

FAST FACTS: Parental Challenges- Awareness of your Partnership

The complexities of raising traumatized children stresses parents, which often polarizes couples. Couples who have in the past successfully decided about which in-laws should be visited on which holidays, now, while under chronic stress, find themselves conflicted about parenting decisions, feeling abandoned, judged, and dismissed along the way. Arguments and resentments sprout up as weeds in the garden of marital life. This is predictable and painful, and there are things we can do about it: awareness leads to understanding and acceptance; strategies promote common purpose. This is the purpose of this Fast Fact Sheet, to expand awareness and introduce a strategy.

Regarding relationship awareness, look at the four Parenting Styles listed below. Read and identify which best describes you. Identify your partner's style. Invite them to do the same. If uncertain which dog breed best represents you, ask the children. They often have unbridled opinions!

Afghan Hound



At their BEST, this parent:

- * is pleasant and engaging
- * blends spontaneity with playfulness to manage tasks

At their WORST, this parent: inconsistent with rules and

- * is inconsistent with rules and expectations
- * avoids conflict while being superficially present
- * at times, is pouty and self-absorbed

Dominant BELIEFS:

- * over time, most problems sort themselves out
- * Children learn from their own mistakes

LOVES to:

- * enjoy life and learn as you go

Co-parenting: sniffs out the attentive Border Collie or the compassionate Golden Retriever



Golden Retriever



At their BEST, this parent:

- * patiently and compassionately provides emotional warmth and kindness to others
- * gracefully guides and cajoles children through daily routines and responsibilities

At their WORST, this parent:

- * becomes overwhelmed and preoccupied with the upset feelings of others
- * in a distressed household, vacillates between complaining and a silent martyr

Dominant BELIEFS:

- * Love will conquer all
- * Be nice to others and they will be nice in return

LOVES to:

- * love and be loved

Co-Parenting: sniffs out principled German Shepherds or relaxed Afghans



German Shepherd



At their BEST, this parent:

- * is principled and loyal to ideas and causes, rules and responsible behavior
- * calm in the face of drama and not easily manipulated
- * warmly affectionate as long as home life is reasonable orderly

At their WORST, this parent:

- * becomes commanding, impatient, and angry
- * Isolates self from others with a self-righteous attitude
- * Can feel lonely

Dominant BELIEF:

- * There are consequences to behavior and children must learn from those consequences

Loves to:

- * live by and instill virtues and values

Co-partnering: Choses partners more emotionally attentive than themselves such as Golden Retrievers and Border Collies



Border Collie



At their BEST, this parent:

- * Serves others through care and task completion
- * Is diligent and unflagging while resolving problems

At their WORST, this parent:

- * Tends to micro-manage and engage in power-struggles
- * Has fears of catastrophic outcomes

Dominant BELIEF:

- * If I don't do it ... it won't get done

LOVES TO:

- * be involved and assist others where help is needed

Co-Parenting: Typically chooses principled German Shepherds or relaxed Afghans as companions in life



AWARENESS OF BEST AND WORST:

Most parents both smile and cringe while reading these cards. The smile comes from self-recognition about the "at their best" listings. The cringe comes from the "at their worst" listing. At this stage of marital awareness, its best to explore and accept the "best" and "worst" features of your style. By showing curiosity and discussing this topic, awareness expands. As a bonus you will be modeling personal growth to everyone in the household.

OPPOSITES ATTRACT:

Opposites attract is the adage, and its generally true with couples. And it goes like this: Parenting Types on the Left side of the page typically couple with couples on the Right side of the page: German Shepherds sniff out the Border Collie and Golden Retrievers and vice versa. Likewise, Afghan Hounds wag their tails about Border Collies and Golden Retrievers. But the two dog breeds on the right side, German Shepherds and Afghan, seldom couple up. The same is true of the Golden Retriever and Border Collie, seldom do they form a couple.

STRESS POLARIZES COUPLES:

Raising children affected by complex trauma stretches and strains parents. Complex trauma creates complex stress in couples. The stress compels each parenting style away from their BEST attributes and toward their WORST tendencies. Predictable patterns of conflict form between couples: Parent Styles on the left side become dismissive of emotions and feelings; Parent Styles on the right side become preoccupied with emotions and feelings. This leads to hurt feelings and conversations that sound something like the following:

Golden Retriever: "I think the kids sense we are not parenting as a team. They are always begging me to let them off some punishment you've given them."

German Shepherd: "If you would just enforce some of the rules around here, maybe the children would listen to you. Instead, you're always changing the rules. Kids need order and clear answers."

Golden Retriever: "Are you serious? The children basically hide from you because you are either yelling at them or lecturing. For goodness sake, if you would just play a game with them once in a while, maybe they wouldn't come running to me for everything."

German Shepherd: "Play with the kids? They get everything and anything they want because you give in to them. You're turning them into spoiled brats. They don't lift a finger to help out around here and you think I should give them more play time?!"

Or this...

Afghan Hound: "I gave Sally permission to go to the skating party tonight."

Border Collie: "What?! She's behind on homework. Yesterday she told me to shut-up and I grounded her for it. She knows she's grounded. She's playing us off each other. You have to check with me about these things. You have no idea what's going on around here!"

Afghan Hound: "Hey, all she wants to do is get out of the house and have fun like a normal kid. It's not like she's failing 4th grade, you know. She wanted to tell you, but she was afraid you'd throw a fit."

Border Collie: "Seriously? Why do I always have to be the bad guy while you do as you damn well please, undermining me, going behind my back? You let her have her way so she'll like you. Well, that's being her friend, not her parent!"

Afghan Hound: "Wow, no wonder Sally wants to get away from you. You're so darned controlling nobody can stand being around you. You and Sally go ahead and keep yelling at each other. I'm going to clean the gutters!"

A STRATEGY TO TRY:

There is a skill that helps each Parenting Style modify towards their BEST attributes. Empathy is the ability to identify how you feel in relationship to another person. The Parenting Tip Card pictured below offers a template to follow. Follow this template with your spouse or child. At first focus on positive emotions. As you feel more confident, apply it to more sensitive feelings {vulnerable emotions of "sad, mad, worried, loneliness).

Empathic Listening

Reduce negative emotions and promote understanding by reflecting the emotional state of a child using empathic listening

Examples

You seem ...
You sound ...
You look ...
I wonder if you are ...

**MAD... SAD
HAPPY ... NERVOUS
FRUSTRATED
WORRIED**

Helpful Hints

Do: Convey warmth
Do: Keep it short
Do: Let the child do the talking
Don't: Critique or advise

MY Strong FAMILY
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