

THE ART OF BEING CONSISTENT

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

I am sure we would all agree that consistency in our parenting is extremely hard to maintain. The dictionary meaning of consistent means 'holding together and retaining form'. That hardly describes my early memories of child rearing. I can recall more than a few meltdowns in my time.

So, what does consistent parenting look like? Consistency means that both parents will agree AND stick to their word in all areas of family management. In a well managed family Jonnie asks Mom if he can go out and play. She says, 'No'. He asks Dad the same thing. Dad will not only say the same, but will reprimand Jonnie for trying to play one parent off against the other. Consistency means that if Dad gives Janie a ten-minute time-out, then Mom will not shorten that time. When going to the store, the same behavior expectations will apply whether Mom or Dad are taking the kids out.

Consistency will ensure that parents award the same discipline for their kids' misbehavior. It creates confusion when a parent ignores a child's particular behavior one day and severely corrects it the next.

What makes parenting inconsistent? Many parents are not on the same page when it comes to child management. When parents can't agree on matters of discipline, then the kids sense it and will slip through as many holes in parental armor as they can find.

If I could wind the clock back to pre-marriage, I would sincerely advise couples to talk about their parenting ideals before they ever commit themselves to one another for life. Next to financial disagreements, it is said that disagreement over parenting is the next greatest breaker of marriages. Many times we allow ourselves to act in a subjective manner. When we are tired, we can't deal with it so we overlook the negative behavior. When we are stressed, anything can happen. We may issue discipline that is far too severe for the infringement, or say things that we later regret. We may excuse negative behavior because of a child's disability, illness, or age. This is not appropriate. **All** kids need to learn to live within boundaries.

How can we become consistent in our parenting? The first thing is to agree on matters of child management. The best way to accomplish this is to create a set of family values. One of those values can be 'Family Harmony'. To ensure harmony, all family members would agree to follow stated family rules. Consequences are then created and explained to the children. They now should understand behavioral expectations and what will happen if rules are disobeyed.

Two problems have been overcome. Parents are on the same page, and kids know what behavior is expected of them. Subjective disciplinary action is negated because the consequences are already laid down. Parents are not choosing discipline measures on the fly. Kids are making the choice to be

obedient or be disciplined. Objective parenting provides a solid foundation for harmony in the home.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.