

Parenting together – three great principles

My husband Richard and I found a table at the back of the café and sat down. The waiter came to take our order, and explained in detail the types of coffee available – latte, cappuccino, flat white, decaff, Fair Trade, soya ... and those were just for starters! While we considered the options, he told us a bit about himself. He had been married for three years and his wife was expecting their first baby in a few months' time. We congratulated him, and I ended by saying, "Your lives will never be the same again." To my surprise, he shook his head. "Oh, no," he said. "It'll be business as usual. Having a baby won't make any difference to us."

While not wanting to discourage this expectant father, Richard and I sought gently to bring a note of reality to the discussion. If you are a parent, you will know that having a baby changes everything! Even if you are blessed with a little one who smiles all day and sleeps all night, the truth is that life is completely different for couples after the arrival of a baby. Many couples experience difficulties in their relationship after the birth of a child. Not only do they have to recalibrate how to manage their relationship, but they also have to learn how to *be* a parent. Here are three principles to help you parent well *together*.

Stand shoulder to shoulder

As parents, it is vital that we stand

together on matters of discipline. If one parent is seen as a 'soft touch' or there's a chink of light between us, most single-minded children will be able to find the gap and use the situation to their advantage. It's no good one of us telling our toddler that because they've just thrown their pasta on the floor they can't have any ice cream for dessert, only to find the other parent in the kitchen creating a knickerbocker glory to die for. Boundaries are not so much about discipline but about security, and standing together on matters of discipline brings security to our children.

Look after your relationship

We will all be familiar with the aircraft safety announcement telling us to put on our own oxygen masks before helping others with theirs. It sounds counter-intuitive to us as parents because we are hardwired to care for our children at all costs. However, it's wise advice not only for flights to the Costa del Sol, but for life. Parenting can be all-consuming – potty training, reading stories, searching for the missing hamster – and it's easy for our relationship with our husband, wife or partner to take second place.

If we are parenting together, the very best thing we can do for our children is to invest in our relationship with our partner. Many couples have discovered the value of a having a regular 'date night' so that they have time to focus on each other. It doesn't have to be complicated or expensive – perhaps having a meal at home with no ironing or



checking of emails, a trip to the cinema or watching a film on Netflix, or going out for a walk.

Remember that values are caught not taught

When our children's toys are strewn across the living room, their coats are still on the hall floor, and they are no further forward in the bedtime routine after we've asked them to put away/pick up/get undressed several times already, we might be forgiven for thinking that they aren't listening. In fact, although it's hard to believe at times, the opposite is true: they don't miss a thing.

It is often said that 'Values are caught not taught'. What we say and do, particularly in our children's early years, has a profound effect on their lives. They will notice how we speak to each other, how we deal with conflict, our attitude to money, how we show love to each other, the priority we put on our relationship. Little by little, we will be sowing values into their lives that will last down the years.



Care for the Family's aim is to promote strong family relationships and to help those who face family difficulties.

Care for the Family, Garth House, Leon Avenue, Cardiff, CF15 7RG
Tel: 029 2081 0800 Email: mail@cff.org.uk Web: www.careforthefamily.org.uk

Care for the Family – A Christian response to a world of need.
A registered charity (England and Wales: 1066905; Scotland: SC038497).