

The C&A Express

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Presenting a United Front

We've been hearing this expression a lot lately, generally in reference to allies and military activity. What about a different battlefield – the child discipline wars?

The classic scenario is that of two adults arguing about how to punish or reward a child while the child runs circles around them both. Going to the parent who will give the most favorable answer to a child's demands is a classic tactic that many grown-ups will recall using in their own youth.

Disagreements about how to raise children are hardly unusual. In fact, most family therapists and marriage counselors readily attest that raising kids ranks right up there with sex and money as a source of marital arguments.

Unfortunately these discussions rarely come up over a cup of coffee while the kids are out of earshot. Instead they erupt in the heat of the moment. One parent insists that a child clean up his room; the other says kids should be allowed to make as much mess as they please on their private turf. Unless parents exercise great self-control, it's easy for situations like that to escalate until parents lash out at one another.

Here are some tips for transforming disagreements about parenting:

- **Take it outside.** Admitting that you disagree about some things is actually far easier on kids than having them witness a major blowup between Mom and Dad. But if the disagreement starts getting heated, it may be best to hash out the details in private.
- **Be willing to defer.** Sometimes delaying a decision for later is not possible. In those situations, one parent must simply defer to the other. When a child is misbehaving and

disturbing others at a social gathering, for example, there's no time for discussion. Parents should decide in advance who would handle those highly charged situations.

- **Trust one another.** This may be especially tough in blended families where one's new partner thinks differently about these issues. Parents don't always have to agree with each other, but they do need to have confidence that their partner will respond with warmth and compassion to their children's needs.
- **Trust yourself.** Parents who are uncertain about how they raise children often feel threatened when their partners disagree with them or do things differently. Make it a habit to remind each other what you do right when it comes to parenting. Seek help if you need it.
- **Create new family traditions.** When two parents come together, their original "family cultures" often clash. Couples can share their traditions with children but strive to create new ones that blend those traditions together.
- **Learn to compromise.** Disagreements are as inevitable as dirty diapers. Parents need to identify three or four child rearing issues that are most important to them and work them out together. Who knows? In the process you just might teach your kids a few lessons in the art of peaceful negotiation.
- **Call the EAP.** We're here for you 24 hours a day. Your Employee Assistance Program is free to you and your family members, providing fresh ideas, problem solving, and referrals for therapy or support. Your privacy is protected by legal guidelines.

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