

## **Parenting**

By Kim Olver

While we have been discussing the inherent differences between men and women in relationships, as well as the importance of need strength compatibility, there are still many areas that routinely stress the strongest of relationships. Parenting styles and expectations often top the list.

While need strength is important in determining compatibility, you still need to look at the quality world pictures or exactly how a person decides to meet their needs. A prime example would be having two people, both with a high need for fun. He likes to get his fun need met by going out to bars with his male friends and going to football games and she enjoys shopping and attending the opera. Both have a high need for fun but they choose to get their needs met in vastly different ways, making their mutual satisfaction, at least with each other, highly unlikely.

In the area of parenting, there are generally three styles of parenting that experts discuss. They have various names but they are generally called the autocratic, democratic and permissive styles of parenting. I teach a democratic style of parenting that is based in Dr. William Glasser's Choice Theory that I call Empowerment Parenting. Autocratic parents adopt an attitude of "My way or the highway." These parents can often be heard saying things like, "As long as you live under my roof, you will do what I say," and "Do it because I said so," and "I don't want to hear it. End of discussion. Period." These parents do not love their children any less but they operate from a faulty mindset that if they don't control every aspect of their children's lives, then the children will obviously run amok. These parents believe that it is their responsibility to teach their children discipline and responsibility and if they listen to what their children have to say, they are in danger of being manipulated.

The permissive parent is at the opposite end of the continuum. These parents want to avoid conflict at all cost. Their belief is that the best way to parent their children is to be their child's best friend. They think that if they allow their children to do what they want, then the children will like them and tell them things that these parents want to know. There is another variety of permissive parent and that is the uninvolved parent. These are the parents who have other interests that take priority over raising their children. They are workaholics, have a large investment in their significant other relationship, or possibly have some sort of addiction. These children are pretty left to their own devices to raise themselves as their parents are too busy or too distracted to notice. Either way, children are left without boundaries and without boundaries, children do not feel safe.

Research supports that the best results are seen with democratic parenting. In this parenting style, the parent is still the parent, not the best friend. However, the parents are very concerned with what their children need and provide them with opportunities for success. Parents focus mostly on keeping their children safe, while allowing them exploration to discover life and to make mistakes while the consequences are small.

In my marriage, I believe both my husband and I started out wanting to be democratic parents to a certain degree. Over time, what happened is that I leaned more in the direction of a permissive style and he moved more in the direction of an autocratic style. He would say that he had to be autocratic to counterbalance my permissiveness and I would say I was permissive to counter his authoritarianism. It is impossible to tell which came first but this conflict in parenting styles can create great conflict in a relationship where partners are parenting.

When in a relationship with someone, it can be helpful to have a conversation about how each of you were parented. It is not a hard and fast rule but many times people parent in the way they were parented or they will parent in an exact opposite way from their parents. Both methods are intricately tied to the parenting methods of their parents. Find out what was acceptable and what wasn't acceptable in your partner's family. Inquire as to his or her opinion of the family rules and discipline methods.

My husband believed in physical punishment, stating it was good enough for him. He turned out OK. I was in the field of child welfare and it was my firm belief that I did not want to have my children spanked. I believed all spanking taught them is that "might makes right." I wanted them to learn how to think for themselves and to have good relationships with their father and me. My husband would agree that he wanted them to think for themselves but his belief was that letting them know who was boss and teaching them right from wrong through punishment would accomplish the same end.

The problem with parenting is that we are operating from experience and what we believe is best. I know very few parents who deliberately set out to ruin their children's lives or make things difficult for them. Most parents want what is best for their children. The problem is that very often mothers and fathers disagree the methods used to get there.

I also believe that parenting needs to be adjusted for the situation, the age and maturity level of the child, as well as the different children themselves. I had two boys who were close in age but very different in personalities. What worked effectively for one child did not work for the other. We have situational leadership in the field of supervision; I believe in situational parenting in terms of raising children. I believe that treating children the same can be the most unfair thing we can do as a parent. Not all children should be treated the same in order for things to be fair.

There are so many variables to consider in parenting. What rules are appropriate for what ages? Do you believe girls and boys should be treated the same or should the rules vary by gender? What discipline method do you believe in? What does respect look like to you and how will you command it? What activities do you think are reasonable for a child to participate in? What are your thoughts about gift giving? Do you get involved with school problems or do you allow the school to handle those? What are your thoughts about family activities and their frequency? Many of these questions and more are not asked when getting to know your partner.

Frequently what happens is you may ask do you want to have children and if so, how many do you want. You watch your partner around other people's children and make an inference that he or she will behave consistent with your children. This is a major important area left up to chance.

When in a relationship if you are planning to have children, spend some time talking about your belief and value systems as they pertain to children. It will be time well spent. And if you find areas that are discrepant, don't ignore them. Continue to discuss them until you reach a consensus with which you can live.