

Who Knows Best?

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Have you ever experienced the “who knows best” dilemma? Many couples fall into this trap innocently enough simply because one is more knowledgeable than the other on certain subjects. Couples often unknowingly enter this trap, being playful at first. Over time the game evolves, and this becomes more serious business. When the couple is playing, one partner’s confidence rises while the other’s is deflated. The structure of dominance and submissiveness can expand to other areas of the relationship when one person always needs to be right, this inevitably leads to the other person always being wrong.

Couples’ relationships are enduring when the cornerstones are mutual respect, shared decision making, and appreciation of their differences. Being on the same team instead of opposing ones, is a source of strength when each person can contribute to problem solving and play important roles in the solution. This is particularly important at the time a couple expands their family, becoming parents of children, and developing their vision of family life.

Becoming parents is certainly a wakeup call, and a game changer! Will the two of you be shifting away from the game of “Who knows best,” or will you try to continue playing by the same old rules? Many couples realize that Life with Baby launches them into uncharted territory. Marking this field, the players are likely to be at a loss needing to learn new skills to enter into a process of negotiating their new roles and responsibilities.

One of the prerequisites in this new game, is figuring out if there will be one or two players? Will Mother be the one “who knows best?” Will the two of you remain on opposing and competing teams? Or, will you be ready to relate in new ways, supporting each other in your new roles?

Can you develop a “parental team?” Or, will the “Who knows best” game prevail with a captain “who knows best” taking charge. Is figuring it out your goal, creating space for the two of you to tag team?

The risk of not changing the script of the “Who knows best” game, is what happens when everyone is overwhelmed? There are a few different ways you may play this out. In the first situation, no one knows best, parents feel inadequate, and are easily overwhelmed, being anxious parents with a fussy baby. The second scenario, assumptions are made unilaterally by the Mom, or jointly by the parents - this is a female domain where “she knows best.” The challenge here is will Mom just take the lead and involve Dad in a supporting role, having the intention of bringing him up to speed for being equally involved? The third possibility, is Mom wants the care of the baby to be exclusively her domain, and to accomplish this she pushes Dad away. Initially, some men may be appreciative of Mom taking charge, and may respond by helping where he can or is allowed. An alternative response for Dad is to distance and become disengaged. He may feel jealous of the attention baby is receiving, deprived of his partner’s affection.

When the baby is about three months old, the Dad who has been peripheral may become more interested, seeing a more socially engaging little one. His overtures may be welcomed or rejected, depending on Mom’s willingness to have him involved. The variable here is Mom, is she flexible and able to create space for Dad now?

When Moms have taken on the “she knows best” stance, and been going it alone, it is common for them to feel overwhelmed, burdened and abandoned. The Mom may have little or no understanding of *why* or how

this came to be, that she is in this seemingly without any support. Over time many women start to build up resentment savings accounts, overpowering their potential to see any other possibilities. In response many men feel sad, lonely, pushed aside, and feel they have been replaced by the baby. Men experience postpartum depression as well as women.

At this stage, many couples are not understanding *why* they are feeling sad or overwhelmed. They are often surprised by the discrepancy between what they imagined life would be like and the reality of what they are experiencing. Before baby, they had their relationship all figured out, and it worked for each of them. The arrival of a baby changes everything, in fact, researchers have labeled this “the transition to parenthood.” This is a special time in the couple’s relationship, incorporating new roles, and responsibilities that call for collaboration, in getting to a place of “we can know best,” together.

- Embrace there is no right or wrong, just different perspectives
- Respect each of you can feel and think differently about an issue
- Invite respectful playfulness you’re your life
- Welcome the sharing of different perspectives
- Embrace collaboration - “we are on the same team”