

Family As An Entity

As a mother, I feel that it's my duty to look out for the needs of each individual in the family. I believe that no one person, child nor adult, is more important than any other. Every single member of the family is unique and special and their needs are unique and special. Even if all kids live under the same house rules, they're taught and enforced differently depending on each one's learning curve and personality type. Also the adults in the house are to be equal regardless of who raises the kids and who brings home the money. Everyone's emotional health, spiritual health, and physical health are equally important. But there's a hidden family member that sometimes gets forgotten when we're juggling the needs of everyone. What about the family as a unit? How does it weigh into the equation?

First let's look at the dynamics of the individuals in the family. The adults can't make themselves the center of the universe. Parents who are so caught up in their own careers, relationships, or just in their own heads all of the time, often have lonely depressed children who doubt their parents' love and devotion. Studies have already shown a very high percentage of teens experimenting with drugs and alcohol are from homes where the parents are too self absorbed to notice or to pay attention to what's happening with their own kids.

On the other hand, it's very easy as parents to sacrifice ourselves for the greater good of the family. I suspect that this very dynamic plays into the resentments and underlying tensions found in most households. The adults often give up their dream jobs, drop out of college, or stops having a social life outside of the family because at some point along the way it seemed like the answer to some problem. For whatever reason, there's no time, energy, or money left for the adults when all is said and done. They seldom get to pick up those pieces of themselves that they sacrificed along the way. The parents shouldn't become martyrs to their kids or the family. It's up to the parents to find a healthy balance between the two extremes.

I've heard a lot of people say that the children should always come first at any cost. I don't agree. Children who are raised to be the center of the universe grow up to be adults who believe that they have a rightful place as the center of everyone else's universe too. It's unfair to teach the kids that they are more important than everyone else. They become self-esteem monsters and bullies. The real world will teach them a very difficult lesson. People won't like them no matter how special Mommy and Daddy think they are. It's better to teach children that everyone is equal in regards to needs, hopes and dreams, responsibilities, and other dynamics of getting along in the world. Mommy's need for peace and quiet once in awhile is every bit as important as little Billy's need to jump and run and play. The key again is for the parents to find a balance between the opposing needs.

The hidden entity is the family as a unit. I've watched families that found a balance between everyone's needs and there really wasn't a family left when all was said and done. The parents are busy scheduling their own lives while the teenagers are living independent lives dropping by the house to eat and sleep, but otherwise completely disconnected from the family and the little ones

are so busy with soccer leagues and music lessons and play dates with their friends that they have no real sense of what family is about. Everyone is happy, busy, flourishing individuals, but the family as a unit has almost completely disappeared.

I've also seen families that went the opposite direction and nobody got their personal needs met because everyone had to constantly sacrifice for the greater good of the family. Your career is decided at birth as well as whom you will marry because you must uphold the family name or the family traditions. Those people come to hate what family represents and want to bust out of the prison of it all. Once again, the answer lies in the parents needing to find a balance between the family and the individuals.

As a mother, it's my job to juggle the needs and dreams of every single member of our household. I always try to remember that secret entity "family" and what is it that the family needs and dreams of. I teach my kids to not only look at how their needs impact each other, but also how it affects the family's needs. For example, if I let my teenagers spend the extra money after the bills are paid each month, then how will the family get to go to Disneyland this summer? They are an active part in helping to determine the family's needs and goals as well as their own. I am very much a part of who gets included. "Wait a minute guys, did you forget that I need a new monitor for my computer before you get another game for your Xbox?"

In so doing, they come to understand that they're important, but not more important than me and I'm not less important than they are. The two-year-old's needs are just as important as the teenagers' needs. Everyone makes sacrifices at times, but nobody is forced to sacrifice all of the time. The kids understand that no one person is more important than any other. They also understand that the family as a whole is just as important as each individual member within it. We have an amazingly strong family bond as well as each of us having very strong sense of personal worth. I feel that this may be the most important thing I do, balancing the needs of everyone including the family as a whole.

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