

COMMON DIFFICULTIES IN THE FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN STAGE

Family Therapy Program

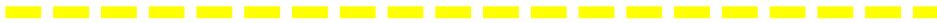
The birth of a child is a wondrous thing, and from the first moment you hold your child you realize what a fragile and vulnerable little creature s/he is. The sense of love and responsibility this sparks serves to intensify every decision a parent makes. Whether picking the child up every time they cry is

soothing and necessary or inadvertently reinforcing more crying, or trying to decide whether a change in the color of their poop necessitates a visit to the doctor, parents agonize over what is the right thing to do many times each and every day.

When couples get together there are many negotiations about how to be with each other and how to be a good adult partner. When you add little children to the mix, every little difference is magnified a hundredfold. The minute to minute demands add a near constant responsibility, and partners have to negotiate who does what, who is good at what, how things will be handled, all in a context of sleep deprivation and oftentimes the financial burdens that come with starting out in life. It is often hard for people to keep their heads clear and their emotions in check given the endless repetitions of the demands that come with having children. As the children grow older, they increasingly become their own person with an emerging personality which the parents have to figure out how to best shape, in order to give the child the best chance to fit in and succeed in the world as they get older. Parenting style and philosophy become increasingly important as parents wrestle with questions about structure and organization, autonomy and exploration, and discipline and guidance. Any differences the parents have, need to be worked out one way or another. Working through these differences becomes especially difficult when parents carry with them unresolved resentments from their **own childhood, creating unhealthy anxiety and stress which diminishes parents' capacity to** fully enjoy their children.

When parents try to compensate for each other or overcompensate for what they **didn't like about their own childhood, it often** produces additional conflict and stress for everyone involved. Sometimes parents get in a cycle of compensating for the other. For example, one parent thinks the other is too harsh, so they go out of their way to be more lenient to make up for it. Being **different in style in and of itself isn't** necessarily problematic. It becomes

problematic when parents become polarized about the issue and try to one up each other in an exaggerated way, to compensate for each other. They can become so extreme in their positions that it is a constant source of conflict and bad feeling. Try to stay true to your own orientation and avoid getting into the mindset that you have to be an exaggerated version of yourself to make up for your partner.



Children need structure, love, and boundaries, but equally important, they learn to regulate their emotions from you. How they see adults compose themselves under stress teaches them a lot about how to manage it themselves. Work with your partner to support each other, be realistic about your own needs and your partners needs in the same way that you take into account for your children's needs. If you have organized your family life so that you like spending your time with your children they will know they are loved, without having to wear yourself out and resenting the energy you put into them.



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