

## NRFC Webinar (July 31, 2019)

### The Importance of Co-Parenting and Relationship Skills: Helping Fathers Help Their Children

#### HANDOUT

#### Co-Parenting Tips for Dads (Carolyn and Philip Cowan)

#### General Approach to Discussions about Childrearing

- Before discussing what you want to do about your child's behavior, try to find common goals.
- Before characterizing your partner's behavior (too harsh, too soft), assume good intentions.
- Try to see the problem from your partner's perspective.

#### Communication principles that facilitate dialogue:

- Try to agree to make short statements. Arguments get out of hand when a large number of ideas are presented all at once before allowing a response.
- Make sure you understand the other person's argument before you counter with your own.
- Before disagreeing with a statement, ask clarifying questions, or state your understanding of the other person's statement before providing your response.
- Use "I" statements that describe what you feel and believe, not "you" statements that characterize the other person's intentions. A sentence such as "I feel that you are hostile" is not an "I" statement.
- As much as possible, tell the other person when you agree with any part of what he/she is saying.
- Acknowledge (if true) that you can see why the other person may be upset about this issue (or upset with you) - even if you disagree with their position.
- If you think the issue you are about to raise will be upsetting to the other, start by saying: "I'm concerned that what I want to say now may be upsetting to you."
- Avoid indulging in any of the "four horsemen of the apocalypse" (Gottman), any one of which interferes with positive communication:
  - Criticism (verbal attack).
  - Contempt.
  - Defensiveness (trying to excuse your own behavior or denying that you meant what the listener heard).
  - Stonewalling (withdrawing from the conflict and becoming non-communicative).
- If a disagreement starts to get heated, take a time out but agree to a specific time and place to resume the discussion. Conflict is very rarely resolved when participants are upset or angry.