

Parenting: Strengths and Love with an Emotional Focus

Optional Curriculum: Parenting During and After Divorce

Prayer

“You have heard it that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.”¹

Spend some time here and pause the video to reflect on these 3 statements:

1. What does it mean to love?
2. Your “ex” is not your child’s “ex.”
3. What does it mean to love your enemy?

Exercise:

How do I do with following the commandment to love others, including my enemies?

What does this quote by Theodore Hesburgh mean to you?

“The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother.”

Boundaries & Communication

Too rigid? Too loose?

- Too rigid means a lack of openness and trust necessary for difficult discussions to happen.

¹ Matthew 5: 43-44 (NAB)

- Too loose means children know more than they should or need to.

Filter communications, there are things your children just don't need to know, and shouldn't be concerned or worried about.

Ask yourself 3 questions before talking to your children about your spouse or difficult circumstances:

1. Am I venting?
2. Is my child the proper outlet for that venting?
3. What is pertinent and what is not pertinent? What do they need to know?

Balance of Power: Parent Roles and Child Roles

Alignment = avoiding triangulation and pairing one against the other.

It is important to remember that love for one parent does not negate love for the other parent. It's not an either-or, but a both-and situation.

Love your children and listen to them. Detach yourself from your spouse. Don't tell them how they should feel, or judge them for feeling a certain way.

For example: If your child is angry with your former spouse, let that anger be their experience. Listen to them and be present to them. There is no need to feed their anger, nor should you tell them how to feel. Same is true if your child is happy with your former spouse. Let them feel that for themselves, detached from your experiences.

Co-parenting: Behaviors to Avoid

1. **Opening discussions with negativity.**
2. **Conveying disgust for the other parent (sarcasm, name calling, eye-rolling).**
3. **Blaming the other parent.**
4. **Having a negative view of the relationship.**

Things to Remember

1. **Your child is a blessing, and it took both of you!**
2. **Be intentional about co-parenting, your relationship has changed, but because of your children, it's not over.**
3. **Attempt to create a shared vision** = you are both on the "same side" when it comes to raising healthy and successful children, that means you can't be enemies.

4. Remember the qualities that attracted you to your spouse, particularly if things are tough.
5. Keep the focus on your children.
6. For older children: hold your children accountable to avoid parent alienation.
7. If your child is upset that the parent doesn't call, remind them that the phone works two-ways! Encourage them to call their parent.

If There is a New Relationship

- No need to discuss your new partner's needs with your "ex." That's not fair and not necessary.
- Remember: when it comes to your children and decisions, your child(ren) and your "ex" come first – not your new partner.
- Create and stick to previously made schedules, arrangements.
 - This holds every party accountable. It's ok to be flexible with-in reason, just remember the segment about boundaries.
- Make communication arrangements too! Don't place your children in the role of messenger.

What if Your "Ex" is "Difficult"?

1. **Pray, pray, pray!**
 - *Jesus calls us to pray for our enemies. That may be your "ex."*
 - Remember, you can't control them, you can only control you!
2. **Don't respond to everything, be civil.**
 - Example: "well we do things differently in this house."
3. **Yes, there is a really good reason why you divorced, remember that, be honest with yourself about that, and then move on from it.**
4. **Take a business, just the facts approach. Communication is inevitable, but no need to try and be best friends. Discuss what needs to be discussed and leave it at that.**
5. **Affirm your child's feelings, validate and express empathy, but without demonizing your "ex." If they are a jerk, your children see it they don't need to hear from you.**
6. **Remember, your "ex" is still their parent.**
7. **Find a friend, counselor, priest, spiritual director, or support group.**