

When Separated Parents Meddle in Each Other's Parenting

Some separated parents can't resist telling the children how the other parent's rules or expectations or new partner are not up to snuff.

Thus the children return from mom, disgruntled with dad's rules or relationships. They act out and find themselves directly at odds with dad. Dad in turn seeks to set the record straight and admonish the children for the attitudes attributed to mom and chides them to tell mom to mind her own business and that her rules and relationships are the ones that are wrong. The children returns to mom and shortly finds themselves next at odds with her. As for these parents; out and out warfare.

Imagine if teachers acted that way!

Imagine the art teacher likes kids to arrange the desks in groups, speak out without raising their hand and work on projects in teams. Now consider the math teacher who requires the kids to pay attention to a specific set of instructions, has the desks arranged in rows and requires the kids to raise their hand to be called upon when asking a question. All is well and good. These students learn the behavioural expectations of both teachers and both classes function well. Now imagine the art teacher believes the math teacher is all wrong in terms of teaching style and tells the kids so. Imagine the art teacher compels the kids to rebel and "on their own" rearrange their desks into groups.

Instantaneously, these two well functioning classes deteriorate into anarchy and the teachers will be in significant conflict.

Note that neither teaching style is wrong, bad or abusive. They are simply different. The only bad that happens is when one teacher tries to impose his or her will on the teaching style of the other teacher. So too between separated parents.

The challenge for some separated parents is to disengage from each other and allow each other to find their way and parent independently.

It is well known that parents, like teachers, coaches, instructors, baby-sitters, camp counsellors, recreation leaders and the like will all have different styles for managing children's behaviour. Interestingly, children learn to adapt.

Children learn to run on the soccer field, yet walk on the pool deck. They learn the differences between each responsible adults' style and typically adjust accordingly. Somehow, it seems that only between separated parents does the expectation that they must do everything the same in every aspect of how they manage the kids.

Assuming no actual abusive or neglectful behaviour, butt out and leave each other alone.

It is not differences in parenting style that will necessarily hurt the child, but the ongoing conflict that ensues when one or other parent cannot resist meddling into the style and relationships of the other parent. The parental conflict is usually more destructive than the differences in parenting style.

Yes kids must get their homework done, get to bed at a reasonable hour, be kept safe from harm and have opportunity for recreational enjoyment. How each parent accomplishes this will differ from parent to parent.

The best rule is for separated parents to concentrate fully on their own house, their own parenting, their own relationship with partners, and their own relationship with their kids.

The kids will sort out the rest.

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