

ASU Campuses and Locations (/)

Parenting together when we're not together anymore



Friday, October 23, 2020

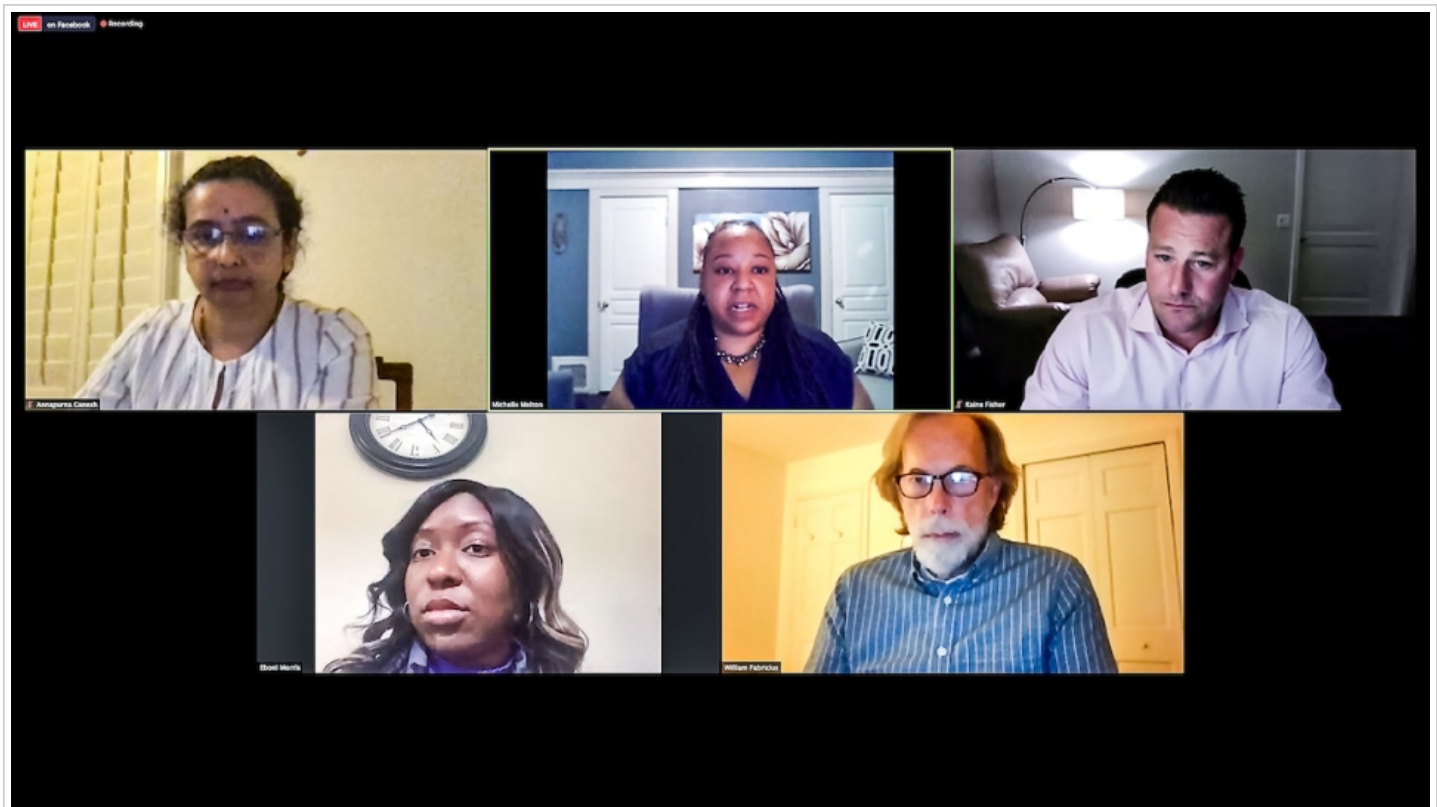
Raising children isn't like it was in your parents' and grandparents' generation.

The family dynamic has changed because we have changed. Our choices have expanded. Our focus has shifted, and we've honed in on our children's emotional and psychological well-being. There is a lot more nuance to parenting now.

Arizona State University's [Project Humanities](https://projecthumanities.asu.edu/) felt it was a subject worthy of examination and debate in a recent livestream event titled "Humanity 101 on the Homefront: Co-Parenting."

"Even in the best of circumstances when parents or caregivers are together, parenting is challenging," said [Neal A. Lester](https://isearch.asu.edu/profile/73432), professor of English and director of Project Humanities. "Tonight's conversation, in partnership with the [Come Rain or Shine Foundation](https://asunow.asu.edu/20190823-arizona-impact-family-matters-asu-project-humanities), continues our ongoing series on parenting via the lens of [Humanity 101](https://projecthumanities.asu.edu/content/humanity-101) – respect, integrity, compassion, forgiveness, kindness, empathy and self-reflection. Our diverse panelists remind us again that there is no ideal parenting manual and that to be 'good' parents, we must be good adults."

The Oct. 22 event's panel featured [William Fabricius](https://iresearch.asu.edu/profile/11230) (<https://iresearch.asu.edu/profile/11230>), an associate professor in ASU's Psychology Department (<https://psychology.asu.edu/>); Eboni Morris, a licensed clinical psychologist who works at a correctional facility; Kaine Fisher, a senior partner and family law attorney at Rose Law Group in Scottsdale; and Annapurna Ganesh, program director for the Early Childhood Education program at Mesa Community College. Michelle Melton, a licensed clinical psychologist based in Phoenix, handled facilitating duties.



Humanity 101 panelists discuss the idea that the mythology of the "nuclear family" that consists of a mom, a dad and two children is little more than a fairy tale because in reality, family structure has always been varied and evolving. Discussing co-parenting in the first part of the 21st century are (clockwise from top left) Annapurna Ganesh, facilitator Michelle Melton, Kaine Fisher, ASU Associate Professor William Fabricius and Eboni Morris.

The panel was tasked by Project Humanities to define co-parenting; identify the challenges and feelings of the co-parenting experience; discuss the role of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality and religion; look at the legal system and how it deals with co-parenting; and offer tips, resources and best strategies to support co-parenting families.

Insightful answers were not in short supply.

The panel essentially agreed with the American Psychological Association's definition of co-parenting: "An enterprise undertaken by two or more adults who together take on the socialization, care and upbringing of children for whom they share equal responsibility."

But there are many nuances to co-parenting, and by the end of the session, many of those layers had been explored. According to Fisher, co-parenting applies not only to birth parents but divorced and separated couples, same-sex couples, grandparents and stepparents.

"I tend to lean towards a more broad definition of co-parenting because I see such a broad scope in the line of work I do," Fisher said.

Ganesh said there are three types of co-parenting models:

- **Conflict parenting** is when parents create a toxic and harmful environment for the children, which usually ends up in court.
- **Parallel parenting** is when the two adults share very little communication with each other but work with the child. She said children can often take advantage of this scenario because they get shuttled back and forth.
- **Cooperative co-parenting** is when parents collaborate and keep an open line of communication with each other. Most important, their child's needs are the center of attention.

"In these three different models, we see the challenges the child faces when their feelings aren't taken into consideration," Ganesh said.

Within the mix of those models are a plethora of potential issues. They include the mental health of one or two co-parents, drug and alcohol abuse, money problems, domestic violence, and religious, cultural or racial differences.

"Children pick up on everything," Fabricius said. "They think their parents aren't happy with each other, even if they're not fighting — that can be just as hard on children because they feel like, 'I might be abandoned if my parents don't like each other. I'm going to be left alone.'"

Morris, who works in the correctional field, said she has seen incarcerated parents maintain positive relationships with their children despite their situation.

"I think the reason why it has been so successful is because of that attachment and open line of communication," Morris said. "They convey that understanding, 'I'm here (for you) regardless of where I am.' Children understand that."

Family law attorney Fisher said co-parents need to prioritize the needs of the child; otherwise, they end up needing his service and finding themselves in front of a judge — a place they do not want to be.

"Judges refer to themselves as 'complete strangers' ... and that complete stranger is going to probably meet these people (co-parents) for about an hour to three hours, or a full-day trial if you're lucky," Fisher said. "Then they're going to be making decisions about where that kid goes to school, who makes the decision about medical or who's their doctor ... I don't want strangers making decisions for my kids."

While the panel listed plenty of challenges that come with co-parenting, they agreed that the main goal of parenting is simple: Communicate and put the wellness and the needs of their children first.

"No matter what, it's always about the child," Ganesh said. "The child is the future of society."

Top photo by iStock images



(<http://www.facebook.com/arizonastateuniversity>)



(<http://www.twitter.com/asu>)



(<http://www.linkedin.com/company/arizona-state-university>)



(<http://www.youtube.com/asu>)

[My ASU \(https://my.asu.edu/\)](https://my.asu.edu/) [Copyright and Trademark \(https://www.asu.edu/copyright/\)](https://www.asu.edu/copyright/)
[Accessibility \(https://www.asu.edu/accessibility/\)](https://www.asu.edu/accessibility/) [Privacy \(https://www.asu.edu/privacy/\)](https://www.asu.edu/privacy/)
[Terms of Use \(https://www.asu.edu/tou/\)](https://www.asu.edu/tou/) [Jobs \(https://www.asu.edu/asujobs\)](https://www.asu.edu/asujobs)
[Emergency \(https://www.asu.edu/emergency/\)](https://www.asu.edu/emergency/) [Contact ASU \(https://contact.asu.edu/\)](https://contact.asu.edu/)