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**Mom vs. Dad: Navigating Parenting Differences With All Good Intentions**

**By Dr. Charles Sophy**

Mom vs. Dad: Navigating Parenting Differences With All Good Intentions Copyright 2005 Dr.

Charles Sophy Keep 'Em Off My Couch

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Let's face it: raising children can be quite the adventure. Rewarding at one turn, challenging at the next - it's the ultimate roller-coaster for the parenting thrill seeker. In the Game of Life, you rolled the dice and accepted the role of co-parent. While the rules seem deceptively simple, (raise child into healthy adult), the game is often complicated by differences in parenting styles between partners. It's these differences, if unresolved, that can abandon you in the land of defeat and leave you feeling overwhelmed and discouraged, with "game over" flashing on your internal video screen.

Bridging a significant difference in parenting styles is one of the most difficult aspects of building a family. Parenting is the substantial task of balancing your beliefs and values (about child development, love, tradition and discipline) with your childhood experiences, in order to nurture healthy and secure children. Add a co-parent to the equation - with their own beliefs, values and experiences - and suddenly, the balancing act becomes more complex.

Let's pretend: It's the weekend. The sun is shining and there isn't a cloud in the sky. You and your parent partner decide to take your young son, Joey, for a relaxing Sunday picnic in the park. Your partner loads the picnic basket with bottles of water, healthy ham and cheese sandwiches on whole wheat bread (no crust for little Joey), and slices up a watermelon for a refreshing treat after a few games of touch football. You hop on your bikes and peddle to the park, laughing all the way as you and Joey play follow the leader and he tries to copy your "pop-a-wheelies" with varying degrees of success, your partner watching warily from behind.

Finally, the park in sight, you all race to be the first one there, Joey pedaling as fast as his little legs will let him. You and your partner are on his tail until the last moment when you both ease off to allow Joey the victory. Elated and winded, Joey hops off his bike and requests a ride on the swings. You turn to your partner and say, "I'll take him. Relax. Enjoy your lunch." Joey takes your hand and you

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toddle off to the swings. He climbs aboard, ready for the dizzying heights and squeals as each push sends him higher and higher.

Seconds later, your anxious parent partner is at your side, saying "Don't push him so high! He looks motion sick. Joey hold tight!" The comments sting, prompting feelings of anger that your partner would think you are not being safe with your child, resentment and even inadequacy. To add insult to the injury, little Joey immediately picks up your partner's hesitation, looks confused and timid, and loudly announces "Daddy, stop!" You quickly catch him and ease his swing into a stop position and watch with mixed emotions as Joey leaps off and runs into your partner's arms, whimpering as he's led back to the picnic area.

You slink back to join them, angry, hurt and frustrated, and eat your lunch in silence. Lunch over; you all wearily climb onto your bikes for the seemingly endless ride home. How did our happy day go wrong? What, if anything, should be done about it? Do you simply hope and pray for the arrival of Monday morning and the refuge of the work routine? No! It's essential to communicate with your partner.

### Plan a Response

Often, our first reaction when faced with a difference in styles is, "That's not what I would do." Conflicts bubble to the surface when one or both partners operate with "my way is the right way" mentality. Discussing and resolving a conflict is the only way to minimize the negative impact differing parenting styles can have on the family. An unresolved conflict in parenting styles is one of leading causes of partner breakups.

Relying on some of the following may minimize your distress as you plan a response:

**Communication:** Take time to discuss each other's parenting styles and values. Work on listening to your partner as carefully as you would like them to listen to you.

**Awareness (self and others, especially your child):** Be aware if your own childhood is influencing how you are reacting to your child or your co-parent, and assess if your reaction is a fit for today's situation. Ask yourself: Why did you react that way? Why did they?

**Ownership (your actions/non-actions):** Don't play the blame game. Examine what role your actions or non-actions played in the conflict.

**Control (who has it; who needs it):** Understand each other's needs for this vital resource. Strive to be more flexible and to not have to always be in control. Never undermine your partner or your partner's parenting in front of your children.

**Resolution (bring issues to closure):** Unresolved issues are a sure course to dissolution. Don't put off dealing with the important conflicts.

**Keep in mind:** Despite your differences, you both want what's best for the children. This wasn't the first conflict and it probably won't be the last. The next time you and your spouse lock horns over a

parenting matter, remember to relax, be compassionate, and know that your kids need you both.

Copyright 2005 Dr. Charles Sophy Dr. Charles Sophy currently serves as Medical Director for the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), which is responsible for the health, safety and welfare of nearly 40,000 foster children. He also has a private psychiatry practice in Beverly Hills, California. Dr. Sophy has lectured extensively and is an Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California Los Angeles Neuro-Psychiatric Institute. His lectures and teachings are consistently ranked as among the best by those in attendance.

Dr. Charles Sophy, author of the "Keep `Em Off My Couch" blog, provides real simple answers for solving life's biggest problems. He specializes in improving the mental health of children. To contact Dr. Sophy, visit his blog at

<http://drsophy.com>

## **Mommy & Baby: Styles Of Parenting**

### **By Kirsten Hawkins**

As a parent, you have the opportunity to set the tone in your home based on the style of parenting you choose. You can choose child-centered parenting or family-centered parenting—the differences will be discussed here.

v Child-centered Parenting  
o Intensely pursue the child's happiness, taking great strains to avoid discomfort or emotional stress for the child.  
o The child receives what she wants when she wants it: no delay, no waiting.

These concepts might not sound too bad, but what happens when Mom is sick? Or when Mom & Dad want to leave the baby with a sitter? There is little-to-no freedom in this parenting plan—and the baby will not grow in to a child who understands delayed gratification or how the world works. Additionally, this sets a child up for a bad case of "me-ism"—other people will not matter to her. Her goals and needs are paramount to everyone else's goals and needs, and the ability to look outward and understand being part of a team will be compromised.

v Family-centered Parenting  
o Keeps the baby's needs met, but within the appropriate context of the family unit.  
o The child enters in to a team-setting; she is not the center of the universe, but part of the family-team.

These concepts might not seem very different from the child-centered approach to parenting, but the results of the two methods are starkly different. Parents have the freedom to meet their child's needs and look ahead to developing skills and abilities, as they aren't catering to every fleeting whim or fancy a child might express. Sitters are okay for the family, as the parents will take time out to "date" and be intentional with each other. Because a baby raised in a family-centered plan understands that she is

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part of a team, she will learn "we-ism," not "me-ism." She will consider others as she grows and how her goals and needs can be met within the framework of a team—without compromising the others on the team.

You may know people on either side of these parenting styles who go overboard. That's not what I'm advocating here; a balance must be achieved. Remember these things:

Ø Life doesn't stop because you have a baby  
Ø Date your spouse  
Ø Continue those loving gestures you enjoyed before your baby came along  
Ø Invite some friends over for food and fellowship  
Ø At the end of each day, spend 15 minutes sitting with your spouse, discussing the day's events

Kirsten Hawkins is a baby and parenting expert specializing new mothers and single parent issues. Visit

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for more information on how to raising healthy, happy children.



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