

## When Mom and Dad Disagree

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Disagreements abound in relationships from politics to parenting. In Parent Effectiveness Training, Thomas Gordon states “Parents don’t have to put up a “United Front.” Let me offer some perspective and possible options.

Parental disagreements are inevitable and often desirable. Where we can do harm is how we deal with them. Also, we may neglect to affirm on what we do agree. Parent educator, Nancy Hetherington Peirce, says “If you can clarify on what you agree that can become a family value.” The following are some tips for dealing with the differences in expectations of children and discipline styles:

### **Ideas to help establish clear expectations:**

- Agree on, perhaps at a family meeting, guidelines or rules that work for family members.
- Learn about personality preferences. One parent may require more alone time than the other.
- Be consistently honest with your feelings. Perhaps, for you, the noise of play sounds like music while to your partner it is headache making. Remember, one day you may be headache prone.
- Declare in what areas you disagree. My husband is more inflexible than me about table manners. So we tend to talk with our mouths full when he’s not around.

If you disagree with your partner’s discipline style, begin by honouring your differences. Some parents were treated harshly in their childhood and swore to never interfere with their own child’s behaviours. Others say “I was treated sternly and I’m glad I was.”

### **Ideas to help with effective discipline:**

- Establish and agree on, perhaps at a family meeting, the consequences of breaking a rule.
- With your partner mutually share your original families’ discipline histories to gain insight.
- Also discuss your tendency to discipline in a more strict or permissive style.
- State your desire to create a fair and democratic process that helps children learn from their experience and mistakes.

**Warning:** If your partner is causing physical or emotional harm to your child, you are morally and legally obligated to stop the abuse. Differences are neither accepted nor negotiated under these circumstances.

If you cannot agree to disagree in some areas and compromise on others, attend a parent class together or make an appointment for couple counseling. You don’t have to work this out alone. The African saying tells us “It takes a village to raise a child.” Utilize the support services in your community. As the leaders of your family you can learn to

affect and model problem solving in the home. You and your children will be the richer, wiser and happier for it.

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