

SEARCH
HOME
MONEY
HEALTH
CAREER
SEX
FAMILY
GEAR & TECH
DIVERSIONS
CONTINUING ED.
VIDEOS

ADD THIS

The Discipline Dilemma

Reining in kids can be hard work, especially when you and your wife disagree about the approach to take

DISCIPLINING CHILDREN is hard work, and it's that much harder when you and your wife disagree about the right approach.

How can you work as a team to set clear, consistent standards for your kids? How do you avoid sending mixed messages or letting them play one of you against the other? Here are eight guidelines to bear in mind:

1. Accept your differences. Forget about creating a united front. Your wife grew up in a different family, and her temperament, preferences and priorities no doubt differ from your own. Maybe your dad was a drill sergeant. Maybe her mom was laid back. Or vice versa.

You may not like your wife's ideas about discipline, but you must acknowledge them—and respect them. Otherwise, it's impossible to work together as a team.

2. Talk things over. What are your priorities for the children? Which of their behaviors bother you most? Dawdling at bedtime? Picky eating habits? Messy rooms? What gets under your wife's skin? Backtalk? Fights over homework? Does one of you have strong beliefs about healthy eating, while the other lets the kids eat junk food?

Agree before these problems erupt that the one of you who has stronger feelings about a particular issue will be the one to take the lead in handling the situation. Next time Sally refuses to clean her room, for example, it'll be Mom's job to dish out a consequence because that's her area of concern. No need for you to get involved.

3. Agree to disagree—but only in private. When your wife approaches a disciplinary problem in a way you don't approve of, bite your tongue. Fight the impulse to contradict her in front of your child. Later, you can say something like, "I know Billy's behavior really got to you, but I wonder if there might be a different way to handle it next time. I know he can be very provocative."

If your wife contradicts you in front of the kids, take that as a warning sign that you both have work to do on this issue. Otherwise the kids have an opening to play you off against your spouse.

4. Have a plan. You know from experience how your kids are likely to behave or misbehave in certain situations. Maybe when they're watching a favorite TV show, they'll whine and beg to stay up for the next program

even when it goes beyond their bedtime. Talk to your wife in advance about these predictable problems. Devise a strategy for handling them. Being prepared for misbehavior is more effective, and less stressful, than being caught off guard.

5. Avoid falling for the "divide and conquer" game (a.k.a., "If Mom says no, try Dad, and maybe he'll say yes"). Make it absolutely clear that when one parent says no, children cannot appeal to the other parent to overrule it. If they try divide-and-conquer strategy, remind them of the rule: When one of us says no, it's NO!

If your child pleads with you to intervene in a conflict with your wife, just say, "That's between you and your Mom. You need to work it out with her." Encourage your child to discuss the situation directly with your wife, but do not get in the middle. (This approach is particularly important when parents are divorced or the child lives in a blended family.)

6. Buy some time. If your child complains about the way your wife has dealt with a particular disciplinary issue, there's no need to respond with an immediate opinion on the matter. Instead, say, "We'll discuss it and get back to you later." The same approach works when a child makes an unusual request; you should buy a little time before giving your answer.

7. Be honest about your differences. With older children especially, you can explain that parents don't always agree: "Mom and I don't feel the same way about that." But let the child know that both you and your wife will consider the issue and reach an agreement.

8. When you do argue, fight fair. Try as you might to work as a team, it's inevitable that you'll openly disagree with your wife at times. When that happens, try not to name-call or use sarcasm. Take a breather to cool off—and revisit the problem later. Don't attack or blame her, even if you think she deserves it. Don't say things like "You always let her get away with bloody murder..." or "You never back me up, making me into the bad guy..."

Instead, tell her how you feel: "I get angry when the kids always see me as the disciplinarian and you as the warm, fuzzy teddy bear..." or "I wish I got more support from you when they hassle me..." Listen to her viewpoint, make sure she listens to yours, and then negotiate a solution that you can both live with.

If the kids witness you and your wife fighting over discipline, be sure they know you still respect one another despite your disagreements. If you've lost your cool and spoken sharply at your wife, or vice versa, let the kids see you apologize and make up. Reassure them that it's not their fault when you argue. Show them that you and your wife can disagree strongly and still love each other.

[Permalink](#)

Write a comment

About the Author

Nancy Samalin is the best-selling author of *Loving Your Child is Not Enough* (Penguin) and *Loving Without*

Spoiling (McGraw Hill). The mother of two grown sons, she lives with her husband in New York City. For more smart ideas on being a good dad, check out her [website](#).

Other Articles by Nancy Samalin:
No other articles from this author

Sign up now to receive intelligent, up-to-date advice on the things that matter most to men.

Name

E-Mail

Tell a friend about Smartman Daily