

# Parenting As Partners



***Trends in Family Strengthening Conference  
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## Parenting As Partners

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Dear Family Strengthening Advocate,

Welcome!

I am honored to share this information with you. Parental conflict is a serious problem affecting all classes, nationalities and genders. As family strengthening advocates, there is an enormous opportunity for us to help parents learn skills that minimize family conflict. Practicing these skills create deeper communication, respect and trust in the parenting partnership and healthier, happier children.

The ideas we discuss today are generally compatible with all types of parenting arrangements from those married and living together to those in two homes and barely speaking. Of course, not all exercises are appropriate for every partnership in its current state. The exercises begin with more basic and are all designed to move parents toward greater shared responsibility for the child they love and hold in common.

This training is an outgrowth of my work in the fatherhood movement. Many family advocates are nowadays paying closer attention to the benefits of fathers in the home. Thus, we who work with families need to increase our skills in helping parents work together. We need to constantly remind the mothers and fathers we work with that whether or not they choose to continue a romantic relationship, they can choose to be great parenting partners.

Respectfully,

*“The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed.”*

*~Carl Jung*



## **Definitions**

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Partner: a person who shares or is associated with another in some action or endeavor.

## Workshop Goals

- Encourage \_\_\_\_\_ family strengthening interventions
- Identify indicators that discourage the emphasis on partnering.
- Identify skills to engage the more reluctant partner.
- Share partnership strengthening exercises.



*“To put the world right in order, we must first put the nation in order, to put the nation in order, we must first put the family in order, to put the family in order, we must first cultivate our personal life; we must first set our hearts right.*

- Confucius



## **Parenting As Partners Perspective**

- Children benefit when parents are \_\_\_\_\_ .
- Partnering skills can be learned.
- A friendly parenting partnership makes other stress more manageable.
- Practicing and teaching these skills will make your own relationships more joyful!

*“Family life is too intimate to be preserved by the spirit of justice. It can only be sustained by a spirit of love which goes beyond justice.”*  
– Reinhold Niebuhr

## **Workshop Norms**

- Maintain confidentiality.
- Practice respectful communication.
- Minimize electronic interruptions.
- Please take \_\_\_\_\_ here. This is a safe place to practice relationship skills.

## **Partner Work Contraindications<sup>1</sup>**

- No couple-centered work when there are patterns of violence, control or intimidation.
- Couple-centered interventions will not succeed if one of the partners is \_\_\_\_\_.
- A serious psychiatric disorder must be treated before couples work is appropriate.



## **Screening for Contraindications**

- Always interview couples separately
- Ask about specific \_\_\_\_\_ (funnel)

- Are you afraid?
- Does he yell and scream?
- Has he ever threatened violence?
- Has he ever hit you?
- Create a \_\_\_\_\_ plan if necessary.
- Reframe violence or addiction as unacceptable.



*“Traditional psychological evaluations are inappropriate with physically abusive men. A procedure that involves psychological testing and interviews without access to and a careful review of collateral sources may produce a very misleading view of the client.”*

*~ Fernando Mederos*

## Engaging the Reluctant Partner<sup>2</sup>

1. Everything we do is driven by our need to avoid \_\_\_\_\_ or gain \_\_\_\_\_.
2. To change behavior, focus on:
  - How not changing will be more painful than changing
  - How changing behavior will bring immediate and measureable pleasure
3. Flesh out the pain associated with not following through on parenting with a partner tasks.
  - What will you miss out on?
  - What will you lose?
4. Begin to associate pleasure with taking action on the co-parenting relationship.



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## **Questions to Engage**

- What do you like or respect about your parenting partner?
- How will taking action create greater joy, happiness or success?
- What benefits will you get by taking action now?
- How are you \_\_\_\_\_ enough to do this?

*“There are costs and risks to a program of action, but they are far less than the long range risks and costs of comfortable inaction.”*

*- John F. Kennedy*

## **Vision Statement: The Partner I Chose to Be<sup>3</sup>**

1. List aspects of your parents' relationship style that you chose to adopt.
2. List aspects of your parents' relationship style that you chose not to use.
3. List \_\_\_\_\_ relationship qualities that you chose to use in your parenting partnership.



## **Reflective Listening**

- Listen with a clear and open \_\_\_\_\_.
- Listen for content as well as feelings.
- Listen for the underlying meaning.
- Put yourself in the other's position.
- Look for nonverbal cues.
- Restate and reflect: "I hear you saying \_\_\_\_\_ and you feel \_\_\_\_\_."



## **I Statements**

1. I feel . . .
2. When you . . .
3. Because . . .
4. I would appreciate it if you would . . .



## **Dividing Parenting Tasks<sup>4</sup>**

1. List all the tasks and responsibilities necessary for the upkeep of the family.
2. Each partner chooses the ones he or she prefers doing or is good at.
3. The remaining tasks and responsibilities are divided using negotiation, compromise and \_\_\_\_\_.

## Partnership Building Skills<sup>5</sup>

- Relationship Esteem – holding the relationship in warm regard despite imperfections and limitations (harmony > disillusionment > repair)
- Speaking Relationally – Contract while speaking; speak from the “I,” move from \_\_\_\_\_ to request



*“Love, from its inception, is not a one way street. Neither is it some idyll of harmony. The pattern, recorded and repeated endlessly, is the rhythm of harmony, disillusionment and restoration.”*

*- Terrence Real*

*“Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it’s a permanent attitude.”*

*- Martin Luther King, Jr.*

*“Mama exhorted her children at every opportunity to 'jump at de sun.' We might not land on the sun, but at least we would get off the ground.” - Zora Neale Hurston*

## **Fair Fighting Guidelines<sup>6</sup>**

- Fight by mutual \_\_\_\_\_
- Stick to the present / topic
- Do not hit below the belt
- Do not try to win it all
- Respect crying / silence
- No \_\_\_\_\_



*“No one can say of his house, “There is no trouble here.”*

*- Oriental Proverb*

*“The other night I ate at a nice family restaurant. Every table had an argument going.”*

*- George Carlin*

## Strategies to Avoid<sup>Z</sup>

- Criticism – attacking someone’s personality or \_\_\_\_\_ rather than a behavior
- Contempt – insults and psychological abuse, hostile humor, sarcasm, sneers, rolling your eyes
- Defensiveness – denying responsibility, making excuses, yes-butting, cross complaining
- \_\_\_\_\_ – similar to withdrawal and avoidance, refusal to respond as a pattern



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**Action Step**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, commit to practice in my own life and discuss this specific partnering skill, \_\_\_\_\_, with a parent within the next seven days.

One way I can accomplish this is

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## **Thoughts About Families**

*“In every conceivable manner, the family is our link to our past, bridge to our future.” - Alex Haley*

*Families are like fudge - mostly sweet with a few nuts. ~Author Unknown*

*“Good parents give their children roots and wings. Roots to know where home is, wings to fly away and exercise what’s been taught them.” - Jonas Salk*

*Parents should listen to their children instead of just talking. They should be patient instead of angry, should encourage and appreciate when their children do anything good, compliment instead of finding fault, point out their accomplishments rather than their weaknesses.  
- Marian Wright Edelman*

*“Friendship is like an elevator, it can take you up or down. Choose friends intelligently.” - Mata Amritanandamayi*

*“Your ability to communicate is an important tool in your pursuit of your goals, whether it is with your family, your co-workers or your clients and customers.” - Les Brown*

*Nobody has ever before asked the nuclear family to live all by itself in a box the way we do. With no relatives, no support, we've put it in an impossible situation. ~Margaret Mead*

*Your children come through you but not from you. You may give them your love but not your thoughts. You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you. For life does not go backward nor carries with yesterday. You are the bows from which your children as arrows are sent forth. - Kahlil Gibran*

*“Neither a lofty degree of intelligence, nor imagination, nor both together go to the making of a genius. Love, love, love that is the soul of a genius. - Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*

*“Acting is just a way of making a living; the family is life.”  
- Denzel Washington*

*The family. We were a strange little band of characters trudging through life sharing diseases and toothpaste, coveting one another's desserts, hiding shampoo, borrowing money, locking each other out of our rooms, inflicting pain and kissing to heal it in the same instant, loving, laughing, defending, and trying to figure out the common thread that bound us all together. - Erma Bombeck*

*What do we teach our children? . . . We should say to each of them: Do you know what you are? You are a marvel. You are unique . . . You may become a Shakespeare, a Michelangelo, a Beethoven. You have the capacity for anything. - Pablo Casals*

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Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Mederos, Fernando. Accountability and Connection with Abusive Men: A New Child Protective Response to Increasing Family Safety

<sup>2</sup> Robbins, Anthony. Awaken the Giant Within

<sup>3</sup> Perlman, Mark. The Marriage and Parenting Journal

<sup>4</sup> Perlman, Mark. The Nurturing Fathers Journal

<sup>5</sup> Real, Terrence. How Can I Get Through to You?

<sup>6</sup> Center for Fathers, Families and Workforce Development, Exploring Relationships and Marriage with Fragile Families

<sup>7</sup> Gottman, John and Silver, Nan. The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work