

## **Joint families & Mixed Messages**

My friend called the other day almost ready to tear her hair out in frustration. "I am so angry! Every time I try to discipline my children and lay down some rules in the house, someone or the other walks over them, and I am left fuming". I allowed her to ventilate and eventually she calmed down. I could empathize with her and many other parents in her shoes. It is difficult to live in a joint/extended family where there is constant interfering, albeit well-intentioned, and overriding of authority. I guess it is to be expected with different people having their own views about what is good and bad, about discipline, about values and what is acceptable. Its important though to realize that these mixed messages can be a part of nuclear families too.

Joint families have their own advantages. Grandparents ever eager to indulge their grandchildren, relate stories and old anecdotes from a bygone era, aunts who will baby-sit without batting an eyelid, and cousins to play with- you will never have to hear the dreaded sentence "I am bored," in the holidays. Children raised in such homes often learn to be tolerant, patient, secure, and generous and can get along well with people.

They also learn how to deal with people of different ages, and adapt their behavior to suit the surroundings and situations, all of which are important life skills.

Keeping the upside in mind we can imbibe a few techniques to minimize the effects of the mixed messages.

- Opening up communication: Using effective communication skills with in-laws, parents, spouses, etc is the first and most vital aspect of deepening relationships and creating healthy boundaries. Saying to a co-sister, " I know you love and want to indulge Nitin, but when he is given chocolates often he doesn't eat proper meals. I would appreciate it if you could please restrict it to evening time," is a respectful yet matter of fact way of getting your point across..
- Setting limits: clear and firm boundaries are essential to inculcate the values you want in your children. Explaining to your teenager that it is your rule that you want them home by 9:00 p.m. even though their cousins are allowed to stay out till 11:00 clearly states the boundaries to your teenager and others in the household as well. Statutory Warning: Be prepared to face the barrage of 'buts' and 'whys' and stomping offs accompanied by banging of doors!
- Tackling privacy: whether its spending some time alone with your children in the evening or an exclusive outing as a family, you can define your space without feeling guilty
- Letting go- its good to be able to let go of things that really aren't important. Once in a while allowing your 10 year old to eat dinner in front of the TV watching her favorite serial with her grand-mother is not a catastrophe!!

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