



Two parents, two styles: Child caught in the middle

Caught between a strict father and a gentle mother, a child learns to navigate tension adults barely name. But when these parents finally choose unity over pride, they discover that balanced parenting begins with listening.

BY MICHAEL AGABA

The silence that followed the pouring of the orange juice on the living room carpet by Emmanuella was even heavier than the sticky mess that was going into the carpet. With eyes open, she waited for the reaction.

"Emmanuella!" her father, Mark, was screaming on the couch. "And how many times have I told you not to bring drinks in here? Go to your room right now!"

Her mother, Lisa, before Emmanuella left, had a chance to move in and intervened. "Mark, it was an accident. She's only eight." She said to him rather respectfully. "Lisa, unless she is at some time made to face consequences, she can never learn how to be responsible." He answered back angrily.

Meanwhile, Emmanuella was standing there, quiet while her parents were looking at each other—two storms about to meet.

This was not the first disagreement

between Mark and Lisa concerning parenting. Mark had been brought up in a strict family where discipline was the yardstick of love. He felt that rules provided children with order and security. Lisa, in her turn, had been brought up by a single mother who stimulated curiosity and emotional receptiveness. She did not want Emmanuella to feel dictated.

To Mark, the way Lisa was doing it appeared to be hedonistic. To Lisa, Mark's seemed harsh.

With time, their dissimilarity spread out into silent bitterness. Mark began to feel like the bad guy because he was always imposing rules on their daughter, while Lisa always felt undermined by him whenever he shouted. Emmanuella, who was between the two, learnt to read the emotional weather of the house before talking.

One day, when Emmanuella had retired to bed, Lisa came upon Mark sitting at the kitchen table alone and gazing into a cup of cold coffee.

"She is afraid of us fighting", Lisa said in a low voice.

Mark sighed. "I just would like her to become a strong girl. The world's not gentle."

"And I only want her to know she is loved", mumbled Lisa.

Then he looked up at her, with weary eyes. "Maybe she needs both."

They both sat quietly, the purr of the refrigerator filling the silence between them. They both made a list of a few house rules—rules that were neither too strict nor too understanding.

The following morning, Emmanuella messed up again when she knocked over her cereal bowl, pouring everything in it. However, this time, Mark could say nothing but sighed and gave her a towel.

"We should clean it up", he said.

Emmanuella smiled in relief. Lisa did too. And the house seemed to be somewhat lightened, too, the first time in a long time—evidence that though there are two varieties of love, it can yet contrive to reach a middle ground.

Parenting needs collaboration, interaction and uniformity among parents or guardians to ensure that a child is brought up in a well-grounded and conducive atmosphere. Nevertheless, the situation can always be problematic when the parents do not agree with each other about how to bring up their children be it relating to discipline, ed-

ucation, freedom or even values. Such misunderstandings may cause strain in the family and bewilderment to the child. It is crucial to discover the reason behind the presence of such differences, the way they impact the family and ensure a healthy family life.

The main cause of parents having a differing opinion on parenting styles is that every parent will have their background, experiences, and beliefs to the relationship. An example is, one of the parents might have been raised in a strict family where discipline and obedience was the norm, whereas the other parent may have been brought up in a more permissive family where independence and expression of yourself were welcome. The view of each of the parents can be further affected by cultural differences, personal values, or even personality traits. Consequently, one of the parents might be inclined to an authoritative style—firm but nurturing, whereas the other might be inclined to a more lenient or authoritarian style. These conflicting philosophies may come a head with each other particularly when significant decisions are required to be made.

These differences of disagreeing may not be limited to the parents themselves but inflict on the emotional well-being of the child. Children live on the principle of consistency; whenever they get mixed messages on what is expected and what is not, they can be confused and draw one parent against the other.

In the long run, this lack of consistency may lead to parental authority and create behavioral issues. In addition, the constant bickering between the parents can result in tension in their homes such that the children will develop a feeling that they are not safe or the reason behind the conflicts. Research has been conducted in family psychology that has revealed that children who are exposed to parental conflict that is chronic tend to have anxiety, low self-esteem, and lack of ability to develop healthy relationships in the future.

Nevertheless, in spite of all these difficulties disagreements that emerge because of parenting styles are not always detrimental as long as they are managed constructively.

Communication and mutual respect are the key. It would be best that parents hold their values and expectations in confidence and are not in the presence of the child when talking and finding an understanding on how to command some fundamental values like respect, safety and empathy.

It is not always possible to avoid compromise. For example, one of the parents may offer to become more lenient regarding some of the rules, should the other be more adamant in regard to setting boundaries.

Couples can also be advised to consult parenting counsellors or attend a workshop with them to find methods to match their strategies and create common methods of behaviour and communication management.

Finally, conflicts on parenting styles should be taken as learning opportunities and not dividing factors. When the parent learns to listen to one another and strike a balance, they provide a good example to their children on how to cooperate and how to solve problems. Differences reconciliation is likely to build the parental relationship and offer the child a safer and more supportive environment. It does not matter that parents are exactly like each other, we only need to appear as unanimous as we can, which is on the basis of love, respect and understanding.

QUICK NOTE.

Tips.
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