Negotiation Skills in Relationships

Few of us were raised with the awareness of negotiation as a skill we might need in relationships. Negotiation, whether between parent and child, as couples, or with elderly family members, can turn conflicts in relationships into opportunities for mutual understanding. Not all conflict is “bad.” It can be creative or destructive. Learning how to engage in creative conflict is a valuable life skill for people of all ages. Avoidance of conflict, even with the intention of sparing someone else’s feelings, often results in long term build up of resentment or increased hostilities.

Negotiation as Parents

Being a parent is a role we take on. A function. A job. We commit ourselves to being responsible for another life. No matter how confident we may be in other areas of our lives, most of us are scared to death we don’t have enough of whatever it takes to be a “good” parent.

The role of parent is added to other roles we have already taken on. All of us are child, student, citizen and worker; many have been sibling, friend, or relative. Some of us add to these spouse, partner, lover. These are roles with certain functions and responsibilities. Adding parenthood often places considerable stress on all the others.

Using the tools of dialogue and negotiation for decision making creates a coalition that provides the consistency children need to feel safe. A shared partnership as parents, means giving both loving criticism and support. Learning dialogue and negotiation skills in mediation can form the basis for a positive and ongoing parenting relationship.

Negotiating With Children

It does not diminish an adult’s authority to negotiate with a child. This is a way to listen to, and validate your child’s views and needs. The one way negotiation between parents and children differs from other kinds of negotiation is that the parents are legally required to make the decisions. The child may give input, but making the decisions is the parents’ responsibility.

In intact families as well as separated families, differences in parents’ world views are often confusing to children. Parenting as one part of a couple relationship, can become a tug-of-war if parents have different values they wish to pass along to their children, or different methods of discipline. Understanding how your child sees things can be enlightening and invaluable.