

MAINTAINING A UNITED FRONT

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Kids love to play one parent off against the other. Maybe you even tried that with your parents when you were young! The best way to ruin effective discipline in your home is for you and your spouse to disagree on responses to your children's behavior. Why does that happen? Often, because consequences to issues have not been discussed prior to these 'events' happening.

I advocate parents sit down before marriage and agree together about how the children will be raised. If there are glaring differences that cannot be resolved at that point, run in the opposite direction and avoid marriage to that person. Otherwise, you will be miserable and you probably won't do a great job raising your kids. If there are issues where common ground can be established, then discuss those thoroughly and write down your values and consequences for behaviors preferably **before** the kids arrive.

You might think that this is a narrow and extreme position. It's based on the fact that following financial disagreements, differences in child-rearing practices run second in reasons for divorce. We have seen so many marriages torn apart because the parents have never sat down and seriously decided on their approach to disciplining their children and how they will deal with each situation. Instead, they just get mad when the other spouse either does not discipline **their** way, or they knowingly undermine each other's authority. Do this and watch your authority crumble.

Children are so smart that they can detect when parents are not on the same page. Daddy's little girl will play on daddy's weakness and try to get around momma's decision. Daddy might be a very strict parent and momma tries to protect the child by being way too soft. The child will go for the weakest link and really milk it till they get their own way. The way around this problem is simple. Have a plan! Decide together what your 'battles' will be and make the consequences equivalent to the infraction. Tell your child beforehand the behavior you expect and the results of exceeding the boundary. When an infringement occurs, do exactly what you both said you would do and back one another. You don't have to get steamed. The child made the choice not to be obedient and has to suffer the consequence.

There will be occasions when a child will ask permission to do something and neither of you have discussed it yet. Rather than say, "Go ask daddy," tell the child that you will discuss it with dad and inform the child of the decision. Many times a child will get a, "No" from one parent and

immediately approach the other, hoping for a, "Yes." Should this occur, the child needs to be told that if one parent has refused the request already, then that is the final decision. Again, back one another up.

Remember the adage, "United we stand, divided we fall." There is so much truth in this. A divided front will cause confusion and may lead to a lack of respect by children towards parents.

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.