

Co-Parenting as a Team: Values, Disagreements, and Anger

Read the article first. This worksheet accompanies [Parenting Questions for Couples](#) at ThoughtsFromATherapist.com, along with [Parenting and Rowboats](#) and [Fear, Competence, Values and Anger in Parenting Rambunctious Children](#). Search “parenting questions for couples” on the site to find them.

If two people row one boat with different strokes, the boat goes nowhere useful, however good each stroke is. The best strategy is the same strategy. Getting to one stroke starts with understanding why each of us parents the way we do, and then noticing what happens in us when a parenting moment goes badly. Each partner fills in their own column, then we compare. For every answer, the follow-up question is: why is this important to me? A few words per space is enough.

PART ONE

Values and origins

Each of us separately: what a child needs, what we keep and what we refuse from how we were parented, and the unwritten rules about feelings in our families. Two people often share more values than their methods suggest.

Why is this important to me?

PART TWO

The same stroke

The rules we already share, the ones we differ on, and one shared method we will both use. Debates about the stroke happen away from the children.

What happens to the boat when two rowers ignore each other's methods?

PART THREE

When I am depleted

How each of us knows we are running low, what helps us recover, and how we are at asking for support and receiving it.

PART FOUR

Under the anger

Parenting anger usually starts earlier than it appears. We trace one blow-up through the four stages, working backward from the first feeling, and find where telling our partner could have changed it.

What arrived before the anger?

What could I have said to my partner there?

A WORKED EXAMPLE: UNDER THE ANGER

THE MOMENT	Two rambunctious, passionate kids getting more chaotic by the minute.
STAGE ONE	Anxiety first, long before the anger. Fear that the chaos will outrun my ability to intervene.
STAGE TWO	Worked backward: if it gets chaotic enough, I will not be able to bring it back.
STAGE THREE	The pull to over-control their behavior to ward the chaos off.
STAGE FOUR	In these moments I do not need academics or strategy. I need to be loved, and a hug works really well for me.
THE OPENING	The cascade into anger starts at the anxiety. Telling our partner there, and our partner offering connection, is often enough to reach the method we already know.

Part one: values and origins

Each of us writes in our own column, in our own words. Add why it matters to me.

VALUES

What a child needs

The most important things a child needs to grow up healthy and happy, and why.

PARTNER ONE

PARTNER TWO

ORIGINS

What I keep

What my parents did that I want to carry forward: a ritual, a rule, a way of being together.

PARTNER ONE

PARTNER TWO

ORIGINS

What I refuse

What my parents did that was hurtful or ineffective, and that I want to leave behind.

PARTNER ONE

PARTNER TWO

ORIGINS

Feelings in my family

How were emotions expressed? What were the unwritten rules about showing a feeling or asking for a need?

PARTNER ONE

PARTNER TWO

SKILLS

My strengths and struggles

What I am already good at as a parent, and what I struggle with. My own, not my partner's.

PARTNER ONE

PARTNER TWO

COMPARING COLUMNS

Where are our values closer than our methods? Where do they truly differ?

Part two: the same stroke

With two kind and well intentioned adults, one shared stroke, even a less effective one, does more than two different strokes.

ALREADY SHARED

Rules we agree on

Bedtime, food, screens, friends, consequences, what happens before a consequence.

NOT YET SHARED

Rules we differ on

Name the difference without deciding yet whose method is better.

ONE DIFFERENCE

Finding one stroke

Pick one difference. Each of us describes our own method, then we agree on one to use for now.

PARTNER ONE'S METHOD

PARTNER TWO'S METHOD

THE SHARED METHOD WE WILL BOTH USE, AND WHEN WE WILL REVISIT IT

Part three: when I am depleted

It is very hard to meet a child's needs when our own are not being met.

THE SIGNS

How I know

Headaches, ruminating, more reactive, more withdrawn, more screen time.

PARTNER ONE

PARTNER TWO

RECOVERY

What helps me

Sleep, exercise, time alone, time with friends, a date night, a hug.

PARTNER ONE

PARTNER TWO

SUPPORT

Asking and receiving

How am I at asking for support? At receiving it? At receiving support I did not ask for?

PARTNER ONE

PARTNER TWO

Part four: under the anger

Each of us traces our own reaction to the same blow-up. Work backward from the feeling that came first.

THE BLOW-UP

What happened, where were we, and who stepped in?

How big did it feel? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

STAGE ONE

What arrived first

Every feeling, in the order it came. Anger is often near the end of the chain: nervous, embarrassed, afraid, ashamed.

PARTNER ONE

PARTNER TWO

STAGE TWO

Interpretation

For the first feeling to make sense, I would have to believe...

PARTNER ONE

PARTNER TWO

STAGE THREE

Conscious thought and behavior

What I told myself, and what I did. Separate the thought from the action.

PARTNER ONE

PARTNER TWO

STAGE FOUR

Return, resolution, and recataloging

What I could have told my partner at the first feeling, and what my partner could offer that helps me return.

PARTNER ONE

PARTNER TWO

NEXT TIME

Being mindful of the first feeling, brave enough to turn toward our partner, and met with connection: that is often what gives us access to the method we already know.

WHAT I WILL SAY WHEN I NOTICE THE FIRST FEELING:

WHAT I WOULD LIKE MY PARTNER TO OFFER:
