”

Defensiveness



“Alright, I may not have measured the formula correctly, but what about the time you took her out in the stroller in the heat of summer and forgot her water bottle?!? That wasn’t very smart now, was it??”

Stonewalling



“I’m so done talking to you
about this...”

When Problem Solving, Try to Avoid...



- Interrupting
- Ignoring
- Blaming
- Insulting
- Over-generalizing
- HANGRY discussions

Compromise



The Full Spectrum of Feelings



The Three H's



- Hear me
- Help me
- Hold me

Gatekeeping



Gatekeeping Comments

- “When you dress him, make sure that you...”
- “Could you please watch your language in front of her? She’s going to pick up on it...”
- “Did you help him brush his teeth for the full two minutes this time?”



The Reality Is That...



...as long as you do *somewhat*
more positive parenting than
negative parenting, things are
likely to turn out fine

Myths about Young Fathers



In general, young fathers are victims of massive misunderstanding and discrimination. As a result, they may be rejected and ignored, disparaged and excluded, condemned and punished by their partners, by their family, and by society at large

Myths about Young Fathers



Many of these stereotypes can be traced to the war and post-war eras of the 1940's, when social service agencies were utilized by large numbers of unmarried mothers

Myths about Young Fathers



- 1) Super-Stud (worldly, and defining himself through sexual conquest)
- 2) Don Juan (exploiting naïve young females)
- 3) Macho (combating feelings of inadequacy and a need to prove masculinity)
- 4) Mr. Cool (emotional detachment)
- 5) Phantom (absentee)

Debunking the Myths



Many, if not most, young fathers would like to be involved and effective parents

De-bunking Myths About Young Fathers



- Financially and emotionally involved
- Engage in concrete childcare activities
- Report fatherhood as a central event in their lives
- Describe fatherhood as “transformative”, guiding new behavior and leading to significant and positive life changes

Barriers to Young Father Involvement



- Interruptions in education
- Financial and employment difficulties
- Relationship issues with the mother
- Relationship issues with family of origin and extended family
- Relationship issues with peers (alienation)

Asset Model



Parenthood may be premature and/or unplanned, but if fathers are nurtured and supported by others, they potentially provide limitless resources to the mother and child

Framework



- Developing an identity as a father
- Early and consistent participation in fatherhood
- Maintaining an effective relationship with the child's mother

Grandparents and In-Laws

