

## BACK TO BASICS

The basic family unit consists of father, mother and child. Together they form a dynamic relational triad. Regardless of how many children a family has, each child perceives his relationship with his parents in this triadic dynamic and understands his role and responsibility in the family accordingly. This then is the foundation of parenthood. This provides the essential context for a child to grow and mature to venture out into the world as a contributing adult in the future.

Given the above then, at the heart of the triad is the marital relationship of the parents. Marriage precedes the family. Under normal circumstances, children are born out of this love relationship between a man and a woman. Children are born into an environment of marital commitment, mutuality and romance. The Centre for Fathering believes that a Great Dad is one who loves the mother of his child.

Unfortunately, all too often and quite unconsciously, parenthood erodes the very foundation that births a family. This is because couples get so caught up with child-rearing that their marriage is pushed to the back burner. After 20 years or so of neglect and after the children have grown up and left the nest, the couple is suddenly left to face each other – as familiar strangers. What happened to the love, to the romance?

It all begins with the innocuous first newborn that comes home from the hospital and becomes the centre of attention. The couple's relationship is now overhauled to cater to the baby's every need. Everyone and everything else, including the love and romance of the couple, is put on hold. Soon this holding position becomes permanent and the couple no longer calls each other "darling . . . sweetheart", but "mommy . . . daddy". Their names have changed and soon their identities and relationship with each other is defined by the new titles. This is when the marriage disappears and the love is buried by chores.

In many cases, parenting can be so stressful and corrosive that couples grow apart in the partnership because their differences grow from a crack to a chasm. Sadly, some marriages break under the strain and children experience the war of roses under the same roof. If we can stop and ask ourselves what is happening, couples would see that it is their marriage that has fallen apart **due to neglect**, and not because love has abandoned them.

Children are the fruits of love and love must be tended to daily, just like a beautiful garden. The heart of parenting is love and it is pointless to love your children when you hate their mother, whose imprint lies strongly in their DNA. As the saying goes, when elephants fight, the ants get trampled. Children so often are trampled, when well-intentioned parents forget that parenthood begins with the love which husbands and wives need to consistently nurture.

Note that this applies to divorced parents especially. Tragically even when couples are divorced, their war may not cease. As a result, the continued castigation of the child's other parent, only hurts the child because s/he is the image bearer of both mother and father. To hate one ultimately leads the child to reject half of him/herself. This causes a lot of self-acceptance issues. We strongly suggest that parents always put their children's interest above their need for redress. Divorce is the breakdown of a marriage but not parenthood. Unless there is real danger like abuse, the child should not be deprived of access to both parents. Children should not be broken down by the breakdown of their parents' marriage.

The main idea is this: Are you romancing your wife today? What steps are you taking to keep the love glowing - the love that gave you children?

Keep fathering ;-)

Centre for Fathering