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when your parenting approaches differ

Disagreement between parents on how to raise a child is quite common. Instead of following just your instinct and ignoring your partner's wishes, embrace objectivity. by **RITIKA JAIN**

FAMILY plays a huge role in shaping an individual who may grow up to fall in love with a person quite like or unlike the self. The couple adjusts to each other's shortcomings and quirks, but their personal beliefs can lie dormant till they become parents. The very qualities they admire in their partner, may not be admired in a co-parent. Quite paradoxical, isn't it?

* what type of a parent are you?

Most parents are unaware of the research being done in the field of parenting. They bring up their kids based on their instinctive nature, which is largely fine till it clashes with their partner's belief system. Let's examine a few cases.

→ lenient vs. strict

Seema* from Mumbai is too soft a parent, according to her husband Rajesh Madan, dad to their 6-year-old, Prakhar. She, in turn, doesn't quite support Rajesh's authoritative approach. While Seema believes

that reasoning with your kid is the best way for him to learn, Rajesh feels that kids need to be guided from an early age so that they strive for perfection in every thing they set out to do. Both styles have their merits and nobody's wrong here. If the solution means allowing one parent to take charge of one aspect of the child solely, the other would feel left out. So it's best to find a common ground.

→ protective vs. relaxed

Delhi-based Mani Kaul* is acutely aware of how susceptible young kids are to abuse and is naturally protective of her daughter. She doesn't allow her to go to the park or even take the lift without supervision. Her husband Chetan, however, is of the opinion that she's being overcautious and is thwarting the child's independence. He wants his kid to be street-smart but Mani thinks her daughter's too young for this now. "Parents must remember that human beings have evolved in response to change in their environment, so it's important for children to explore their

environment but preferably under parental supervision," advises Dr. Raman Girotra, a Gurugram-based consultant psychiatrist.

→ authoritative vs. supportive

Atul Gandotra,* a self-made man that he is, wants his children to be ambitious and have priorities like money set right from the start. He tends to be a little controlling and critical of others, including his son Lakshya. His wife, on the other hand, believes in positive encouragement and a balanced world view. Dr. Niraj Ravani, Director, Mumbai Psychiatry Clinics, says, "You have to be aware of your child's temperament. What works for one child may not work for the other. If you respect each other, the child learns to respect you as parents."

→ indulgent vs. pragmatic

Sharad Jain from Faridabad is a doting dad who brings home a lot of gifts for his only son Advay. However, his wife Aditi believes



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that the kid should earn his rewards so there's more value attached to every gift. Though Sharad has full confidence in his wife's methods, there have been times when he has had to step in. Their kid used to be a picky eater and the doctor had shown concern about his weight. While Aditi was determined to make him eat healthy, impelling him to sit still till he finished what was on his plate, Sharad wanted to experiment for a week by letting him choose what he

would eat. This clicked: Their kid started showing interest in food. So what counts is, being open to what works for each family and their given situation. Dr. Girotra advises, "It is important to allow your child to choose, unless the choice has potentially harmful implications."

*** the right approach**
Sometimes we get stuck in rigid patterns of thinking and make it difficult for our partners to actually 'partner' with us. Here's

what experts advise so as to achieve harmony:

➔ **communicate**

Everyone has a unique personality. If you have a meek personality and always let your partner take most of the decisions, one day you'll grow to resent them because you did not voice what you wanted. So it's advisable to keep the channels of communication open and discuss what both of you find acceptable. The idea is to not take

decisions on the spot but to calmly hear each other out.

→ agree to disagree

Dissimilarities need not mean strife. Try and put yourself in the other person's shoes and see what roadblocks she is facing, or where she's coming from. Kids don't have to have the same kind of relationship with each parent. Your message to your kids should be this: We're two distinct individuals but as parents, we're a single unit and have each other's back.

→ learn from each other

You may have traits which are complementary to your partner. A procrastinator might learn from his wife's disciplined routine and the wife may learn to plan finances better from her husband. You can apply this symbiotic relationship in the parenting sphere too. If your husband suggests something, don't take it as criticism. He's just trying to help you find a solution as a partner. "I used to be miffed that my husband wanted to spend a lot on an IPL match ticket when our son was just 5. I had told him to take him along when he's older and has a better understanding of the game. He eventually found a sense in that," says Shilpi Burman, consultant counsellor at Pearl Academy, Delhi.

→ do not argue in front of your child

It's tough to pull this one off. But if you are in a situation that pushes you to argue with your spouse in front of your kids, take time out, simmer down and discuss things when you're out and your child is not close by. Different approaches can send mixed signals to the kid and place undue burden on him. "If the parents are in conflict, they should not bring it up in front of

the child as children can become confused about whose instructions to follow. Ultimately, they'll end up doing whatever is convenient to them," says Dr. Girotra. Presenting a united front will benefit your kid immensely. Think of it like working on a shared project. None can emphasize this enough.

→ try to introspect

Are you really that sure about your stance or is it a battle of egos? Do your research by talking to other parents or a counsellor. "I used to believe in giving choices to my daughter ever since she was a baby. I'd ask if she wanted a banana or an apple, if she wanted to play indoors or outdoors. This would sometimes irk my husband since he felt that parents should be the deciding authority. Over time, I've learnt that his approach has paid off in some cases. Our daughter opted for many classes, grew tired of them and eventually dropped out. But my husband wouldn't let her quit guitar lessons. Over time, his persistence was rewarded. She's quite good at guitar now. I probably would have let her have her say but my husband put his foot down for once, and I'm glad he did," says Deeksha Verma, mom to Agni, Delhi.

→ learn to practise before you preach

Before you become a better parent, you have to become a better person. If you want your kid to imbibe a certain quality, make sure that you teach her by your example. Words are rendered meaningless unless they are backed by action.

→ be flexible

No rules are set in stone. Sometimes compromise can be necessary. This is especially worth considering if you have the best interest of your child in mind.



DIFFERING STYLES

Noted psychologist Diana Baumrind has written about the following parenting approaches:

→ autocratic or authoritarian parenting

It is based on the belief that the parent is always right and the children have to obey.

→ permissive parenting

Under this approach, the belief is that children should be allowed to make their choices on their own.

→ democratic parenting

This is based on the concept of encouraging children to make their choices after inputs (pros and cons) from their parents.

→ don't let them inherit your fears

This is one common ground that you and your spouse must agree upon. "We must not let our own fears inhibit our child's potential. This is typical of many Indian parents. Instead of infusing your apprehensions in your child, try to boost his emotional quotient (EQ). Kids with a good EQ do far better in life than those with a high IQ but a low EQ. To do this, you need to listen to your little one. Do not get upset even if there is an outburst. The first step is to help the child connect to his own feelings; the next step is to problem-solve and channelize the hurt or anger in a positive way. Remember, your child learns best from you," says psychiatrist Shyam Bhat of the Mind-Body Clinic, Bengaluru. ●