

## Bonus material 2.1. The Importance of Talking About Expectations

Because of your different backgrounds and experiences you may have different expectations when it comes to parenthood, motherhood, fatherhood and child raising. Therefore, it may be a good idea to simply ask your partner how they feel about the very basics of parenthood and child rearing in order to find out how they feel on the subject. Only by communicating will you be able to find about each other's views on parenting practices – both good and bad – and come into a shared understanding of how to raise a child, build a happy family environment and be supportive of one another.

Try asking each other the following questions before writing down what you agree on and the things which need to be discussed further. Remember that disagreement on a subject does not have to be negative, as together you can work on a solution which suits both of you and your child.

- What puzzles you?
- Are there things that make you worry?
- What do you expect from you partner?
- What kind of support do you expect from your partner during the pregnancy period?
- How can you support your partner?
- How can your partner support you?

### Family involvement

This subject can be sensitive, given that some cultures, and even individual families, have differing levels of involvement in the lives of those closest to them, while the very concept of the term 'family' could be interpreted in a different manner from culture to culture. Occasionally, a spouse or partner may feel smothered or pressured by family members from either side, whose role they deem too big or hands-on. Therefore, you might want to discuss the involvement of your families in terms of raising your child and how often they should be involved. In an intercultural relationship there is a good chance that only one family will be close to hand, which in itself could cause feelings of jealousy or frustration, and the expatriate parent may feel sad about not having his or her family around.

Family involvement is a positive aspect and could even be considered essential by some. For example, the mother may need a great deal of help in the initial stages of parenthood and may rely on her family if the father is working. Moreover, grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins can help with a variety of daily matters, such as helping with the children or picking them up from kindergarten. However, in the majority of cases, only the Finnish partner's family will live in the same country and even then they may live far away.

The family of the immigrant member of the relationship is crucial in terms of passing on culture from that particular country, as well as language, traditions, foods, etc. This is why it is important to strike a balance and have a united front as early as possible.

## Emotional expression

Some cultures are very open about expressing emotions and opinions, while others are more reserved and passive. When a couple from different cultures gets together, there is a possibility that these two ends of the spectrum will meet. This is magnified when families become involved and a child arrives. In this case, talk about the intensity and nature of emotional expression in your family and your partner's, as well as how you convey emotion to each other. For example, you may come from a family who finds it easy to open up and talk about things, while your partner's family may do things in completely the opposite way – or vice versa. This is not to say that either way is right or wrong, but from the very beginning you will need to know how you are going to approach your relationship with your children.

## Gender roles

People will naturally have differing ideas when it comes to the roles of parents once the child is born and who should do what. This is accentuated in intercultural relationships, as the couple's cultures may expect different things from each person. Therefore, you can attempt to clear up these issues by talking to each other about your own expectations. Ask your partner what he/she believes should be expected of a father and mother, as well as a partner, and then tell them how you feel. By doing this, you will be able to work out your own roles within the family and just what is expected of you. This, in turn, will move you towards a shared view on gender roles within your own family.

Also, think about how you were raised and how your parents divided responsibility. Try to determine how they shared the load and if their way worked or if certain aspects could have been improved. If your partner does the same, then not only will you have more of an understanding about how you were both raised but hopefully learning more about each other will bring you even closer.

Furthermore, will either partner expect the more traditional male/female roles to surface after the birth of the child, or does there need to be a post-birth re-evaluation given the likelihood that the woman will be at home more due to her child-rearing responsibilities? At this stage we would ask you to look at Worksheet 3.3, which raises a number of questions relating to the issues you may face both before and after birth. This will help you to raise some issues you perhaps hadn't thought about thus far.

## Cultural identity

As parents, you will play the biggest role in imparting cultural knowledge to your child, but your families can also provide positive experiences and offer stories about their roots and culture. In the future, time spent on holiday in the expatriate parent's country would be beneficial, but of course this is not always possible due to long travelling distances and expensive flight tickets. Instead, you could try different ways of boosting cultural knowledge and language skills. For example, finding events, celebrations or groups that speak the same language can be rewarding, as can ordering books or DVDs in your mother tongue. Furthermore, you could invite members of your family to visit you or arrange to holiday in the same place which is not too far away, or even take on an au pair from your country. Try to remember to involve the Finnish partner's family, as the support of the other culture and its many traditions is equally important.

In this situation, it is worth thinking about aspects in both cultures that you want your child to see and benefit from and how both families can help with this. For example, one culture may have certain habits, such as kissing or hugging when greeting others, or particular customs, like name days or how people address one another, you would like to see passed on to your children. By telling both families about how you see specific aspects continuing and explaining your reasons, they can help to ensure they are reinforced.