

Q & A: Ex-wife sabotages our disciplinary attempts
Ruth A. Peters, Ph.D.

Question: “My husband’s ex-wife sabotages our disciplinary attempts. What can I do?”

Answer: Wow, I wouldn’t want to be in your shoes! But, before we assume that Mom is undermining your discipline on purpose, let’s take a look at some other possible sources of her behavior. It could be that she believes that your taking away of possessions is an inappropriate disciplinary tactic and that her children shouldn’t have to deal with that type of punishment. Or, she may feel that she’s not seeing the kids much, and that the easiest way to their hearts is to replace objects that Step-Mom has removed. It’s possible that a discussion between Mom and Dad (and perhaps yourself included) would clarify her concerns and motivations. If she truly feels that you are being unfair by taking away possessions, perhaps she can agree with you and Dad on another tactic that is effective, yet more palatable to her. Or, if she feels that the only way to the kids’ hearts is to buy them things, perhaps you’ll be able to convince her that spending fun time with them—at the park, tucking in at night, reading books—is what really brings kids and parents together. If, however, you are convinced (and you’re being rational in your assumption) that she’s just down-right trying to sabotage your discipline, then you’ll have to get more creative. Different consequences will need to be used in your home—notably tremendous boredom. The taking away of privileges (electronics usage such as the TV, DVD player, video games, radio), outside playtime, swimming, and even instituting an earlier bedtime) may prove effective. Consequences don’t have to be about loss of possessions, especially if Mom is able to sabotage that. In reality, kids hate to be bored, and the loss of fun time may actually bother them more!