

A woman with curly hair and glasses is hugging a young girl from behind. They are on a city street with cars in the background. The woman is wearing a black jacket and the girl is wearing a grey hoodie and black boots. The text is overlaid in the center of the image.

**THE BEST
THING YOU
CAN DO FOR
YOUR KIDS
IS LEAVE**



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Marriage Advice For Parents

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Marriage Advice For Parents

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage can be a challenge. Merging two lives together has its complications. Now imagine adding another adolescent human into the mix.

That's what parenting is. It combines the issues of marriage with the issues of raising a child. Sometimes it can be overwhelming.

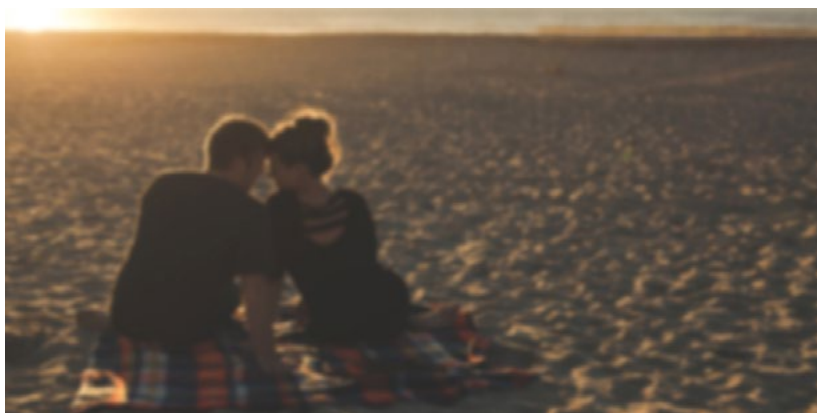
But it's easier when you work together with your spouse to raise your children.

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The Best Thing You Can Do For Your Kids is Leave

By Ted Lowe



*The best thing for your kids is for you to leave...
for the night... with your spouse.*

We all love our kids and want what's best for them. We sign them up for activities and sports, which is good. We want them to have time with friends, which is good.

We want them to make good grades, so they will get into a good college, so they will get a good job, which is good. We all want the best for them.

But if we are not careful, we might forget to do the thing our child needs most: love our spouse.

Philip Cowan, Ph.D., a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, who has studied families for decades with his wife, psychologist Carolyn Pape Cowan, Ph.D., says, "Kids whose parents' relationship has cooled are more likely to have behavioral or academic problems than kids of happy couples. Even if you can't see yourself going out on a date for yourselves, do it for your kids."

My wife and I go on a date almost every week. We take a few hours each week just for us. We work out together, see movies, have a meal, we talk, ask each other silly questions, and do that other fun thing couples do. We have uninterrupted time to re-connect.

Dating lifts our heads from the chaos of kids and work, and makes us see each other. Dating matters. It really matters, but not just for us, for our kids.

Carol Ummel Lindquist, Ph.D. and author says, "The irony is that a strong relationship with your spouse is one of the best things you can do for your kids. You and your spouse are modeling a good relationship, which sets your children up for better marriages themselves when they grow up."

Dads, the best thing you can do for your children is to love their mother. Moms, the best thing you can do for your children is to love their father.

Do you want your kids to have a marriage like yours? Because they more than likely will. So, model fun and connection and priority in your marriage.

The best thing you can do for your kids is to leave for the night with your spouse.

How and when do you and your spouse make dating a priority?

How To Protect Your Marriage From Parenting

By Ted Lowe



For many, parenting can be tough on a marriage. Bottom line, our marriages need protecting from our parenting. How?

For over 30 years, researchers have studied how having children affects a marriage. The results are conclusive: the relationship between spouses suffers once kids come along. And why shouldn't it?

We stop saying and doing the little things that connect us as a couple. From the moment we become parents, sexual intimacy is greatly impacted.

At every stage, kids and their needs are constantly changing, requiring something new every day. We are also married to someone who was raised, at least to some degree, differently from us.

Add all of the above to the fact we are different from our spouse in so many ways and there is no wonder parenting plus marriage can often equal tension. Bottom line, our marriages need protecting from our parenting. How?

Put your marriage before your kids

We live in a kid-centric world. I have three kids of my own who I adore, yet who keep my wife and I quite busy.

But my relationship with their mom is one of the most important parts of their development, more important than many of the other things in their lives. So that means, we have conversations that our kids aren't a part of just because we want to.

That means we can send them out the room to watch a movie together. That means we may miss a baseball game to go somewhere just the two of us. That means they can't be involved in everything they want to do because it puts too much stress on us. When you feel connected in your marriage, you are more connected as parents.

Leverage your different parenting styles and views

When it comes to parenting, on good days I'm grace and she is truth. On bad days, I'm denial and she is critical.

We used to struggle a lot with how to parent our kids. I was more of the softy and she laid down the law. I thought I was right. She thought she was right.

But the older our kids get the less right I feel. The older they get,

the more I think I'm just not sure how to handle this situation.

Nancie feels the same way. Our uncertainty has made us better listeners because we are searching for balance and wisdom in both our viewpoints. While that sounds lovely and flowing, it's not.

The process can be frustrating and still we never really know it we are doing the exact right thing. But two really is better than one when we listen and value each other.

Hide in the bathroom and get on the same page

Discuss important parenting decisions in private so you can get on the same page. Kids need to see a united front. But your marriage needs to avoid parental battle of wills in front of your kids.

So, while hiding somewhere in your house where the kids can't hear you, come to a united decision of how you want to handle the situation.

Nancie and I are usually pretty great about this until we weren't... last week. I had told our sixteen-year-old "no." She told him "yes." I didn't know she hadn't heard my "no." And around and around we went, in front our son. It was not good. Don't do it. Get on the same page.

Parenting doesn't have to hurt your marriage. You can decide to live in a way that is great for your marriage, which is always great for your kids.

When Parents Disagree About How To Enforce the Rules

By Carey Nieuwhof



Effective parenting will never happen without rules and relationship.

You might have noticed there's this tension in parenting. OK, you may have noticed, there are 1,000 tensions in parenting, but today I'm going to focus on just one.

What tension you ask?

The tension between the parent who wants to enforce the rules and the parent who wants to focus on the relationship.

You know what I mean. One parent says, "It's lights-out at the sleep over at 10 p.m.," and the other parent, faced with pressure from her despondent ten-year-old daughter and not wanting to disappoint, lets the kids stay up until midnight because nobody likes a mean parent.

One parent asks whether the room has been cleaned, while the other parent, in the same moment, sits down with their son at the kitchen counter for a cup of hot chocolate and a long conversation.

You know what's really strange about rule parents and relationship parents? They fall in love and marry each other. (This explains far too much about your marriage, doesn't it?)

The debate, of course, between every parent is this: Who's right? The rules people or the relationship people?

The answer is: You both are.

Effective parenting will never happen without rules and relationship.

Rules are needed because boundaries are needed

You should never let the inmates run the prison. Kids naturally and instinctively would throw out most of the rules until they are left in a crying mess, confused and craving order with no idea how to bring it back to their lives.

That's why you need parents. Letting the inmates run the prison results in even the inmates wanting to eventually escape. It's the job of every parent to bring order, limits, and meaning to young lives.

But relationships are also vital for multiple reasons. Rules without relationship are cruel. They actually incite rebellion. Having a deep relationship with your kids reminds them that the rules are born out of love, not tyranny.

That you love them even when they think you don't. That the rules,

when followed, lead to life.

The challenge is that rules parents think relationship parents are soft, while relationship parents think rules parents are mean.

The truth is we need each other.

One thing I've learned as a dad whose kids are now in their twenties is that eventually, all you have left is relationship. It's pretty hard to enforce the rules when your kids leave home, get married, and even pay their own bills.

If you were relying on rules as the only parenting card you ever play, you end up being a pretty angry person yelling random bits of advice out the window at passing traffic.

You know what makes your kids want to come home? Sure, the cooking does. But I digress. What makes them ultimately want to come home when they don't have to is this: relationship.

Because nothing runs deeper than love.

When you have relationship you still have influence

And when you have influence, you can still speak into their lives. In fact, they might even turn to you for this strange thing called 'advice'.

Imagine your kids actually asking you what you think. I know, it probably sounds like only alien children do that. But I promise you from experience, it can actually happen if you work on relationship.

The irony is if you focus only on the rules you end up with no relationship, and if you focus only on relationship your kids eventually lose respect for you because they realize you bend with the wind and there isn't much substance underneath the soft veneer.

So guess what parents-who-always-disagree-about-the-approach-to-

take? We need each other.

The rules parent can learn from the relationship parent, and the relationship parent can learn from the rules parent.

Maybe tonight after you read this post, sit down together over a cup of coffee and learn from each other.

You need each other. Actually, so do your kids.

Should You Let Your Kids See You Fight?

By Carey Nieuwhof



You may have already weighed in on the age-old parenting debate: should you let your kids see you fight?

The question springs out of the pain too many kids grew up witnessing. For sure, there are some things kids should never witness.

While God can use anything for good (and he does), I'm still not sure it's great parenting to introduce kids to the depths of human depravity.

As a result, some couples move in the entirely opposite direction: they don't want their kids to witness any kind of conflict. But not everyone's sure that's the answer either.

After all, how are your kids going to learn to resolve conflict in a healthy way if they never see conflict?

I am convinced there is one fight every kid should see growing up—they should see you fight for each other. They should see you fight for your marriage and for them.

Most of the fighting in families happens for the opposite reason: families spend their energy fighting with each other.

You know the drill. A world war is sparked over everything from who on earth left a wet towel on the wood floor, to how many videos games you son is allowed to play, to why your daughter can't go to the sleepover.

Brothers and sisters fight because they're, well, brothers and sisters. You fight with your spouse because you're married (or with the ex because you're not married.) We fight because we're human.

My wife and I learned how to fight with each other long before we figured out how to fight for each other and for our kids. Fighting with someone is just so much easier and more natural. And deeply destructive.

What's the difference between fighting for and fighting with?

All you do is swap out one little word, but it makes a difference that is staggering:

- When I fight with someone, I want to win.
- When I fight for someone, I want them to win.

What does it look like when you want your spouse and your kids to win? It means...

- searching for solutions even when you can't think of any
- giving someone the benefit of the doubt

- filling the gaps in information with trust, not suspicion.
- deciding you're going to stay when everything in you wants to leave
- getting the help you need to deal with your junk, not their junk
- loving each other because you realize love is a decision, not an emotion
- letting your kids see you're committed to your spouse

When you let your kids see you fight for each other and for them, it shows them how much they're worth.

One of the reasons most of us struggle with fighting for each other is that we're not sure anyone has ever fought for us.

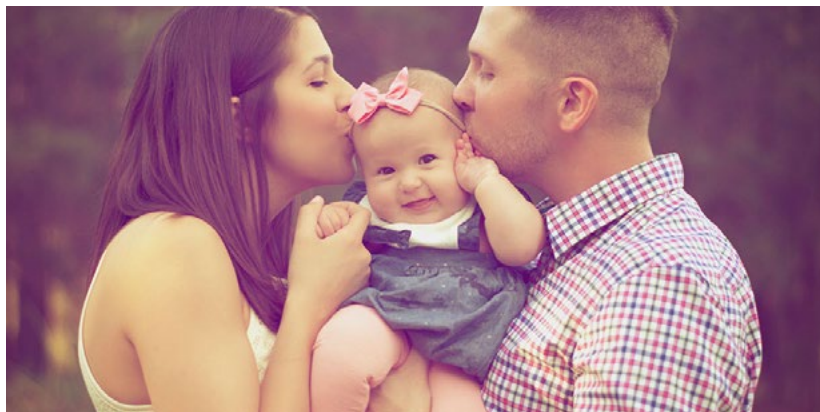
The reality is that someone did... for each one of us, when we deserved it the least. Jesus was fighting for us when He became human and walked this earth when He was beaten, nailed to the cross, and forsaken. Jesus demonstrated perfectly what fighting for someone looks like when he gave His life for us so that we could have life.

Fighting for someone and wanting them to win requires humility and sacrifice, but it's how you prove you love them.

Let your family see you fight, but let them see you fight for each other.

3 Parent Hacks to Get Some Mommy-Daddy Alone Time

By Ashley Willis



When we have so many other things fighting for our time, our marriage and sex both get pushed to the back burner.

When you have kids, time seems to always be an issue. There is simply not enough of it, especially when it comes to mommy and daddy getting some alone time.

Yes, I am talking about sex. And, yes, we need to be having lots of it, even with kids in the house. Let's be honest. It's a lot easier said than done. So, what are we supposed to do?

We have to make physical intimacy a priority. That often means we have to schedule it. I know it sounds a little lame, but everything else is on our schedule, so why not sex?

When we have so many other things fighting for our time, our marriage and sex both get pushed to the back burner. We have to prevent this from happening. Many times, this takes strategic, creative planning.

1. The Getting Ready Tactic

This might be the one Dave and I have used most. OK, that may be too much information, but I'm just keeping it real.

This scenario is one in which we make sure our kids are safely occupied for around thirty minutes or so maybe using an iPad, reading a book, or watching a movie, etc.

Then, we just tell them that Mommy and Daddy are getting ready and head to the bedroom. This tactic can be used any time of the day.

Yes, it works. And, no, my kids haven't figured it out yet or walked in on us. Oh, and please lock your doors. No kid wants to walk in on their parents' love fest.

2. Lunch Break Love

This is a great tactic when you both have a lunch break and the kids are at school or daycare. Who says lovemaking has to happen at night? Why not set a lunch date at the house?

In fact, how fun would it be to surprise your spouse and meet him/her at the house for a little rendezvous? Don't be afraid to spice things up. This takes a little planning, but it is well worth it.

3. Early Bedtime

This hack might be the most practical of them all. Tell the kids that everyone needs to hit the hay earlier than usual one or two nights a week. Use this time to reconnect with each other in the Biblical sense.

If you have older kids, you can give them something else to do like listen to music, read, or watch television if the bedtime seems a bit too early for them.

As parents, we set the bedtimes. So, we can take full advantage of the extra hour or two.

These three tactics are certainly not rocket science, yet so many of us have a hard time making our sex lives a priority. It seems unimportant to many of us, but it is vital to our marriages. We need to connect with our partner on every level—physically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally—to build and maintain a strong marriage.

Ask These Questions

So, let's talk about how we can be having MORE sex with our husband/wife. Ask each other these questions:

- What time of day works best for you to enjoy it most?
- How often do you want to be having sex?
- Where do you enjoy it most?
- What can I do to enhance our sex life?

The more we are open with each other about our expectations and desires, the better. Let's get excited about it. Try one or all of the three parent hacks discussed earlier. Come up with a new hack and share it with the rest of us!

Let's build up to it by texting each other flirtatiously, buying and wearing nice lingerie, lighting candles, or running bubble baths.

We are married! God designed sex for us. We should be having the best sex around. Let's have more of it and enjoy it. The kids will be fine in the other room.

10 Actions That Kids Learn From Their Parents' Marriage

By Doug Fields



When I speak on marriage, I'm always asked if I intentionally taught my kids about marriage. The answer is yes and, no.

Yes, there are times when we've talked specifically about marriage (either ours or ones that our kids have observed).

But, for the most part, Cathy and I have been wise enough to know that our kids are constantly watching and learning from us without us having to do a lot of talking. Our actions (both good and bad) are always teaching them about marriage.

I would be thrilled if my kids had a similar type of marriage that Cathy and I share it's definitely not perfect, but we're both very proud of what we've developed over 27+ years.

Here are 10 actions that I know my kids have observed from us over the years:

1. Affection

Cathy and I are very affectionate and I like having my kids see me holding their mom's hand, hugging, kissing, cuddling, etc. as often as I can.

2. Saying I'm Sorry

I want to be quick to use this phrase and I want my kids to hear me say it (and I have to say it a lot more than Cathy).

3. Affirmation

This is my primary love language so it's easy for me to dish out encouraging words. My kids get a lot of verbal affirmation, but they also hear me directing it toward my wife (which is really easy).

4. Attraction

I think Cathy is hot and, I make it known around our family. I'll regularly say to our kids: "Isn't your mom beautiful?"

5. Time

Our kids know that we like to spend time together. When they see us steal time away to sit in the backyard and talk, or go in the hot tub, or go on a date night, or sneak away for the weekend that's a good message I want them to see.

6. Laughter

We laugh a lot in our house and my wife's cute sense of humor cracks me up. I like having my kids see that my wife makes me laugh.

7. Respect

Opening the door for Cathy, saying "thank you" and "please" and showing her simple signs of respect.

8. Faith Conversations

We're not always praying in front of our kids, but they hear and see our faith conversations and know that we're always talking about Jesus and what it means to be a follower.

9. The Value of Friends

Our house is well worn from the traffic of friends in/out of our house. We love having people over and the Fields' house is a regular hangout for some incredible friends.

10. Servanthood

I know my kids have had a better example in Cathy than with me because she's the ultimate servant. Always asking, "How can I help? What do you need to make life better?" Serving one another is seen in the daily, little things and there's many opportunities to serve.

Kids are always watching their parent's marriage and yet too many marriages underestimate the power of modeling!

Children are taking daily recordings of what a marriage looks like and those recordings are definitely influencing and shaping their view of marriage.

3 Things Every Parent Should Do Before Your Kids Leave Home

By Carey Nieuwhof



We were designed to become adults. And much to every parent's surprise, it happens to all of us.

You might be just beginning this parenting voyage and can't even bear the thought of your chubby little gem growing up to leave home one day.

Or maybe you're well into this thing called parenting and you realize that in a few years, your oldest son or daughter will be heading off to college. I don't know any parents who are really excited about this prospect. I wasn't. Neither was my wife.

But time doesn't seem to care much. In what seems like a heartbeat, my kids have grown up to be twenty-two and eighteen. And recently, we drove over a thousand miles to drop our youngest son off at college on the other side of the country.

Whether you want it to happen or not is a bit irrelevant. They go. And no, they don't always come back. (And honestly, for the most part, they shouldn't.) We were designed to become adults. And much to every parent's surprise, it happens to all of us.

With that in mind, how do you prepare yourself for that moment, even if it's five, ten or fifteen years down the road? Sure . . .there's a lot you can do to prepare your kids, and we write about that a ton around here.

Although my wife and I are pretty early into this journey, we've thought and prayed about it a lot over the last few years. Here are 3 things any parent can do before your kids leave home.

1. Become Best Friends With Your Spouse (Again)

My wife Toni and I had a moment of realization about 6 years ago when our then 16-year-old son got his driver's license and drove away with his brother in the car.

We stood there in the living room watching them pull out, turned to look at each other and both gasped, "What just happened?"

For the first time in sixteen years, we were alone and our kids were gone, on their own. Legitimately. No one ran away. There was no crisis. They were gone. We were alone, a state we barely remembered.

It was the first time we realized we were going to have a LOT of time together over the next few decades. After all, we were both in our early forties.

As we thought about it (and actually researched it a bit) we realized couples take three paths when the youngest leaves home:

- **Split up.** Yes, the divorce rate actually spikes when the youngest goes to college.
- **Live Separate Lives.** Other couples stay together but pursue parallel lives—he has his friends and hobbies, she has hers.
- **Become Best Friends Again.** We picked this option.

We worked hard on our relationship. Our focus was so much on the kids that we kind of lost sight of each other. And we still had issues to work out.

By the grace of God (and with the help of some good Christian counsellors), we got the junk out and built a future together.

We started pursuing more shared interests and even a few shared hobbies. We carved out time for more date nights. So what happened?

We love being together again. As in seriously love to be together again. We resolve our differences more quickly than we used to. And remember, one of the best gifts you can give your kids is a strong marriage.

2. Prepare to Fill the Hole

No matter how hard you work on your relationship as a couple, when your kids leave, there will be a hole. A big one.

You can sit and sob, which almost everyone does for at least a few minutes. But your identity was never intended to revolve around your kids.

You were designed to worship God, not your family. Remember? And your kids are designed to worship God, not you.

Consequently, your identity is not tied to how good your kids are, how bad your kids are, or how close your relationship is to your kids. Your identity revolves around Christ.

So that's a bit of theology. But what does this mean practically? It means you will have a LOT more time. What are you going to do with it?

For us, I've been slowly ramping up my writing and launched a podcast. I've been cycling more, and last year my wife got a bike so we can ride together.

My wife went back to work full time and even changed her career path. If work or career isn't a big part of your future, find something meaningful to do with it—paid or not.

It's a great opportunity to volunteer, serve or just be an incredible friend to the people around you. Fill the hole with good things, and you'll be surprised at how many good things happen.

3. Let Them Go

It's hard, I know. But you need to let them go.

Chances are you will want to connect with your kids more than they want to connect with you. Even in high school. That's OK.

While you never want to stop fighting for your relationship with your son or daughter, sometimes the best way to fight for them is to give them a bit of space.

Your kids were designed to leave home. (If you don't believe me, just read the first two chapters of the Bible and you'll see. Think about the alternative: 38-year-olds living in your basement playing video games.)

Don't hover over them when they're in their final years of high school. Be around. Always be ready to respond. Just don't try to control everything they do.

They will appreciate your influence more and probably want to hang out more often. Let them figure some stuff out on their own.

Not to the point where they drown, but, seriously, remove the water wings. And remember, learning to swim always involves some struggle. So let them struggle.

Teens and young adults who learn the consequences of their actions early will make far better decisions by age twenty-five than people who were rescued by parents who just couldn't let go.

Your desire to act in the best interest of your kids often isn't about your kids—it's about you. So do what you need to do to let them go.

That's what I'm learning. It's a little counter-intuitive, but in the end, you can end up with kids who are, well, men and women.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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