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Is It Okay to Argue in Front of Your Kids?

By: [Maggie Vink \(View Profile\)](#)

When you first bring home your new baby, it's as if the world stops. Forget the evening news; work troubles seem unimportant and everything pales in comparison to your sweet-smelling bundle of joy. But soon the stress of [sleepless nights](#) starts to kick in and you realize that the world is still turning. Your spouse—that wonderful person without whom you wouldn't have your new baby—leaves gross dirty dishes in the living room or insists on watching football when you want to watch a movie. Little annoyances add up and the next thing you know ... you're having an [argument](#).

Arguments happen in the best of relationships. But as your darling baby grows into an impressionable child, do you let him or her witness your disagreements? Or do you keep your fights behind closed doors?

Presenting a United Front

When it comes to parenting decisions, moms and dads need to present a united front. Your kids may be small, but that's all the better for finding tiny loopholes. When there is noticeable dissent among parents, children can begin to triangulate. "Kids start to get the impression that they can play one parent against the other," explains Corinne Gregory, Founder and President of Social Smarts, a social skills educational company for children. Rather than disagreeing about consequences or other parenting issues in front of your kids, Gregory recommends talking to your spouse afterward about how you would have handled the situation. Out of the range of little ears, you and your spouse can come to a compromise and decide how you'll handle similar situations in the future.

Fights Happen ... But Where?

It's only natural for couples to have disagreements from time to time. Parents are people, with flaws and emotions that may—at times—conflict with their vision of perfect parenting. So should parents argue in front of their kids? According to Gregory, it depends *how* and about *what*.

Working it out in front of the kids.

Yelling or treating your spouse with disrespect isn't a good idea in general, but it's really not advisable when your kids are present. However, if you and your partner can work out your differences in a calm and emotionally

healthy manner, is it okay for your kids to witness it?

“If we can show positive modeling—that is, positive outcomes to conflict—that’s a good thing,” says Gregory. “Don’t be insulting, certainly don’t get physical, and show some sort of resolution. Even if the resolution is ‘I guess we can just agree to disagree.’ That’s healthy and productive for a child to see.”

Reality TV, sitcoms, and even the news ... today’s children are constantly presented with disrespectful and even harmful ways of handling disputes. Children see yelling, screaming, and people talking over one another so it can be beneficial for children to see their parents settle disagreements in a calm, respectful, and productive manner.

Fighting it out behind closed doors.

If your disagreement spills from annoyance to anger, it’s best for your kids not to witness it. “Anything that becomes abusive—whether it’s verbal or physical—is not something we need to expose kids to,” says Gregory. “Depending on the age of the child, it is at best case bad modeling, all the way down to outright frightening when kids hear their parents fighting.”

Calmly agree to talk to each other later when the kids are at school or asleep (but only if you keep things quiet). If necessary, see if a babysitter can come over or if your children’s grandparents can take them for a few hours. Then you and your spouse can express your opinions and work it out without the concern of scaring your kids.

Let Go of Perfection

There’s a lot of pressure on parents these days. You may have your daughter enrolled in soccer, but as soon as you see your neighbor’s daughter in her cute dance costume, you feel like you’re somehow shortchanging your kid. And heaven forbid your child should act up in school—these days it seems like every little discretion is somehow blamed on poor parenting. But parenting was never supposed to be about perfection. Kids learn by making mistakes, and eventually your kids are going to realize that you make mistakes, too. And that’s okay.

“Far too much emphasis is placed on ‘putting on a front’ when it comes to parenting,” says Bob Lancer, author of *Parenting with Love, Without Anger or Stress*. “The truth is more important than appearances when it comes to leading children toward honest, responsible conduct. There is nothing wrong with parents disagreeing respectfully. In fact, it is inevitable that two individuals will not see eye-to-eye on all issues. Children respond best to honest, compassionate authenticity.”

Rather than aiming for perfect parenting 100 percent of the time, focus on the big picture. You don’t want to keep your child insulated in a bubble-wrapped world where everything is perfect and no one ever disagrees. If you do, your child will grow into an adult with no idea how to healthfully resolve conflict.

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