

# NEGOTIATING PARENTING WITH YOUR PARTNER

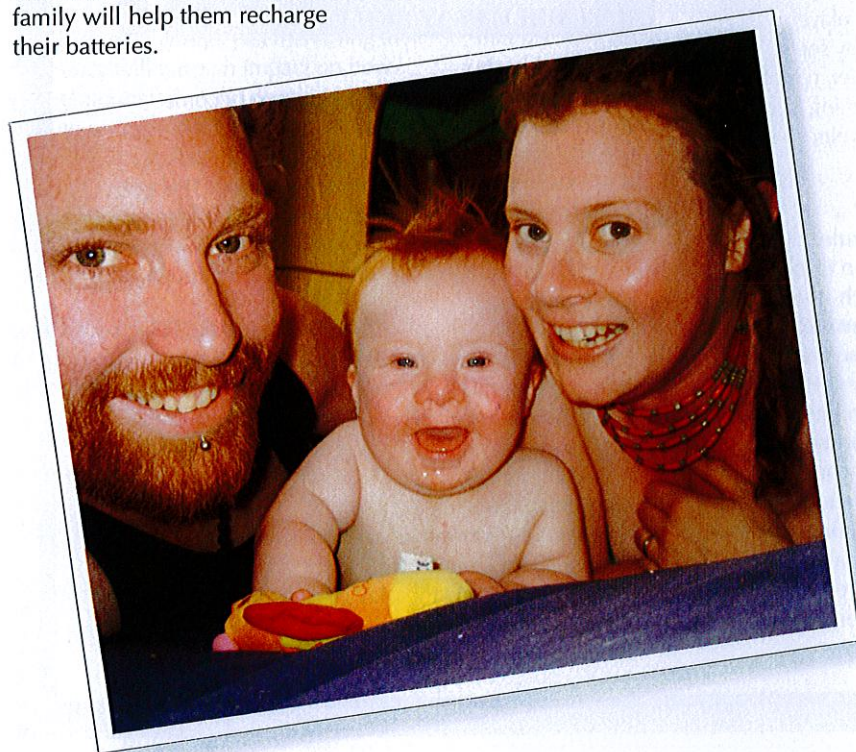
Families are small networks, little systems where each part affects the others. In your roles, you and your partner have a real influence on each other's parenting.

Depending on your relationship and how things are going, you can help or hinder each other in becoming the best possible parents to your children.

So it makes sense to invest in and look after your relationship. Support each other. Work as a team. Keep the lines of communication open. Show that you are committed to working through any differences that arise, as together you learn how to parent.

## LOOKING AFTER YOUR RELATIONSHIP

The emotional energy required to care for a baby places extra demands on relationships. Take the extra time and effort to do things to help you stay connected as a couple. As a priority, find a baby sitter you can trust. And supporting your partner to maintain their own interests and friendships outside the family will help them recharge their batteries.



## TEAMWORK

Working as a 'tag team' is a big advantage in two parent households, and really helps you deal with the daily pressures and stresses of parenting. Here are some ingredients of good teamwork.

**Listen to your partner's interests and concerns** – mothers frequently say they really value the opportunity to share what is happening – good and bad – with someone who really cares.

**Be ready to step in** when you are needed, and take over so your partner can step out of the ring for a breather.

**Back each other up** in front of the children, and discuss any disagreement about how something should be handled later, away from the children.

### Avoid giving unwanted advice:

Sometimes mothers just want to off-load the stress by expressing their feelings. This is not always an invitation to you to start problem solving. If in doubt, check out what your partner wants to do so you can solve things together.

### Catch-up regularly about the children:

discuss approaches and ideas for dealing with problems. Try to do this when the stress is low, rather than in the middle of a stressful encounter with the children or each other.

## MANAGING CONFLICT

Some conflict is inevitable – even in the strongest relationships. Mothers and fathers might have different ideas about family life, and may differ on fundamental parenting issues such as what is 'normal' or 'right'.

Your children's sense of safety and wellbeing is closely linked to how you behave towards your partner. Exposure to unresolved conflict between parents is associated with behavioural and developmental problems in children. On the other hand, showing children that disagreements are a normal part of life, and teaching them (by example) healthy strategies for coping with and resolving conflict benefits children.

## THE DIVISION OF LABOUR

One common source of tension is the division of everyday parenting and household tasks. Fights about who is doing what around the home are second only to disputes over money.

It's not about whether household and parenting tasks are divided perfectly equally. What really matters is how satisfied you both are with the division of labour at home. Some mothers are perfectly happy with a fairly traditional division of household labour; for example, you looking after bins, gutters, lawns, dishes, and nightly baths, while she does the cooking, laundry, and vacuuming. However, if your partner is not satisfied – regardless of how you rate your contribution – this can lead to resentment and can harm your relationship.

To avoid tension, have a conversation with your partner about the parenting and household jobs that need doing and whether you are both happy with the way they are allocated. If there's an issue, you'll be able to do something about it before the tension gets any worse.



## FATHER FACT

An Australian study found that fathers who were happier in their relationship with their partner spent more time with their child in playing indoor or outdoor games and involving children in everyday activities.