One of the keys to a settled home is to be united in our parenting – it creates a home that children feel secure in. The word ‘team’ is so important when it comes to parenting with your partner. As parents, we need to create the atmosphere together, the boundaries together and the goals together, all of which defines the environment our children will grow up in.

Tips to set you on your way to parenting on a united front

It is important that Mum and Dad visibly love each other. Yes, kissing in front of the kids will make them gag, but it also creates an environment of security. “If Mum and Dad are okay, we are okay.” And remember, they are smart: if they know we are on the same team, they won’t be able to play us off each other.

To be united means knowing how the other ticks. What are your needs from the relationship? What are your partner’s needs? Have quality time together as a couple. Being united also means knowing how the family ticks. Each of you will have observed different things going on in the family, so share your insights and observations. Spend time together sharing about the kids and discussing the issues that are coming up.

Be agreed on the boundaries in the home. You will need firm boundaries such as:
• no name calling
• as a family we will listen to each other
• cell phones off at dinner time
• be polite to everyone

There will also be more negotiable boundaries around room tidiness, what a child wears, TV time and bed time. Being together on this gives consistency at home which contributes to a calmer atmosphere.

Learn to be flexible and work as a tag team

We all get tired with parenting, and we have other stresses in our lives as well. When you parent on a united front you need to watch out for each other and step up if your partner is not coping or seems to be losing it! But do it discretely and sensitively: if you step in, take over and overrule your partner, it can send a huge message to your kids (and your partner) that you are not in agreement.

Kids love to divide and conquer. Children have a sixth sense about whether Mum and Dad agree on things, and if they detect a gap in your standards, watch out! Our lovely kids are smart enough to charge through those gaps in our parental ranks to get to the things they want.

Parenting from a united front
Communicate as a couple
Ask each other, “How did that go? How am I doing as a parent?” …but only if you are prepared to hear their answer! Debrief after difficult times at home. It is important that we are open and honest with each other – even when it can hurt a little.

Communicate as a family
Having time at the dinner table creates fantastic opportunities, not just to hear from the kids, but also from your partner.

You don’t have to agree on everything with your spouse. Real people have real differences on many issues. The important thing is that you present a united front of cooperation and communication, not perfect agreement. If you give an instruction or set a boundary, and your kids tell you that it is different from what their other parent has already said, then, unless there are hugely important reasons not to, defer to the earlier ruling. “Oh really? You’d better do what she says. I’ll have a talk to her about what her reasons are.” Or, “Hmm, okay. I’ll talk to her and get back to you.”

Back each other up
As role models, one of the things you should be modelling is how two adults can resolve differences, or to disagree but concede to one another, and do it in a peaceful, friendly, mature way. If you can do that well, your children will benefit to occasionally witness it.

At a glance
We all get tired with parenting, and we have other stresses in our lives as well. When you parent on a united front you need to watch out for each other, and step up if your partner is not coping or seems to be losing it. But do so discretely and sensitively: if you step in, take over and overrule your partner, it can send a huge message to your kids (and your partner!) that you are not in agreement.

At The Parenting Place we believe ‘family is everything’ so we’ve created a series of 45 Hot Tips brochures to help you make the most of your parenting journey. They’re grouped into four categories: Early Years, Middle Years, Tweens and Teens, and General Parenting.

General Parenting topics include:
- Communication
- Family meal times
- Feeling guilty?
- How am I doing?
- How to talk to kids
- Media diet
- Parenting alone
- Parenting from a united front
- Simple parenting strategies

that work
- Talking about money
- Too much talk
- What money can’t buy
- 5 keys to blended family success

Brochures are available from theparentingplace.com or The Parenting Place, 300 Great South Road, Greenlane in Auckland, 0800 53 56 59.
The Parenting Place is a not-for-profit organisation working to enhance the lives of families and young people in communities and schools throughout New Zealand. To help us create more resources, Vodafone customers text FAMILY to 7005 to give $5