

Physical proximity puts couples on the same parenting page: Study

Parenting together can make couples "more attuned to each other's parenting approach than they would be on their own", the study found.

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'The entire family interacting together for an extended period may be stressful, but parents can take this time to tune into each other's behaviour and emotions'. (Source: Getty/Thinkstock)

Good parenting requires couples to work together as a team. And now, with a lockdown in place in many parts of the world, it has been understood that physical proximity plays a great role in putting parents on the same page when it comes to various aspects of parenting.

A recent study has suggested that parenting together can make couples “more attuned to each other’s parenting approach than they would be on their own”. According to *Medical News Today*, the study was conducted by researchers at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore. “Our study indicates that when spouses are physically together, there is greater synchrony in their attentional and cognitive control mechanisms when parenting,” senior author Gianluca Esposito of NTU’s School of Social Sciences and Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine, was quoted as saying.

For the study, researchers tracked the brain activity of 24 couples (mothers and fathers) that live together. It was done using functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS), which is a non-invasive technique that allows participants to wear electrode headsets. Researchers then measure the changes in their haemoglobin levels using infrared.

Before the tracking started, the parents were asked to fill in a questionnaire that asked them to what extent a parent, more than the other, takes the lead when interacting with the child. The couples were then presented with a selection of audio samples that they heard both together and individually. The samples comprised: adult female cry, adult female laugh, high pitched infant cry, low pitched infant cry, infant laugh, and static noise.

It was found that the sounds that led to most alignment when the couples were together, were positive and neutral — infant laughter, adult laughter, and static noise — as opposed to less synchrony arising from crying sounds, of both infants and adults. The study also found that those relationships in which the mother more than the father was the primary parent, exhibited greater synchrony when the parents were together. The synchrony was found to be the lowest in older parenting couples.

“The entire family interacting together for an extended period may be stressful, but parents can take this time to tune into each other’s behaviour and emotions while caring for their children,” Esposito was quoted as saying.