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# **EQUALLY SHARED PARENTING**

## *Rewriting the Rules for a New Generation of Parents*

### **by Marc and Amy Vachon**

**“Marc and Amy Vachon have succeeded in becoming  
absolute parenting partners.”**

–Lisa Belkin, *New York Times Magazine*

**“The Vachons are the leading edge of true social change.”**

– Laura Vanderkam, *The Huffington Post*

Introducing **Marc and Amy Vachon**, a couple that has completely revolutionized the old models of parenthood through their new book, **EQUALLY SHARED PARENTING: *Rewriting the Rules for a New Generation of Parents*** (Perigee Hardcover; January 5, 2010; \$23.95). An empowering guide to the Equally Shared Parenting movement, this book arms readers with the necessary tools to create a balanced life that is rarely experienced by most parents of young children today—an evolution that goes beyond the working mom and involved dad.

Chances are, you’d rather not check your happy, rested life at the door the moment you become a parent. As a mom, you might want to keep your career but aren’t sure how childcare and housework fit in. As a dad, you probably want to be there for your child’s milestones, but breadwinning responsibilities will make that tough. And what about time for yourself (never mind your sex life)?

**Marc and Amy Vachon** were determined to beat this doomsday scenario when their first child was born. And thus, their method of equally shared parenting (or ESP) was born. Their strategy was to share

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everything—the good and the bad. They would be *peers* in the four areas of their lives: childcare, housework, breadwinning, and time for self. They would share the burdens so that nobody was consistently overwhelmed, and they would share the joys so that neither missed out on experiencing a deep connection with their child. In the process, **Marc and Amy** launched EquallySharedParenting.com, bringing together a previously untapped community of parents who are transforming the traditional parenthood models with their own take on ESP.

Drawing on **Marc and Amy's** experiences, as well as those of dozens of ESP couples, **EQUALLY SHARED PARENTING** clearly outlines the benefits and challenges of egalitarian parenting. It presents both the philosophy behind this lifestyle and the everyday steps needed to achieve and maintain it, regardless of income bracket, lifestyle choices, or profession.

### **About the Authors**

**Marc and Amy Vachon** are the founders of [equallysharedparenting.com](http://equallysharedparenting.com), the first dedicated resource for egalitarian parenting from the perspective of both genders. Amy is a clinical pharmacist in a management role and Marc is an information technology specialist. They live in Watertown, Massachusetts, with their two children, ages 4 and 7.

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Advanced Praise for EQUALLY SHARED PARENTING:

“If old gender roles don't allow parents to live the rich diverse lives they want, then there is an alternative. Read this and consider how our lives could be richer.”

– Joan Blades, co-founder MomsRising.org and MoveOn.org

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“In this witty, warm, and wonderful new book, Amy and Marc Vachon show us how both men and women can have it all in 21st century families.”

– Francine Deutsch, author of *Halving It All: How Equally Shared Parenting Works*

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“...a joy to read...a treasure for couples who want to share parenting and sustain loving, intimate relationships at the same time.”

– Scott Coltrane, author of *Family Man* and *Gender and Families*

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“Follow the advice in *Equally Shared Parenting* and watch yourself, your marriage and your children flourish.”

– Monique Tilford, co-author, *Your Money or Your Life* and Dave Tilford, senior writer, Center for a New American Dream

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“[Amy] and her husband, Marc, have become the standard-bearers for a philosophy called ‘equally shared parenting.’”

– Sharon Jayson, *USA Today*

## An Interview with Marc and Amy Vachon

### **What inspired you to write this book?**

We were amazed and frustrated to notice that so much was written about the miseries of modern motherhood – the drawbacks of the standard choices such as staying at home, marginalizing a previously cherished career to attend to family needs, or continuing to work full-time while juggling an impossible load of work and family. These descriptions, together with the higher and higher bar our society has set in the past decade for motherhood itself, offered plenty of opportunity to complain but no solutions. And they didn't address the work/life concerns of men – typically saddled with primary breadwinning and secondary parent status. We – and, happily, many other couples we have now met – were living a real solution that remained hidden from public discussion, and we felt called to speak up.

We have heard time and again that Generation X/Y parents value balanced lives and equality far more than those of previous generations. They want meaningful time with their families, jobs that make a difference, and equal partnerships. Unfortunately, they have few role models to help them build relationships that sustain these ideals; we wanted to outline the 'how' – the practical details – of their first-choice life. Our website became our initial medium for speaking publically about equally shared parenting, but we felt it did not reach a large enough audience in a meaningful enough way to help others create this lifestyle.

### **Did your parents' methods of raising you affect your decision to pioneer the ESP method?**

Many ESP couples interviewed for the book described passionately how they wanted to create lives different from what they witnessed in their parents' marriages. Women saw their own mothers unfulfilled by standard roles; men wanted more than anything to connect with their own children on a far more intimate basis than their fathers did. Our own journey to ESP was also affected by our childhoods – perhaps in slightly different ways than we describe above. Amy was raised in a single-mom household, which taught her that women *can* do it all but gave her a strong desire to share both the burdens and joys of raising a family with an equal partner. And Marc grew up in a big, traditional, working class family; his draw to ESP was foremost a desire to create a fun and balanced life post-baby, and he credits his parents' dedication to family over money for giving him the courage to forge a new path.

### **The positive response to ESP has been incredible, but some people remain unconvinced. What are some common misconceptions couples have about ESP?**

Convincing any parenting couple to adopt a particular family model is a losing battle; decisions about how any of us structure our family lives and intimate relationships are not often made by debate. Our main goal with *Equally Shared Parenting* is to shout the good news that an equal partnership with balanced lives for both parents is wholly possible – practical, sustainable, and a joy. We do not wish to proclaim ESP as the one superior choice for all couples, but rather as a real option attainable by any two willing partners.

With that caveat out of the way, however, we have noticed several common themes among those who wish to dismiss ESP. The most frequent complaint is that this lifestyle must lead to onerous scorekeeping between partners – who washed more dishes this week, who put the kids to bed more often, etc. This could not be farther from the truth. ESP couples are not afraid to tackle issues of workload that arise within any partnership, but they do so as a team rather than as adversaries. They work to preserve their equality in the face of a culture that promotes inequality – and their task division is a product of their joint desire to be happy together rather than a rigid goal unto itself.

Other common misconceptions about ESP include the idea that it is inefficient, an attempt to create two identical parents, a life of mediocrity, too expensive, not possible with *my* particular career or job, or confusing to the kids. We tackle each of these untruths in our book, and more. And we also dissect the *real* challenges of ESP – issues that are quite different from the list above.

**In your book, you include anecdotes from many other happy ESP couples. Have you found that, in the initial stages, ESP appeals more to one gender over the other?**

On its surface, ESP appears to be a great deal for mothers. Finally, men will be required to do their fair share of the floor scrubbing, 2:00 a.m. rocking, and meal prep! This perspective explains why many women ask where they can sign up...their husbands. If this lifestyle were truly more beneficial to women than men, however, it would likely not stand the test of time – however fair or ‘right.’ And Marc would likely not have signed on to be a co-author!

When you dig a bit deeper, you can see a different picture – ESP is equally desirable to men. ESP gives fathers a full partner in earning the family’s income, an authentic daily connection with their kids, equal say in how their household runs, and guilt-free time to themselves – to name a few incentives. Even those who may begin with a sense of obligation end up guarding it fiercely because they get from it as much as women do.

**You’ve practiced ESP for seven years! What have you found are ESP’s toughest challenges? Are there things in your daily/weekly routines that you’re still experimenting with and tweaking?**

ESP is a work in progress, as is any way of relating to those you live with and love. The world is not set up (yet) to easily accommodate this lifestyle, and so we have had to face interesting challenges. For example, during Marc’s layoff from work in 2007 and subsequent search for a new job that preserved our balance, paid the bills, and provided a meaningful career. Almost every couple we interviewed for the book has had to surmount difficulties, and expects to in the future. ESP isn’t simply a fair-weather lifestyle – relying on the perfect job, income, or schedule; a couple’s ability to face inevitable difficulties and stay the course of their dreams comes from their deep inspiration to live this way.

Some of the everyday challenges of ESP include the need for both parents to shift roles more frequently than perhaps more traditional couples do – from parent to breadwinner to housekeeper to amateur tennis player or violinist. Even within each role, ESP couples strive to be jack-of-all-trades competent, so that they can truly tap into the joy in all aspects of life; this can be challenging, however. And don’t forget that it can be hard for many of us to let go of control in specific areas – such as primary parent status, home manager, or even main breadwinner.

All ESP couples need to tweak their routines and talk together about changes in their approach as their families change and grow. We’re no exception! For example, we recently altered our work schedules to allow both of us a full day at home with our son every week before he heads off to Kindergarten next Fall. But as time goes on, this work cements our belief in ESP as our best life together, and brings us closer as a couple who is experienced at working out the details as a team.

**Finally, the rewards of ESP seem endless. What are just a few of the things that each of you enjoy through ESP that you could never live without?**

Many of the ESP couples we’ve met have adamantly stated that they could never live differently. They consider it the cornerstone of their marriage, their family identity, democracy brought to the family, their way of communication, their truth. We agree. For Amy, ESP foremost brings a lasting, intimate partnership – a way to truly walk in each other’s shoes and understand each other over time. For Marc, it is mostly about freedom – to get out there and have fun, stay connected with friends and interests, really know his children (and Amy), work without being consumed by work, stay open to all of life’s possibilities without getting stuck in any one cultural role. And, of course, we can’t imagine living without sharing all the crazy things are kids get into!