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Our Relationship.... And Parenting

by Kathy Bosch, Extension Specialist, Family Life Education

Your partner relationship should be considered the basis or center of your family.* Therefore, during your parenting years, it is essential that you not neglect your marriage or partnership. This takes the conscious effort of both partners. One partner alone cannot nurture the relationship to keep it vital.

Communicate Needs and Expectations

Today most individuals want respect, commitment, passion, friendship, companionship, sexual gratification and maybe even more, from their marriage partner. It is not wrong to expect these things from your partner, but it is important that you discuss your needs and wants openly with your mate. What happens, too often, is that individuals expect that their partner 'should just know what I need.' It is not likely that needs will be met without some form of discussion or connectedness. When was the last time you shared your wants and needs with your partner? This is especially important when couples have children, as time and energy demands are great. Although children must have your time and attention, one or both parents may begin to feel taken for granted or neglected. Make an effort to take care of your partner relationship including emotional and sexual connectedness.

Spend Time Together: Connectedness

No matter how busy life gets, it is essential to spend time together. Some couples want more connection than others, but you must at least be willing to talk with each other, listen, negotiate, and resolve conflict. Open dialogue and daily communication (or as much as possible) about the children's needs, concerns and life happenings will help couples feel as though they have a parenting partner. Parents must support each other and not expect one person to do the parenting alone. Showing love and respect to each other is one of the greatest gifts you can give each other and your children.

Manage Conflict

Children benefit from seeing parents work through conflict as long as it is managed well. How is conflict managed well?

There are various ways to manage conflict, but there should be no losers. In strong relationships, couples support each other and build up each other even through conflict. Individuals should not expect to always get their way; nor should either partner always give in to the other. Rather, compromise and negotiation are necessary for building respect, showing love, having a caring relationship and nurturing trust between partners.

Understand Developmental Stages of Children

Parents who have an understanding of the developmental stages that children experience will be more likely to have realistic expectations for children's behavior. For instance, expecting a 3-year-old to vacuum the house is not appropriate given the developmental level of 3-year-olds. However, you could ask an older child to vacuum and help the 3-year-old pick up toys. Partner conflict often occurs when parents do not understand developmental levels and have either too high or too low expectations for their children.

Discipline of Children

Parenting is not an easy task and often causes stress in partner relationships. Parents often raise children in the way they were parented. Adults who have had little training in child development may find it helpful to attend parenting classes to learn various options and techniques for disciplining children and dealing with misbehavior. Conflict is almost inevitable between partners in regards to disciplining and caring for children. This is especially true when partners disagree on parenting styles, such as when one is permissive and the other is firm. If partners do not support each other in parenting, children will get mixed messages and the idea that one parent is more fun or likeable. Children need guidance, discipline and supervision.

Parents need to determine and follow through on consequences for misbehavior. Often the parent who is with the children more during waking hours must be the disciplinarian. The other parent, however, must make a conscious effort to offer support, show respect, and be concerned with what has occurred during the day and assist with the multiple tasks of parenting whenever possible.

There is no doubt that children add another dimension to couple relationships. Being a parent can be a wonderful experience but without support and information, parenting can put stress on a partner relationship. You and your children will benefit if you have love and support from your partner, extended family and friends, in addition to information and training on how to parent.

***Note**

The partner relationship discussed in these fact sheets “Our Relationship...” NF553 to NF558, is assumed to be healthy with no abuse or mistreatment present. In the case of partner abuse, this information does not apply. In order to rehabilitate, the abuser must willingly seek counseling and therapy. Parents must always look out for the best interest and safety of minor children. If abuse is present in the relationship, the interests of the abusive partner should **not** be put above the well-being of dependent children.

For help call the Nebraska Statewide Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault Hotline at (800) 876-6238 or National Domestic Violence Hotline at (800) 799-7233 (voice) and (800) 787-3224 (TDD).

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