



## **Growing Concerns**

### **A childrearing question-and-answer column**

#### **with Dr. Marti Erickson**

*Question:* We're expecting our first child in four months. Although we get along pretty well together, I'm worried that will change when the baby comes. My wife's parents were very permissive and spoiled their kids by giving them everything. My parents were much stricter and always made us toe the line and earn the things we wanted. How can we present a united front as parents when our backgrounds are so different?

*Answer:* You are off to a good start simply by asking the question before your baby arrives. Once you become parents, disagreements over child-rearing can be confusing for your child and create unhealthy tension for your whole family. Now is the time to sit down and talk together about the values you want to instill in your child and your beliefs about how to achieve that. Here are some strategies that many couples find helpful:

- Begin by identifying areas of agreement – in writing, preferably. For example, describe the kind of person you hope your child will be at the age of 10 or 15. This will tell you what qualities you both value. Then identify the parenting strategies you both agree will help your child develop those desired qualities. Set aside areas of disagreement for later and focus first on your shared beliefs and expectations.
- At a time when you both are calm and rested, explore together the areas of disagreement. Think about what you believe and where you learned it, using your memories to pinpoint the specific behaviors in your own parents that served you well and those that sometimes made it hard for you. A mature, healthy approach is to recognize that none of us had perfect parents; we all have things from our childhood that would be good to carry forward and other things that should be left behind.
- Identify resources you can turn to for the best child-rearing information to help you resolve your differences. Sign up together for parenting classes. Read and discuss books by reputable parenting experts. Use credible online resources that provide research-based information, not just personal opinion.
- Agree to have regular check-in times with each other to discuss calmly how you both think things are going in your relationship with each other and with your child.
- If you find that, even with these preventive steps, you have intense, prolonged conflicts about child-rearing, seek professional help. In the early months and years of parenting, you are establishing patterns that will define your family life for years to come. The most successful families are the ones who seek outside help before conflicts get out of hand.