

WE ARE A TEAM

One of the most important things to consider as a parent is the notion that you can't do it all, and you can't do it alone. It's important to let some tasks go; for others you need to find ways to enlist the help of your children. You may be surprised to learn how many resources they have, and how eager they are to help you.

It helps when everyone thinks of your family as a team. You can even call yourselves the Smith Family Team. This conveys a collaborative and cooperative atmosphere that permeates the house. By acknowledging democratic values, you let your children know that you consider everyone responsible to help guarantee the success of the family's efforts.

To be a team, every family member has to respect that every other member is important and entitled to have a voice in family decisions. Though you have certain responsibilities and authority as leader of the team, you must respect each team member as well. Don't use your power to abuse and/or undermine your children.

Let's imagine that you get frustrated because of how hard it is to get everyone to bed on time, and on some nights you yell and scream at them. You get so mad that you become aggressive, forcing them into bed and restraining them from leaving their rooms. By doing so, you are in danger of abusing your power. But even worse, you are violating the value that everyone is entitled to respect. On top of that, your strategy is backfiring. You're modeling a hostile, conflictual and unhappy way of relating to each other. No wonder you feel helpless and inadequate.

Eager to try a new approach, you call everyone together and explain how unhappy you are about what happens at bedtime. You suggest that talking about it together will make a difference. In the subsequent discussion, you discover the reasons why your children don't cooperate. They suggest a new approach to bedtime routines. You decide to give it a try – and sure enough, it works.

What you did was build a team. To accomplish this, begin by talking up the idea of teamwork. To get everyone on board, you can say something like, "You know guys, I was thinking – we'd all feel so much better if we acted more like a team. After all, I can't do everything to make us happy. So let's call ourselves the "Smith Family Team." How about it if we make a Smith Family Team logo, and make up some banners on the computer."

BUILDING THE TEAM

Here are some suggestions:

- Set up a specific family meeting time each week to discuss family issues.
- Announce that everyone's voice is important in the decision-making process.
- Ask each child for input, and genuinely listen to all suggestions, emphasizing that each person's point of view needs to be respected and considered.
- Acknowledge that you appreciate everyone's help.
- Instead of asking the children questions, talk about your feelings. (Say, "I'd like to get your input" instead of, "What do you think.") Talking this way is important because the other person doesn't feel pressured or blamed. Questions can put people on the defensive; it's best to find another way to express what you want to say.
- Reinforce each child's contribution and thank him or her for trying and cooperating ("I appreciate the job you did."; "I'm glad you are trying.")
- Be flexible. The best outcomes will emerge over time, through trial and error.

Everyone's point of view is important and family members need to respect one another to make a successful team.
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