

session 8: parenting as a team

Being a good parent isn't easy. You have to master lots of skills to be a successful parent. The same skills that help you be a good parent can help you have a lasting marriage, too. The good news is that these skills can be learned, and now is a good time to begin practicing for future commitments, like parenthood and marriage.

What do you think are *skills* (not feelings) that a person needs to make a successful relationship as a spouse and as a parent?

What can you start doing now to start practicing the skills you listed above?

How do you rate yourself on the following communications skills, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being lousy and 5 being practically perfect? Think of a specific example from your life to back up your rating.

Being a good listener (Rating)

Example:

Being able to clearly state what your problem is, without turning it into a personal attack (Rating _____)

Example:

Being able to find compromises ((Rating _____)

Example:

Being able to see things from another person's point of view (Rating _____)

Example:

Being able to admit when you are wrong and then make changes (Rating _____)

Example:

Think about the parents in each of the stories below. What do they have going for them? What do they need to work on to make things better for them and for their child?

Terrell is a 24-year-old father. He and his 19-year-old girlfriend, Joyce, have a three-year-old girl named Daisy. Joyce and Daisy live with Joyce's parents. Terrell was supportive of Joyce throughout her pregnancy, and he took time to go with Joyce to every doctor's visit. Terrell and Joyce also attended childbirth classes together, and he was in the delivery room when their baby was born. Terrell has a wonderful, warm relationship with his daughter.

When Daisy was just 18 months old, she was sick and had a very high fever. When she was hospitalized, Terrell drove her there with Joyce and stayed with them, even though his manager threatened to fire him — and did. The baby recovered, and now Terrell sees Joyce and the baby almost every day — because he is unemployed. He rarely has any money to help Joyce.

They sometimes fight about Terrell's unemployment. It seems to Joyce that he is not even trying to find a job or continue his education so he can get another one.

Joyce did graduate from high school, and she was a good student. Now that the baby is healthy, Joyce has started taking classes at the community college. Joyce works hard at school and gets good grades. She reads to her daughter every night, keeps her very well groomed and dressed, keeps their rooms spotless, and has already taught her to be very polite. Although Joyce is gentle with Daisy, she is undemonstrative and quite strict. It seems to Terrell that his daughter should be able to relax and have a little more fun.

What do these parents have going for them?

What needs work?

Martin, age 23, is the father of 2 children: Maria, age 5, and Martin Jr., age 6 months. "I didn't have a very good relationship with Maria's mother, Angelica. We weren't even together when Maria was born, and I knew that I wasn't going to do it that way again." Martin and his wife, Vanessa (Martin Jr.'s mother), have been married a little over two years. "Vanessa and I started talking about getting married on our second date. We just knew that we wanted to spend the rest of our lives together." Martin and Vanessa did date for about 8 months before they got married and went to premarital counseling with a minister they both knew.

"Vanessa can make me laugh at just about anything. We talk over the little things that go on in our day, and it's nice knowing that she's going to love me even if I do make a fool of myself. It really helped for us to go to counseling before we got married. We talked about the different ways we had been raised and how we thought a marriage should be." Martin does admit that it's not always been easy: "Even with the counseling, we've fought some about money and how much time we each spend with our friends. Vanessa's gotten jealous of one of my old girlfriends with whom I'm still friends. We went back to the counselor when it got really bad right before Martin Jr. was born and that helped."

Martin has not seen his daughter, Maria, for almost 2 years. Her mother, Angelica, moved to Los Angeles, and it's been impossible for him to get out there. "I've been able to talk to Maria on the phone once a month or so, but it's just not the same. She keeps asking me why I don't come see her and if I love her. I vowed to never let that happen with Martin Jr. I may not be able to fix it with Maria, but I'll always be there for him." Martin believes that his relationship with Vanessa will help Martin Jr. feel more secure and loved. "I don't ever want Junior to wonder if I love him or not."

What do these parents have going for them?

What needs work?

Kenny quit school to get a job to support his son, Rudy, who is now almost five. Kenny is a salesman in a furniture store. He makes decent money, but he isn't rich. Kenny pays his child support in full, on time, every month. He maintains regular contact with Shari, Rudy's mother, but he does not spend much time with her and their little boy. He has visitation rights, and he picks up Rudy faithfully every Saturday afternoon. Kenny is nice to Rudy, but he almost always immediately takes his son to stay with his parents all day instead of spending time with Rudy himself. Kenny works overtime most weekends.

Shari dropped out of school to have Rudy. She wasn't doing very well, anyway. She lives with her parents in an upstairs apartment they have fixed up for her. She is very sweet, and she is crazy about Rudy. She never denies him anything. She lets him do anything he wants. She has lots of girlfriends, and they all dote on Rudy. Every day she goes to the mall, where she buys toys and cute little suits for Rudy, as well as clothes and make-up and jewelry for herself. She calls the baby her "living doll." Kenny feels she should be saving some of the money he gives her. He also feels that Shari should consider working part-time once Rudy starts school. Although her parents offer free day-care, Shari says no way because she wants to stay home with her baby all day.

What do these parents have going for them?

What needs work?
