



# Proactive PARENTING

UNCOMMON THE COMMON

HAPPIEST HARDEST  
JOURNEY OF ALL

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**Dr. Lily Neelankavil**

(Doctoral specialization in HRD / TA).

Lily is the Founder/President : Center for Individual and Corporate Action.

A behavioral analyst with an exemplary track record as consultant to many leading business houses, management institutes, professional bodies, educational, social and religious organizations.

Her work is essentially based on her many years of international learning, counseling and Consulting work with children, parents, managers and organizations: along with her own Growing up as a daughter, wife and mother. And now a proud grandmother, she relearns the whole process all over again.

Among her various research publications, is a popular TV serial dealing with the growth dilemma of children / youth.

#### **Two Daughters:**

Professionally qualified in Management / Psychology from India / USA and are married and settled in USA, husband being specialist Doctors.

Blessed with five grandchildren

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***MELTING CANDLE:*** ... the symbol of 'sacrificing love and light' ...

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this book to my beloved parents Rev. L. K. Nelson and Mrs. Janet Nora Nelson.

Papa and Mama, this book is a recollection of the lovely memories of those sweet days when we were together. Through this book I thank you for showing me the guidelines of life, for teaching me the most meaningful lesson that life is a gift made more precious when shared with others.

I love you and will miss you forever.

This book is both a tribute and testimony to your marvelous parenting.



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# Preface

I was in the process of giving finishing touches to this piece of work, when my husband George, who has been my loving constructive critic supporting me in every one of my endeavors, shared a few thoughts on his own experienced reality. I thought it worth quoting in this context.

*“I had lost my mother when I was hardly a year old. All I have of her memory is an old family photograph with the other members of the family, when she was expecting me.*

*My father was away most of the time, serving in the armed forces. He was out in the field during both war and peace, never able to really spend time with me, except during his ‘annual leave’. I was somehow brought up, thanks to my grandparents and the others in our joint family.*

*How often have I asked these questions?*

- ❖ *What would have happened to my life, had I been like any other child?*
- ❖ *Would I have turned out any different had my parents been there with me?*

*I am certain it would have made a world of difference to me...At the same time, can I be really sure of the impact they would have created, if it would have made me better or worse! **This for that matter is just an untested assumption and paradox?***

*Today, Lily and I are blessed with two lovely, gifted and accomplished*

*daughters, sons-in-law who are more than sons to us and five adorable grandchildren. Other than we continue to thank and praise God almighty for all His sovereign grace, mercy and blessings, we may not rightly deserve to be credited for our 'parenting perfections' – which we should have thoroughly enjoyed doing, rather than 'guilt-fully' sometimes regretting that we didn't really!???*

*I am making these unexplored bold statements with the intention of stirring a thought-process within all well-meaning parents; to objectively understand and appreciate a true and realistic frame of reference and the needed role clarity on parenting...*

*We all must once in a way, pause and think of the marvelous and miraculous institution of marriage itself – the natural motivation and the built-in urge that herald a 'process-happiness' in the very lap of creation.*

*Come to think of it, beyond that, everything, almost everything is not under human control. I am not suggesting that we do not have anything to do at all. But we also know that much more than we can imagine, they are beyond our control – the gender, the look and the other physical, mental, spiritual characteristics and so on.*

***You made my whole being,***

***You formed me in my mother's body.***

***I praise you because you made me in an amazing and wonderful way.***

***What you have done is wonderful.***

***I know this very well.***

– Psalm. 139: 13-14

*Antonio Stradivari, a seventeenth century violin maker whose name **Stradivarius** in its Latin form had become synonymous with excellence, once said, 'To make a violin less than his best would be to cheat God, who could not make Stradivarius violins without Antonio'. He was right.*



God could not make **Stradivarius** violins without Antonio Stradivari. He was the one and only one specially Chosen and gifted for that purpose.

In the same vein, there are certain things only you can do that no one else can. Certainly **parenting** is one of them.

I tend to think now as a grandfather that we could and should enjoy parenting our children, just as or even more than we enjoy being a part of their creation.

‘Proactive Parenting – the **happiest hardest** Journey’, sometimes becomes the **hardest**, only when we needlessly cross the boundary beyond being the **happiest**... happily interested in their growth and well-being, responsible for providing all the needed support, encouragement, and then enjoy seeing them grow.

**So often major problems crop up only when:**

- ❖ We assume unnecessary responsibility and authority to unduly discipline or control and in the process make a ‘bonsai’ rather than a full grown tree out in the world.
- ❖ We expect our children to dream and realize ‘our dreams’ rather than their own; not really letting Him work in and through them to accomplish His great purposes, as per His unique personalized divine design and plan.
- ❖ Ultimately, when children surprisingly grow even beyond our imagination, we do not magnanimously, with a special sense of humor admit to our children and to the world that they are what they are, not **because of us, but in spite of us!**”

May be after reading this, you will now understand why I wished to quote George, who in later years became an accomplished CEO / Internationally

acclaimed Management *Guru*.

Okay parents. Should you disagree with George even to a very negligible extent, you **MUST** read further. In any case, I urge you to go ahead and read. It would be a meaningful reinforcement and endorsement. As the author I would love to hear from you. Share your thoughts and let me know what you feel and think about the book *Proactive Parenting*.  
**HAPPY PROACTIVE PARENTING!**

Lily Neelankavil

# *Acknowledgements*

More than a few people have been my inspiration for writing this book. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to every one of them for their assurance and proficiency in the publication process.

To my Heavenly Father, I am extremely grateful. I praise Him for guiding, protecting and supporting me in this endeavor. He gave me good health and a sound mind to complete this book. **The Power and Glory belong to HIM forever and ever.**

My very special thanks to a very special person in my life, my husband George; he not only suggested the title but also spent a lot of time reading the book giving it its final shape. He also offered me invaluable guidance by way of constructive criticism and suggestions. He kept me on track, his pep talks made all the difference to my words.

For those beautiful childhood memories and unforgettable experiences, I am thankful to my precious daughters Rano and Anno. They taught me the value of children, especially daughters and parenting.

Thanks to my sons-in-law Suresh and Sanjay with whom I exchange the large and small dramas of our lives, who have shared so much about bringing up children... I admire you and your parenting style.

How can I not mention my darling grandchildren Esha, Rohit, Sharon, Liana and Sana? You created so many sweet changes and helped me relearn a renewed parenting process. You guys are the best! Each one of you is a bundle of joy, an inexhaustible source of happiness to me!

To all members of the Centre for Individual and Corporate action (CICA)

whom I call ‘CICAites’ from whom I have learned so much, who have been willing to learn from me... all my gratitude, my many thanks for their warm encouragement and helpful comments.

To the team of CICA office whose keen interest helped in making this book a reality ... I am grateful.

To all my unique counselees ... who have in their own way made sizeable contributions that have enriched this book... To all the gracious parents and to their lovely, beautiful and intelligent children who took time to share their triumph and regrets with me. You drew me into your lives and hearts, you allowed me to share the fruits of your understanding... I treasure your friendship.

I also want to thank the many individuals, couples and families with whom we have had the honor to work over the years as well as those who have attended the seminars and workshops with me at our Centre - CICA.

We are grateful to Mr. S. Udaya Kumar, Elite People for so very patiently and professionally doing the page layout and printing coordination.

Last but not the least – rather the foremost, from the bottom of my heart thanks are due to the editorial assistance provided by Jayanthi Ramanujam Gopinath, who is like a daughter to me... she has really put her heart and soul into the book, giving it the needed face and expression. Ultimately, if you find the book refreshingly readable and appealing, it is Jayanthi who made it happen. Jayanthi, I just want to give you a hearty hug for all your affectionate, competent and committed contribution; primarily motivated by her love for me and the subject, with out expecting any material compensation what so ever.

# *Introduction*

Welcome to the magnificent world of parenting! Too sentimental! Unbelievable! Then how about parenting as a hard journey delicately spiced with golden moments of pleasure and joy? No doubt parenting is a hard journey but not an impossible one, and yes it is certainly possible to make it enjoyable too.

Do you know one of the hardest things about being a parent is that **parents have to grow up too**? The question is “Who is grown up enough to raise children?” A better question would be, “When will I be ready for this role?” One of the best observations I have made over the years is that it is never too late for parents to risk growing a little more, and if the parents take this risk, it will impact their children positively. Thus, there is no time like the present to begin helping children grow up and in this process facilitate ourselves as parents to grow too.

## **Why do we have problems raising children?**

**There are two main reasons:**

- ❖ We do what was done to us when we were small, because we think that is the ‘best’ way to bring up children,
- Or
- ❖ We do the opposite of what was done to us when we were small, because when we have had a ‘hard and rough time’ ourselves, we want to make sure that our kids do not have to go through the same.

When children come into our lives, many new parents feel that they are heading into a new adventure called family life. They take on their newly assigned role with missionary zeal; they totally identify themselves with this new project, “I am a parent.”

God by giving us a child has made it specifically clear that we are in a position of accountability. The days and nights of this new little person’s life are entrusted in our care. Things can no longer be the same. Gone are the days of being just a doctor, engineer, a secretary or a home maker. Whatever our role before, our life has a new dimension now. To be a parent is a God appointed position with life time possession. No one can promote us nor can anyone demote us. There is no question of any retirement and don’t even dream of a job transfer. But what is so beautiful is that this position comes with God’s blessings for our entire life, for as long as we continue to live and breathe on this planet.

When God gives us a child He has a definite plan. He guides us day and night whether teaching, correcting, loving or just living. It is my strong belief that parents can truly find God’s guidance in their relationship with children.

I fully agree with parents when they say being a parent is not easy. Parents not only face the challenge of getting the job or studies done by their children while developing their character and values but also face those problems that have to do with their behavior,

Today we see a new thirst and desire to know the why and how of children’s behavior and the meaning of human existence as a whole. I have become aware that life with children no matter how skilled the parents are or how delightful the children are, the relationship between the two is a draining and baffling one, with built-in hardships and contradictory needs.



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However for the vast majority of people, parenting is still the most valuable and satisfying act in their lives. Performing this role with joy and skill, without continual blundering provides the most profound meaning to our lives.

Raising children is by far the most rewarding and daunting experience any human being can ever have. I say this based on the experiences of the many people I have worked with as well as my own. The new responsibility of raising children puts a tremendous strain on a couple's emotional, financial, spiritual and physical resources. I therefore greatly admire and greet those who are presently occupied in the daily task of leading their offspring from infancy through independent adulthood, which is the ultimate goal of parenting.

The overall aim and central goal of my life has always been to experience bliss and peace, which will help to make the world a happier place; this is what I have tried to do with every parent and child I have met through the years and this is what I have attempted with *Proactive Parenting* too.

While some specific universal rules are given for parenting, some exceptions are bound to appear in some areas. Just as each child is unique and even identical twins are not the same, common rules too cannot be the same for everyone. Life is much too awesome, mysterious and complex to be reduced to a simple formula. On the other hand, without principles and guidelines we become little more than wild animals in a jungle. While too many rules and guidelines squeeze the life right out of us, too few of them could result in life threatening chaos. We need to strike a balance between the two.

With the above considerations in mind, I have set out with the limited goals of sharing with you the most common important questions that I

have identified over the years which have come from the parents. I am fully aware that some of these questions, thoughts and ideas may not apply to you and then for some others, none of them will apply at all.

However ask yourself a question at the end of each chapter and give yourself a pat on the back for all the areas you've already covered. As for those areas that still need a bit more of work – consider these as resources from experts for further study and enhancement.

You may just find that some of the pain you experience as you read these lines is partly caused by one of these parenting questions and thoughts. I am sure this will challenge you to take greater strides in this journey.

## *My Source of Inspiration*

I was born in a middle class Indian Christian family with rich values and culture. I grew up playing the role of the only daughter to my beloved parents and the only sister to my two loving brothers whom I adore, admire and hold so close to my heart. When we were little children, I don't remember my mother loading us with too many medicines or vitamin pills. She structured our diet very carefully. Food was prepared with a lot of care, with simple variety. We hardly fell ill, and if we did, a good old family doctor would come home, offering friendly smiles and simple medication. Before we left for school a glass of milk with almonds and honey was a must for all three of us, the goodbye was always with a hug and a word of prayer from our mother.

I remember unity of the family was the top priority. We spent a lot of time together in prayers and in play; in discussions and in silence we learnt the values of life. My parents were the two pillars of the family even after they became grandparents of seven grandchildren. Today both George and I continue to pass on their timeless values and teachings to the younger generation with the help of the other members of the family.

The family traditions slowly became a part of my life. Whenever I am in any kind of difficulty I spontaneously think of my Papa and Mama, "what would they do in such a situation?" I continue to receive the answer and guidance from them, even today. It really helps me.

Even as a child I was always fascinated with children and loved any child

with whom I came in contact. Today I realize that this special love I feel for children and people is a spillover of the abundant love my siblings and I experienced and enjoyed in our family.

Dear parents I would like to share with you three important points that I have learnt over the years. What I share with you through *Proactive Parenting*, with the many people I meet is the happiness prescription my simple loving parents bequeathed to me a long time ago. The rewards of this gift are everlasting and can never be counted or even expressed.

- ❖ Prevention is so much better than cure. So before we as parents feel and think that there is any kind of problem with the children or in the family relationships, let us start the prevention well before hand.
- ❖ If you feel you or your children need to get remedial help, do go easy with the treatment and your precious selves.
- ❖ Children learn and become a lot like their parents in achieving their values.

So in the ultimate analysis we as parents need to be very careful, thoughtful and loving knowing that our children are going to become as they experience us, not only as parents but as human beings too.

**There are many reasons that motivated me to write *Proactive Parenting*.**

George and I are privileged and blessed with two lovely daughters, and this experience has provided another sparkling opportunity to add further dimensions to our parenting concepts. This practice I now offer to parents is a personal interpretation.

During the past several years I have been travelling, conducting workshops for parents, teachers, school principals, church ministers, teenagers, child

care workers and corporate executives. This has deeply motivated me to think of writing this book.

My many years of conducting workshops with parents and counseling people have also inspired me to write this book. Many parents wrote to tell me proudly of what they had been able to accomplish in their homes after attending the workshops. They also believed they could achieve so much more if given more insights. Many asked, “Why don’t you give us a book? Why don’t you give us some kind of a step-by-step process that would help us learn the skills?”

People share with me their personal experiences, their doubts, their fears, their disappointments and their enthusiasm. I have learned from them all and I am grateful to them for their frankness. What they shared with me, I now share with others for the sake of learning and growing without disclosing their identities.

Sometimes parents do not distinguish the problem and so they do nothing, other parents identify the problem but do not admit it, while some others again recognize the problem but do not know how to fix it. I am motivated to write this book for all three groups of parents, so that when they read this book they will be motivated to get in touch with reality, they will start thinking and doing something for themselves and their children.

Yet another factor that motivated me was when it was time to see my daughters off into the world, I wanted strong wings and deep roots for them ... the confidence to ascend high and a firm base on which to land if things did get unsettled or uncertain. I visited a number of good book stores but alas I could not find the answer anywhere. It was exactly at this time the idea of *Proactive Parenting* was born. For the ideas to crystallize into words on paper...it took longer than I expected. Here is the book in your hands today.

Even though I am ready, I do not have all the answers. I hope the ideas in this book will help you prepare your children to experience the adventure of life with confidence and wisdom...more importantly to help you sow many seeds of happiness during this time you are together.



## *A Few Thoughts for our Children*

*Dear children,*

*While penning a few thoughts for your parents, I thought it would be a great idea to also let you know what an important incomparable role you play in our lives. Have you ever wondered how we as parents are incomplete without you? It is our everyday prayer for you to be happy, healthy, and safe. Of course, in this journey of parenting we too make mistakes. We too are learning and many a time you have been the teacher and we the students. You are the vision of tomorrow, the force of the future. Wherever the roads may twist, turn and take us, one thing will remain the same – we love you for who you are and what you are. Enjoy the process of feeling free to grow, to blossom, to change and to follow your glorious destiny.*

*May God bless you abundantly and be with you always.*

*Lily Auntie*



## *Proactive Parenting for Precious Parents*

The book you are holding in your hand is the evidence that you want something better for your children.

*Proactive Parenting* is a guide to give parents a few ideas to cope with some of the problems they face on a day to day basis.

*Proactive Parenting* focuses on strengthening family ties and empowering family feelings of togetherness and happiness. It helps us recollect the joys and difficulties of growing up. It teaches us to understand and respect this precious season of laughter and sunshine in life called parenting.

I personally feel, think, and believe that parents are the holders of their own reality and the experts on their children. *Proactive Parenting* can improve the parents' relationship with their children considerably. It can help them generate more positive thoughts. It can also help them use their energy and time to fruitfully enjoy their children even more.

In this book I have offered encouraging stories, realistic advice from my own parenting experiences as a mother, daughter and also as a counselor, so you can prepare your children for life even after they leave home.

*Proactive Parenting* includes stories from parents who have been there, done that and lived to tell the tale. I hope their stories will remind you that you are not alone. Others have walked the path before you. *Proactive Parenting* will help us understand that by combining the beautiful reasoning power of the mind along with the brilliant concept of our

congruency, this goal can be achieved. I have presented an account of the human nature of parents and also of the children that contain an optimal blend of holistic synthesis and usable analysis.

*Proactive Parenting* is for parents who wish to enjoy parenting, who want parenting to be fun. This book has been designed with every kind of parent in mind. It is for parents who are doing their maximum and want to do more, for parents who are not doing their maximum and want to learn how, for parents who are tired and troubled, for every parent who wishes to rediscover and rejuvenate the joys of parenting.

Even if your children are grown, some of these ideas will still apply; if your children are small even better. If you have no children, these ideas can be applied to yourself if you wish to internalize new permissions to benefit yourself. Just as we can develop new habits at any age or any time, renovate and redecorate the house in which we live, we can also build a whole new personality. We can gradually become what we want to be.

*Proactive Parenting* gives parents a road map to keep children on the straight and narrow path which takes children to successful adulthood. When we practice these disciplinary techniques day after day, consistently and faithfully, we will be happy and satisfied with ourselves and with our children. Just as reading a book on physical fitness and not practicing those fitness-exercises does not benefit the body at all, likewise merely reading this book will also not benefit a parent unless sincere effort is made to practice what has been read. It is only practice that makes a mind perfect in course of time.

To read and complete *Proactive Parenting* is challenging and often difficult, but an incredibly fulfilling one. To take this challenge requires a resolute mind and a steadfast determination.

This book is not meant to be sampled or briefly tested. If we can commit even a thought a day at a time, it could change our relationship with our children and our lives.

*Proactive Parenting* is a tool where we will find tips for meeting children's most important needs, for practicing effective discipline, managing family and conflicts, teaching life skills, giving these young lives structure and much more. This book captures the essence of being a parent, with true stories about love, attitude and overcoming obstacles. All parents will find empowerment and encouragement to love and accept themselves and to believe in their dreams. They will find answers to many questions and also discover a new hope for a promising future.

Finally this is a resource book that guides parents through the toughest and most important conversations you will ever have with your children. You may not like everything you read in this life changing book, but once you begin implementing the suggestions you are going to enjoy this book, you will accept the changes in yourself and in your children's behavior. You will be thrilled and satisfied with the feeling of success in your life and in your children's life.

*Proactive Parenting* helps us prepare and evaluate how we are going to raise spiritually strong, physically healthy, mentally confident, happy and successful children. It helps us become more focused on our parenting style. It is likely that some of us will be disappointed to find that this book contains no easy panacea for parenting and does not teach shortcuts or the easy way out for parents to establish good relationships with their children. It only provides some basic insights into children's behavior and their attitude towards their parents. It is also about parental fears and assumptions about their children. We have in short discussed the human side of parents' behavior towards their children and children's behavior towards their parents.

*Proactive Parenting* is designed not just for the parents but for the entire family, a tool that helps us prepare our children for everything - from managing self, managing relationships, managing performance and managing growth.

To find that the perfect balance between holding too tightly and handling the leadership isn't always easy for any parent, but hopefully this book will be of some help. Consider it and give a try to learn from others who have done it before you.

Remember life is an experiment dear parent, so being imperfect will not result in penalties in the game of life. Take a risk and try these suggestions. You will probably be pleasantly surprised by the power of change when you will see the results in all your loved ones and yourself ... in the rainbows, in the music ... in the smiles and laughter I wish for you.



# *Before I Begin*

My many years of work with children, helping them grow, makes me believe that children are unique, special and that each child is born a winner. I believe that every one of them is worthy of importance not only for the family but also for themselves, for society and definitely for the nation. This is the most important and critical aspect of Human Resources Development about which there is so much awareness and emphasis in every sphere.

As parents who enjoy parenting, who find it the most rewarding experience of life, you will agree that the importance of raising children with emotional and intelligence quotient is demanding on all sides. It requires heart, intelligence and tremendous endurance. The real life dramas in which parents and children are engaged in every day does not even give them enough time for careful thought or rehearsal.

## **Parenting is a System ...**

Parenting is not a natural skill or talent with which parents are born. It is a developed skill which is worth learning if we want to achieve our aim of seeing our children happy, healthy, safe and successful, both now and in the future. This system of *Proactive Parenting* makes life easier and happier for both parents and children! This is also a learning process which is gained by experience.

## **Parenting is a balancing act ...**

Parenting can be a time of confusion and commotion, a long season of strain and storms. Rebellion against authority and convention is to be

expected, accepted and tolerated for the sake of learning and growing. This is a very difficult time; however it is possible to make this an enjoyable season too. All because of a factor called *Love*.

### **Raising children is a challenging job ...**

I know, I have been there too. Despite the fact that my husband and I are both students of Behavioral Sciences, even though raising our two daughters has been an extremely rewarding experience, it has not always been easy. The realities of our own interactions have shown us how child rearing can become more fun and less of a struggle for both parents and children.

### **Can children and parents live together in peace, agreement and respect?**

This is a question I address to all parents. I am sure you will agree with me when I say that the answer to this complex question is a definite ‘Yes’- under certain conditions. These conditions require that we live with our children with mutual respect and dignity for each other, which will take us together on the road of co-existence.

No one could ever doubt the intentions of parents. Yet so often our efforts are unrewarded, our love is not appreciated. It is important to understand children’s behavior and accept certain facts. Being a student of people, I share my experience with parents that when our efforts are so often unrewarded, our love unreciprocated – it is definitely time for a reality check, to understand a few facts.....

There are many factors involved in *Proactive Parenting*. I do not plan to take all, but let us begin with a few.

# Chapter

# 1

## *Move from Emotions to Reasoning*

Question: Your neighbors are celebrating a birthday party for one of their children. All the other kids in the neighborhood have been invited. But alas! Your child has not received an invitation. And your kid is taking it hard. With tear-filled eyes and mouth puckered with grief, he comes to you and tells you about this. What would you say to console and pacify the child?

This is a question I had once put across to a group of parents. Here are some of the responses:

- ❖ “I will comfort the child with the promise of an ice cream cake.”
- ❖ “I will definitely get the neighbors to invite him next time.”
- ❖ “I will boost his morale by saying, let’s throw a big party for your birthday and not invite this silly kid, okay?”
- ❖ “I will take my son to my neighbor’s house, explain the situation to them and arrange for him to join the party.”

## **Which of these approaches should parents adopt?**

**My answer: “None of them!”**

Truly speaking, none of them can be called an ‘okay’ approach. If you notice carefully, in every one of the responses, the parents themselves have made a decision on behalf of the child. It would have been better instead for the parents to step down to the level of comprehending the child’s thinking, emotions, feelings and understanding the child.

### **Shift from emotions to reasoning ...**

**Parents need to provide opportunities for their children to make decisions for themselves.**

**An okay response from an okay parent after listening to the whole story would be:**

“Sure my dear, I understand your feelings. I know it is very upsetting when your friend does not invite you to his birthday party. I also feel sad and hurt at what your friend has done. He should not have done this. But now you tell me, what shall we do about this?”

The child will feel, “My parents have understood my feelings and problem.” He will have the energy to think about the problem and suggest a solution on his own. Most likely, the response will be a simple one like:

- ❖ “Get me a bar of chocolate”
- ❖ Or, “Read me a story”,
- ❖ Or “Take me out somewhere else while the party is going on”.

## **Should we instead plant a feeling of revenge or induce other morally wrong feelings in an impressionable young mind?**

In this way, parents will become familiar with a disciplinary technique which provides both the parents and the children with a choice, while permitting their children to take responsibility for their own decisions. This cultivates self-discipline and self-management which transform into self-confidence in the future years. This is the best means of empowering the children to develop into an adult capable of facing the stresses and strains of modern society.

What is important here is to understand the children's feelings and to respond at that level, without volunteering advice or suggestions. When children vent out their feelings and they are understood by the parents, children will have the energy to reason out and decide what they want to do when faced with a problem. Let me share a very insightful and interesting incident.

*A mother took her five-year-old child to school for the first time. The child was scared and did not want to leave her mother. The mother repeatedly advised the child to stop crying and compared her with the other children who were not crying and were going to their respective classes willingly and happily. Again and again she pointed out to the other children walking the corridors and told her child to go to the class, smiling like all of them.*

*The child listened for a while. Finally the mother said, "Look at that girl, she is running to the class leaving her mother behind without making any fuss. She is not crying, why do you need to cry?" The child, who could not take this anymore, held her mother's hand tightly and said, "That girl must be having a step-mother. You are my own mother, aren't you?"*

*The mother was shocked when she heard this statement and immediately took the child onto her lap, kissed her, gave her a tight hug and demonstrated that she had understood the child's feelings. She said, "Of course I am your own mother and I love you very much. If you do not want to go today, I will bring you back tomorrow."*

*The child cried a little longer and after a while went to class with the other children, because she knew that her mother had understood her feelings.*

Children's feelings do not always seem important to parents. A simple emotion that seems silly to adults is very important to children. When children realize that parents understand their feelings, they will willingly move from emotions to reasoning. And this is really the crux of the matter.

When children are experiencing strong or strange feelings, they cannot figure things out rationally. What children need at this time is a release of their feelings. When parents expect children to understand something from the parent's perspective, the parents need to first listen and understand the children's feelings. Solutions to the problem come only after that. Logical arguments hold no value or importance when one is under the tremendous pressure of feelings.

**But what if the child adamantly insists on attending the party?**

**Children are childish; parents are adults, so they need to be 'adultish.'**

**You tell me, is it possible for you to take your child to an uninvited party?**

I am sure you will not take the child for the birthday party where he is not invited! Then in that case we as parents need to stay calm and

patient and explain to the child that it is just not possible to take him to a place where one is not invited. Get this message across and then leave the responsibility of taking a decision to the child. With encouragement, understanding, love and support the child is sure to arrive at a decision which will not put the parent in an embarrassing or tricky situation.

While it is natural for children to adapt to a style of life that is different from ours, let us not forget that we too have our own values, lifestyle and of course our own egos!

**Is every young child capable of thinking things on his own and making decisions on his own accord?**

**Each child is different and unique.**

From around the age of six to eight, children start acquiring the ability to reason and make rational decisions. Of course individual differences are always there. Decisions taken or responses made before this tender age are purely based on emotional factors and are the impulsive reactions to their feelings. They will not logically or rationally come out with appropriate responses. Understanding parents put themselves in the child's shoes, empathize with the emotions, feelings and the resultant impulses.

In the same way, children also learn to see themselves as adults. This process of mutual understanding will help children develop their reasoning and their values. Again children cannot be generalized. However this process takes time. We need to have a lot of patience. By the time children are fifteen or sixteen years old, they develop a good amount of reasoning and are in a position to make their own decisions, but they surely need their parents' support.

**We can understand when parents move from the thinking to feeling level, and feel what the child is feeling. But can children move**

**themselves to the level of adults?**

**Yes of course, when you stop telling and start asking. This helps children to improve their thinking level.**

A lot depends on the age of the children. After the age of six the children's ability to think and their awareness of their feelings increases. Parents can really help their children by asking them questions (i.e. asking questions but not questioning) so that they develop their thinking and reasoning ability. As parents, we are more accustomed to advise or criticize our children. This doesn't help in any way. The reality is, it will only make them more rebellious.

*A daughter asked her mother one day not to advise her; instead to put herself in her place and understand how difficult it is for her to face that particular situation. What a wonderful daughter to give this awareness to her mother!*

It is up to us to treat children as grown-ups. Usually we put them down and insist on obedience saying, "You know nothing. Just do as mother says," "as father says". "Don't talk back to elders!" Instead of suppressing them in this fashion, we should consider them as equals and create an atmosphere that encourages them to use their minds easily. Let them think for themselves and arrive at their own decisions. We can do this by talking less, listening more, understanding and communicating to them more frequently and freely.

I am just wondering... when parents are willing to make some changes, will children not be willing to do the same?

Remember, for us as parent to change is much more difficult than it is for children, simply because of the past experiences



and baggage we have gathered and kept in our minds. Thank God children have less experience; they are much more flexible and are willing to change easily.

TURN OVER IN MIND

*(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)*

[illegible]



# Chapter

## 2

### *Demonstrate Leadership than Ownership*

Why are some children so adamant! What can parents do to help them use their reasoning power, to function and behave better?

As you ask this question, two points come to my mind.

- ❖ Demonstrate leadership, not ownership.
- ❖ “The difference between a lady and a flower girl is not the way she behaves but the way she is treated.”

*- The Pygmalion, George Bernard Shaw*

If you are raising your children with a few rules that are constantly enforced, then this should not really be a problem.

Don't be afraid to demonstrate leadership to your children. Rather than acting as their owners, why not behave as their guardians, their custodians and guides? Good leadership includes love, care and warmth as well as structure and limits. So the role of a parent is to also inspire their children to use their reasoning power and to distinguish between right and wrong.

Let us remember one thing dear parents. Children were not put on earth to raise you. They do not make the family rules. You do! Children are much happier and healthier when they are given limitations and structure. Our job as parents is to help our children accept our right as parents in their lives. In fact we do them a great disservice if we do not teach them to obey us. It is very important our children learn to surrender to our authority.

### **Parents! Are you wondering why I am saying this?**

The way children see their parents' leadership sets the tone for their eventual relationships with other authorities too, like the elders in the family, school teachers, college professors and future bosses. For this is also about accepting the leadership of others in life.

With each generation of children we have seen different waves of rebellion. They rebel because of control or high expectations at home or at school or both. This reflects in the increase of aggressiveness, disobedience and emotional disturbances in them.

However our relationship with our children is not about being a critical dictator but about being a benevolent dictator. This means parents give permission to the children to take decisions, but if the decisions are not in their children's best interest, the parents then take the decisions. This does not mean bossing the children around for the sake of indulging in a power trip. What I am talking about is a careful balance between love and authority. Parents encourage a dialogue, invite discussions and

everyone understands that the final decision will be for the betterment of the children. In this way, we help children reach the right decisions within the limits of parental guidance. We let them know that parents are concerned for their children, so they take decisions which are better for them. Children feel so much safer and healthier when there is a regular rhythm to their lives. Children need to have responsibilities, without becoming slaves or little adults.

In general, children ought to be doing a few simple daily routines without fuss. Routines help to create an inner structure and ego boundaries in children. In fact these are the very aspects that will help to distinguish the competent from the incompetent in adulthood. This will nurture an awareness and respect towards dignity of labor, also an open minded flexible attitude towards work.

Of course children are impulsive until their reasoning is fully developed. When they rebel, they are not thinking, but they do think and reason things out later. They find it hard to tell their parents about this process they are going through, because they do not know or understand what is happening in them.

### **Demonstrate your authority without punishment.**

Mrs. Rashmi Patel shares her experience on how she and her husband handled her son's resistance to go to boarding school.

*It was time for Rahul to leave for boarding school. "When Rahul heard that he would have to leave next day, he told us he wasn't going." When it got close to the time he had to leave, he said that if he was forced to go to boarding school, he will run away from home.*

*So we said, "Ok. But you better pack a few things to take with you."*

*He went into his room and packed some of his things. Then he came out and informed us that he was ready to leave.*

*My husband stopped him and said, "Well, wait a minute. You will probably need some money." So he gave him some money and Rahul put it into his pocket.*

*Thinking for a moment Rahul said, "What if I get hungry, maybe I should wait until after dinner?" We told him it was a great idea.*

*When we were finishing dinner, my husband told him he'd better make a move, because it was going to get dark soon. Rahul looked outside and then looked at my husband.*

*Finally Rahul said, "Maybe I'd better stay here." That was the last time we heard him not wanting to go to boarding school. We dropped him at the hostel next morning."*

The instinctive rebellion against authority is inborn, regardless of any contemporary teaching to the contrary. Children want to test the limits of parents and see how far they can push them.

*My daughter was only four years old when she questioned my authority for the first time. She was tearing the morning newspaper into bits and throwing them on the floor. When I told her to stop doing that immediately, she looked up at me and said, "So what happens if I do not stop?" I told her, "I will do something for which you would not be happy if you continue." Slowly she stopped what she was doing.*

Parents must set up a definite clear structure for their children. This structure must have limits and these limits must be backed by careful management.

*Many years ago, when I had just embarked on my career as a counselor, I knew a mother who had punished her twelve year old daughter, and had asked her to stand in a corner until she apologized. When the daughter did not say sorry, the mother walked near her and asked, "Are you ready to apologize?"*

*The daughter did not reply. After sometime the mother returned and casually walked into another room. The daughter was obviously still not ready to apologize, so the mother came back again, this time to do some work in the same room and this activity went on for more than an hour. The daughter's legs were becoming numb. When she saw that some visitors were coming home to join them for dinner, with pain and shame she finally said sorry.*

*The girl had learnt a lesson that day. She realized that her mother meant what she said. She had set limits and backed it with control. The boundaries were clearly defined.*

As parents there are certain battles that we must win, when we do not compromise on authority and dignity. No child is born bad, no one enjoys being bad and undisciplined. Situations and circumstances make them stubborn or disobedient. Children are not problems, they may have problems.

If you are not sure what I am saying, reflect back on the first time your toddler looked into your eyes and said, 'NO!' or threw a tantrum. What is the reason for this two letter word to evoke such a strong response?

*I have a vivid memory of my daughter the first time she said 'no' to me.*

*I was telling my daughter 'NO' for everything she wanted to do. 'NO,' 'NO.' "Do not do this or do not take that. No touching hot food or electronic gadgets, no putting the finger in the*

*mouth, no peeping out of the window.” Oh, the list was quite endless.....She was so fed up with my many ‘NO’s. This word had registered itself firmly and strongly in her mind. One day when she was eating biscuits, I took a small piece from her plate. Immediately, very loudly and clearly pointing out her index finger at me she said, “NO, NO, NO”*

Children react to the word ‘NO’ in different ways according to the situation, and their level of intellectual and emotional development. While some children become sullen and withdrawn, others may yell or argue. Kids are generally excited to push boundaries, try new things, understand and test their abilities. They do not understand that you are simply concerned for their safety.

In most situations when children are dealing with a **NO**, the frustration and distress is a matter of misunderstanding. As a parent you are concerned that your children should not get hurt, about keeping things safe, clean and doing things on time. However it is also important to understand that your children are still in an early stage of development and realize none of this. When they hear you say ‘No’ they will take it personally until they are old enough to understand your reasoning.

Even at this early age, it helps if you give a basic explanation of why you say no. Use positive statements so that your children do not perceive your words as finding fault. Help them know that you are not being negative about them, that it is your love and concern for them that you express. Maintain an attitude of calmness, for if you get worked up, they will too, because unknowingly the children imitate the parents.

The Scripture says, “*Children obey your Parents in the Lord, for this is right.*” Ephesians 6:1



This is a command and not a request. If it were optional nobody will do it.

*I remember I used to hate this verse as a child, for my mother would ask me to recite it every time I disobeyed her.*

*As the years passed by and I became a mother myself, I began to understand the immeasurable worth of my loving parents, the immense affection and care they had showered on me.*

*I began to enjoy this verse so much, I asked my daughters to repeat it every time they disobeyed.*

*Today they are young mothers themselves. Does history repeat itself? Does the tradition continue? I dare not ask.*

From the time of birth, children have a desire to be loved, accepted, wanted and recognized. Also they do not want to be rejected for who they are and what they do.

*A mother of a ten year old child shared with me once that her child has always been incredibly stubborn. For a long time the parents tried different methods of correction but nothing really worked. However a change set in the day the parents allowed the child to learn a few lessons on his own and it worked well.*

Children are anxious to be treated as individuals in their own right. As children grow, their behavioral patterns and the emotions they experience will have strong reasons based on this yearning for recognition. It is the parents, teachers and people around who are responsible for the causative reasons of this behavioral pattern of the stubborn children.

*A seven-year-old girl used to become silent and tight-lipped every time her class teacher asked her a question.*

*The teacher sent for the girl's mother one day and complained*

*about her daughter's peculiar behavior in front of the teacher. In the following weeks the girl continued being silent and tightlipped, but with a new addition to her behavior. She now frequently complained about every one of her classmates to the teacher.*

*Another meeting between the mother and the teacher ...*

*This time the mother scolded her daughter in front of the teacher, "You are an adamant, unreasonable child! I am ashamed of you and I really do not know what to do with you."*

*This resulted in the girl becoming even more stubborn.*

*Some weeks later the mother brought the daughter to me and complained about her, again in front of the child saying, "My daughter is very stubborn. She does not answer her teacher's questions in the class. The teacher gets angry and complains to me in front of everyone in the school and I feel so ashamed of her. This child is too troublesome. I cannot handle her anymore."*

*I asked the mother: "Is there anything else you want to tell me?"*

*The mother added, "She is very quick in complaining about the other children who are talking and laughing, who have not brought their homework and who are eating in the class."*

*When the mother stopped I asked the little girl, "Have you been listening to what your mother is saying?"*

*"Yes," She replied promptly.*

*I asked the little girl, "Are you doing all this?"*

*"Yes."*

*I asked again, "What is the reason for you to do these things?"*

*Immediately, she answered, "I am stubborn."*

*"Do you know the meaning of the word stubborn?"*

*"Yes I know".*

*“I don’t know”, I told her. “Will you tell me?”*

*Then she came close to me and said, “Stubborn means, when your teacher asks you a question, you close your lips tight and don’t answer, no matter what happens.” And she acted this out by pressing her lips tightly together.*

*“Are you doing this?” I asked.*

*“Yes.”*

*“Are you complaining about the other children to your teacher?”*

*“Yes.”*

*“And what is the reason for doing that?”*

*The girl gave this a little thought and said, “My teacher complains about me all the time to my mother, I too complain to her about the other children all the time!”*

*I understood that she was rebelling in her own unique way. She was trying to tell me, “If the teacher stops complaining about me to my mother, I will also stop complaining to her about the other children. She irritates me, I irritate her.”*

I urge you to check and make sure your children are not having disturbed feelings of this kind against you or anybody else.

**Children rebel in innumerable ways ... according to the situation and the uniqueness of each child...**

**Children are human too...**

Some parents who themselves are unstable, immature and emotionally disturbed feel that their children ‘owe’ them unquestioned obedience no matter what the commands are. Expecting children to show blind obedience is just not possible because they have their own reasoning ability. As I said they are human too, they express their irritation towards their parents in various ways.

**Each child is different and special...**

Power-seeking children feel that they are significant only when they are the boss, “No one can force me to do anything and everything” or, “You better do what I want”. Even when parents do succeed in subduing such children, the victory is only temporary. Such children struggle hard and create different techniques to prove their power.

**Age is an important factor...**

An eighteen months old child expresses his autonomy by saying ‘No,’ by trying to move away from you, or by getting into things he is not supposed to. An eighteen year old has many more options available to express his autonomy – how he dresses, what career he chooses, his political beliefs, his religious beliefs, the friends he keeps, what time he chooses to go to sleep at night, wakes up in the morning or even returns home.

**Flexibility counts a lot...**

Parents, let us be flexible. Let us not believe that there is only one right way to do things. When we become rigid, it will create problems even when they get older. If you still believe that there is only one right way to do things when your children are twenty, and most of the time it is your way, you are in for a lot of unnecessary heartache and conflict.

**Children have their own assumptions...**

Children who seek revenge are convinced that they are not loved. They wish to hurt others as they have been hurt. Parents of such revengeful children often feel deeply hurt and want to retaliate. This further provokes the children into greater acts of revenge.

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## **Children also feel ‘not OK’...**

Children who suffer from a disability or a feeling of inadequacy become extremely discouraged. Since they have given up all hope of succeeding at anything, they try to ensure that others do not expect anything of them. Parents will realize that the children are doing this only when they feel despair and want to give up.

### **So the remedy lies in first identifying the reasons for the child’s defiance and rebellion.**

Let us understand dear parents that constant reminding, too much punishing, smothering and insisting on performance without understanding the children’s difficulties will lead to unnecessary anger and rebellion.

### **So the question now is what can the parents do to make life simple and enjoyable?**

#### **Here are some tips:**

- ❖ Send clear messages and explain without confusing.
- ❖ Be a role model for positive behavior.
- ❖ Take a deep breath before you yell, or count from twenty to one.
- ❖ Never let your words reflect your inner turmoil.
- ❖ Use a calm voice and a soft tone.
- ❖ Be consistent in what you do.
- ❖ Avoid a head-on conflict.
- ❖ Support the children to cooperate with you, make them helpmates in all of your endeavors.
- ❖ Understand that fighting in response to provocation, or giving in because you feel helpless will increase children’s desire for power.

- ❖ Avoid feeling hurt.
- ❖ Avoid punishment and retaliation.
- ❖ Prove to the children that they are loved.
- ❖ Build a relationship based on mutual trust.
- ❖ Stop all criticism. Focus on the child's strengths.
- ❖ Encourage every positive attempt, no matter how small.
- ❖ Above all, do not be ruled by self pity and do not give up.

**Congratulations!** You will find yourself saying NO less frequently, encountering fewer rebels too!!

### *TURN OVER IN MIND*

*(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)*

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# Chapter

## 3

### *Sibling Rivalry*

Children who are very good-natured and loving suddenly turn very difficult, act aggressive and become rebellious when a baby brother or sister is born. Why does this happen?

Truly speaking, the sense of belonging, to feel accepted, wanted and recognized are quite natural for all of us. These are also basic needs of children. When children feel hungry for these needs they change their behavior to fulfill these needs. This is something that is to be expected of children and accepted by parents.

Sibling rivalry is a natural phenomenon. However, one can always minimize it. We can resolve it to quite an extent through communication, by understanding the needs of the children and through conflict management.

When the older child comes to know that he is going to have a ‘baby companion’ in the family, his initial reaction is to feel very excited and happy at the idea of having someone to play with. The child imagines the baby as a friend, someone who will be great fun to be with.

Unfortunately, the child’s feelings of happiness and excitement soon change into sadness and anger. The child notices that after the baby’s birth, friends and relatives bring gifts only for the baby but not for him. He hears them exclaim over the baby all the time. “How sweet, the baby’s nose is just like her mummy’s and eyes like daddy’s.” The child thinks to himself, “Of course nothing like me in any way!” Soon there begins a growing resentment towards the new baby.

*A few years ago when a new baby was added to a family, the first child Ahmed became very confused. He began to think about the new arrival and doubts rose in his little mind, “Am I important or not? Do I belong to this family or not?” After observing the visitors for a while, Ahmed wanted to find out if his parents shared the same attitude of preference with him.*

*Ahmed chose a time when the mother was in the middle of a busy day and had snatched some time to eat. He asked for biscuits.*

*The mother said, “Wait a little Ahmed, I’ll get you the biscuits in a while.”*

*So Ahmed waited. Exactly at that moment the baby cried, the mother immediately left her food uneaten on the table and rushed to carry the new born baby. This confirmed the ‘fact’ in Ahmed’s little mind, “the baby is more important and accepted. His needs are valuable, but not mine.”*

*Now began the struggle in Ahmed’s mind, “What can I do to prove that I am also important, that I too belong to this family, that I should be accepted as I am and my needs are also*



*important for me and for my parents?”*

*So Ahmed thought of a way to attract his mother's attention by doing something deliberately, which he had earlier been told not to. Instead of putting his toys back in the toy box, he threw them all around the room simply because the mother had told him to keep them in the toy box.*

*The mother, who otherwise failed to take notice of Ahmed because of her increased work load and excitement after the baby's arrival said, “Ahmed, “Didn't I tell you to put your toys back in the toy box? You've thrown them all over the room. Don't be naughty now, be a good boy and help mummy. Mummy has so many extra things to do because the baby has just joined us. There is so much more work for mummy now.”*

*Little Ahmed did not listen to what the mother was saying for he was delighted his mother had recognized him even though she had called him naughty. He thought, “Finally, after a long time mummy had to call my name today! If I am naughty again I can draw her attention, so let me be naughty.”*

*A few days later when the mother was busy looking after the baby, Ahmed began feeling neglected and unwanted again. He picked up the baby's feeding bottle, willfully dropped it and broke it.*

*Now that certainly got the mother's attention! She scolded him saying, “Ahmed you are not understanding mummy's problems and you are a naughty boy,” and gave him a slap. But Ahmed was gratified that his mother was talking to him even if it was to scold him and had touched him even if it was to slap him, because for a long time she had been frequently 'touching' only the baby...but not him.*

*Ahmed felt a little satisfied and thought something is better than nothing.*

Children and even we grown-ups cannot survive without getting some kind of recognition and attention. At times we crave for recognition, we seldom care or even realize how right or wrong our methods may appear to others...And now here's another scenario:

*In a family the parents and the two kids were extremely excited as they were expecting their third child. Their first child, a daughter who was seven years old had already chosen the party frock she was going to wear when she would meet her new brother or sister, while the second child, a five year old boy had decided to wear a three piece suit.. Both children wished to welcome his or her baby highness coated suited and booted for the royal occasion. When d-day arrived it was with a lot of reluctance that they got into their everyday clothes before they were both taken to see the baby. The children and adults cooed and cuddled the little baby girl. The kids jumped up and down and wanted to take the baby home right away.*

*After a few weeks all the excitement and drama slowly began to fade. The exuberant mood of the children had now shifted into a kind of not really liking the idea of having another permanent little member in the family. Very soon both the elder siblings started complaining about the little baby. They could not wake up in the morning because the new baby was a disturbance, she cried the whole night. Their Mom could not help them in their homework because she now spent all her time with the little one.*

*The mother shared with me that when she had been to school to pick up her son the class teacher had spoken to her and had casually asked, "How is the little baby doing?"*

*The mother replied, "Oh, she is doing great".*

*The teacher asked again, "And how is everyone else with the*

*baby?”*

*“Alright I guess, but why are you asking this?” the mother asked the teacher.*

*“Well” said the teacher, “when the baby was born last month, all your little son would do was go on and on saying, “She is so cute, so sweet and so soft. Two weeks later when I asked your son about the new baby the reply was a very dry ‘okay’, accompanied by an indifferent shrug as if nothing important has happened.*

*This morning when I asked him about the little baby again, he actually grunted and walked away rolling his eyes as if to say, ‘how many more times do I have to answer this dumb question again and again?’*

When children realize that the brother or sister is here forever ... the much awaited bundle of joy actually becomes excess baggage.

In some homes, the situation may just be the reverse. The parents develop a deep ‘sentimental’ attachment towards the elder child. In such cases, it is the younger child who will adopt ‘negative’ tactics to attract the parent’s care and attention.

All siblings fight from time to time. But sometimes, a sibling’s fight can somehow make life miserable for everyone in the house. The question that always comes to one’s mind is, “Do parents have to intervene?” If yes how often and how much?

Sometime children need to work it out on their own. But if they are on the verge of really hurting each other verbally or physically – it is time for the parents to step in and put an end to the dispute.

**Of course when parents do this, it is important to keep in mind the**

**following points:**

- ❖ Acknowledge their anger.
- ❖ Listen to both sides.
- ❖ Show appreciation for the difficulty of the problem.
- ❖ Express confidence that they can work it out.
- ❖ Leave the place.
- ❖ If they still do not stop fighting, then separate them to cool off.
- ❖ Do not express your anger.
- ❖ Spend regular one-on-one time with your kids.
- ❖ Make each child your own favorite.
- ❖ Never compare nor complain about one child to the other.
- ❖ do your best not to be partial.
- ❖ Never say ‘you guys are driving me crazy’ for it really isn’t going to help the situation.

The reality is that siblings just fight sometimes for toys, TV programs, music and many other small things. But sometimes siblings’ anger can be a deep, potentially dangerous thing. Sometimes siblings fight because they want to compete with each other to prove themselves better in the eyes of their parents and others. The job of a parent is to find out whether they are competing for the first or front seat, for some other reason, or for *love*.

**How do we make children understand that parents feel the same love and concern for each of them?**

Fredrick Pearl, the father of Gestalt Therapy says, “As you know, parents are never right. Either they are too large or too small, too tall or too short, too smart or too dumb. If they are stern they should be soft, if soft they should be stern. But when and where do you find that parents are alright?”

Children can always blame the parents if they want to play the blame

game, and hold the parents responsible for everything that goes wrong. The sad truth is that no matter how wise the parents are, they cannot in their children's eyes be right for any length of time.

**However some sibling rivalry is actually beneficial ...It can teach children cooperation and compromise.**

But if it gets out of hand frequently, the parents can take certain precautions and can use the following tips to lower the tension. To strike a balance is the goal here.

**Do not get caught in the trap that everything must be equal among your children.**

Everything must be fair, but fair is not the same as equal. Treating them equally is not fair. Parents can use sincere, kind and loving talk and have an impartial conduct towards all their children. "You too were once an infant. You grew up in this cradle and on my lap, just as this little one is doing now. Daddy used to carry you on his shoulder for hours and grandma used to give you an oil massage and bathe you..." This kind of affectionate talk will help the elder child. Telling the elder child, "Your younger brother is your mirror image" will make him feel proud of himself. When the younger child is old enough to comprehend things, parents should treat both children as equals, with absolute impartiality in terms of love, attention, time, energy, appreciation, looks and money spent on them. Equal and loving acceptance of both children through word, touch and action, should be expressed repeatedly.

**Keep a distance...**

Encourage your children to resolve their own differences. Let them cultivate their valuable negotiating skills. Help them learn how to argue and sort out their own points constructively. The first rule is "Use words, not your fists," and parents are there to take care.

**Consider other causes...**

Let us not assume all arguments are the result of sibling rivalry. Arguments often arise because children can be tired, hungry, or even bored. Sometimes a child who is angry with someone else will fight with its sibling, because he is a safe target and there is not much risk in it. See if there is a pattern to the behavior and work on the problem ... or on the problem behind the problem.

***TURN OVER IN MIND***

*(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)*

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# Chapter

## 4

### *A few 'Whys' of Misbehavior*

What does a parent do when children persist in misbehaving in a certain way?

There is always a particular reason why a particular child behaves in a particular manner. It is for the parents to identify the reason why the child is misbehaving in a certain way.

It is not uncommon for children to exhibit aggressive behavior. When children misbehave in a certain way, this usually indicates that the children are under some emotional stress.

Children who misbehave in a certain way are children who feel discouraged and criticized. They do not believe they can belong in useful ways. So they seek to belong through misbehavior.

Children's misbehavior may arise from a need for attention. Children prefer to gain attention in useful ways. But if they cannot get it in this manner, they seek it in certain 'not so useful' ways. Children demand attention. The answer to attention seeking children is to make them feel that they belong, that they are wanted; their contribution is highly appreciated and it counts a lot. Let them know that you appreciate them not only for their contribution, you also love and accept them for who they are. This will help them feel useful and not useless.

When children stop their misbehavior in response to our cajoling, remember even then they have gained attention. Later the children will seek to repeat this misbehavior in order to gain the same kind of attention. Coaxing is also a form of manipulation. Children are very smart, they come to know this very soon; even before the parents become aware, their children fully understand all this and then they start manipulating the parents too. When children are hurt because of other people or various circumstances beyond their control, they turn away from their inexplicable pains in the vain hope that if they pretend that whatever is happening is not really happening, their pain will go away. At these times they don't even realize they have received the desired attention through this.

While Children learn from their mistakes and grow, letting go can sometimes terrify a parent. Parental anxiety and fear can often be the main cause of their rebellion. When children decide to fight their own battles, they do not feel so threatened, they actually learn how to compromise and feel peaceful. In fact not just they but even the parents and the entire house will feel the peace. This is the point you need to keep in mind, for this really works.

*Raju often refused to do his homework because he wanted to play. One day the parents allowed him to do just this. They did*



*not force him and no harsh words or punishment was given like on other days. The next day when Raju was in class without his homework, his teacher asked him to stand in one corner of the class room and listen, Raju felt extremely humiliated and ashamed of himself when his friends began staring at him. He could sense their silent ridicule. That day when he came back home from school, he sat down to do his homework on his own. His mother was pleasantly surprised and said to herself that the strategy had worked.*

### **Do not be influenced by the children's manipulation...**

Some children are hardwired to push limits, but they are also pushing limits to find themselves. Rebellious children think that if they can draw you into negotiation, they can change your mind. For example if you have made it very clear that they do not eat any snacks before dinner and the children are asking you again and again for this, simply say, "Here is the rule, repeat after me, no snacks before or after dinner." If the children ask you again don't talk about snacks. Talk about an apple or a glass of milk. You do not engage in the part of equation that is not negotiable.

### **Do not lose your temper with your children...**

### **Our autocratic reaction is to have a list of wills, and wills not ...**

- ❖ "You will go to bed by nine O'clock."
- ❖ "You will study for two hours every morning."
- ❖ "You will not skip tuition."
- ❖ "You will not be rude to your little sister."

These remarks make the child even more rebellious, sometimes passive. I don't think either of these outcomes is what we really want. We don't want floppy lettuce and drooping flowers, but what we do want is for

children to know the limits of their decision-making power. Do a lot of relationship building and limit setting, not in the heat of battle but on sunnier days, when stubbornness and bristling are not the theme. Some hours before bed-time you can try saying, “I know it is really hard to go to bed at 8:30. I wonder if there is something we can do now, like playing with your elder sibling so you do not feel left out.”

**We create conduct in the manner we advice.**

“Don’t do it!” “I won’t tolerate it!” Such admonitions, with the repeated use of negative words will have exactly the opposite result of what is desired. The children will in fact be tempted to repeat their mischief, just to see how long the parents can tolerate it, and also enjoy the ‘thrill’ of driving their parents to the limits of their endurance.

**Teaching and guiding helps children understand and measure what is right and wrong.**

Children are able to follow the natural course of cause and effect. The important thing is to teach and set appropriate boundaries which they can understand and respect. The principle works the same with a chained dog. If you control a dog by keeping it chained constantly, when you remove the hold, he will naturally and surely run away and will keep running until he is lost. Controlled children are the same. Once given a moment of freedom they get into the worst kind of mischief you can imagine. Some children choose not to grow or do anything unless somebody tells them to do so. They depend on others to make all their decisions. This is immature dependence, not healthy at all.

**Keep in mind ...**

- ❖ Ignore misbehavior whenever possible. Checking children again and again will make them shameless and they will conveniently not take notice of what you are saying.

- ❖ Respond to positive behavior by giving attention to the children when they are not making a bid for it.
- ❖ Avoid undue services to the children; i.e., do not become servants to them. This will stop their freedom and they will not grow in a natural way.
- ❖ Never ever compare your children with others in any way

*A thirteen year old boy shared with me that his parents are kind, they love him but they are a little more kind and loving when it comes to his younger brother. When I asked him what could be the reason for this he said, "They compare me all the time either with my brother who is much smarter than me, or with my friends who are doing very well in their studies or with what had happened in their own childhood, for you see I am not that good."*

*I said, "Does this mean that your parents love your brother more than you?"*

*Then he said, "I am not sure. All I know is when I am there they tell my brother, "you are doing very well and you never slip or go down in your studies like your brother does." Sometimes they also tell him, "You are continuously studying for hours but your brother just studies for a few minutes and runs away to do something else." Now my brother thinks that he is the smarter one and when we fight he openly tells me that I am not as good as he is."*

### **Comparison really kills the confidence and motivation in children.**

*A mother was sharing with me how much damage comparison can create in a relationship, especially between parents and children.*

*She said, "Our neighbors have two young sons. One night when*

*I got up, say around three o'clock in the morning I saw that the lights were on in one bed room in our neighbor's house. It was still dark outside. To my surprise our neighbor's elder son who was in the twelfth standard, was walking in the verandah, studying hard for his final exams.*

*Immediately a comparative thought ran in my mind about my own daughter who was in the tenth standard at that time. My mother's mind began to think, "She is also writing her board exams just like him, but he is still studying at 3 am". When I peeped into my daughter's room hoping something similar would be happening there, I was furious to see how blissfully and comfortably she was sleeping...no cares, no worries and definitely no concerns about her board exams. In the morning in my loudest voice, (so that my daughter could also hear) I shared with my husband what I had witnessed the previous night. I also added, "What a boy! He knows his responsibility." There was no response from my husband, he was quiet. I was very happy I had conveyed my message loud and clear to everyone including my daughter. She was in her room, getting ready to go to school when she heard this. She came charging at me and this is what she said, "Mom, do you want me to also wake up in the morning and study just like him?"*

*Like a fool I embarked on an advice session and said, "It will be good if you can also do what he is doing."*

*Immediately my daughter said, "Look here mom, you don't have a son, so why don't you adopt him?" And she left for school. I was shocked at this remark.*

*It was a family tradition to offer thanks to God every evening at 7pm. This was also our family time to share the day's events just before dinner.*

*When it was my daughter's turn to talk about her day, she burst into tears. I will never forget that evening. She wept and when I heard her reasoning, I wept too.*

*She said, "How could you compare me with that boy? Did you care to realize that I have been studying until late night? I cannot study in the mornings and I study better during night time. I cannot be like him Mom. I was very badly hurt and in my anger I was so rude to you. I am sorry Mom."*

*By this time I was crying too. I said, "I am so very sorry for what happened today and I promise I will never again do this." We both hugged and kissed each other."*

## **What comparison can do to a 'Parent - Child' relationship...**

### **Be transparent with your children.**

Let them see that you also fail and are learning. Teach your children how you handle things. None of us does things right all the time. We are human beings. Children will accept your frankness and modesty rather than you not being true to them.

When Parents become aware of imperfections in themselves, they are often tempted to impose perfection on their children. We need to realize how threatening it is for children to cope when parents are blissfully unrealistic and unaware of their own faults. Children respect and admire you when you are frank and open about your own imperfections.

If you suspect that your children are experiencing some kind of difficulty and are not behaving as normal children, check if they are having an above average intelligence; they could even be hyperactive but have some problems expressing it and coping with it. Parents are so often unable to identify this. This does not mean that your children have a disability and

they cannot be Ok. The blunder many parents commit is that they label the children as if something is wrong with them and that they are not Ok. This again creates a bigger problem for the children at home as well as in school too. They just need to be treated and handled in a different way with more attention, love and understanding. Many of these children turn out to become great successes in life. Parents of such children can equip themselves with more awareness about these situations and also seek professional help. If you really study the lives of some of the world's greatest people, you will be surprised to know how many of them fall in the same category.

Dear Parents, the biggest room in the world is the room for improvement. Every child is born with a different kind of potential. We are all champions in our field and so are our children. This means, being effective is more important than being popular, because neither we as parents nor our children are participating in a popularity contest or for the Miss Congeniality award.

### *TURN OVER IN MIND*

*(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)*

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# Chapter

# 5

## *Self Esteem*

How healthy is it to have expectations for your children, to want them to excel in studies, to be a top ranker, to be the best in anything and everything?

Observation and awareness have proved that lifelong values come from expectations. When we have expectations for our children they understand and acknowledge the importance of values. To excel in life and to do their best is a value too.

There is no harm in having expectations for your children as long as your children also understand that the parents respect and understand their ability to perform in the areas they are good at.

Some parents want their children to come first in everything they attempt-studies, sports and other extracurricular activities. This is not

only very hard on children, but it also becomes impossible in the long run. Eventually children start losing interest and get fed up.

When children are not able to cope with the high expectations of parents, parents get angry. They compare their children with others and humiliate them. In this situation some children start thinking that something is wrong with them, may be they are not normal, while some children who do not accept this at all from their parents begin to rebel and so often do not do anything well even in the areas in which they are brilliant. You can push your children until they drop, and then push them even more, but bear in mind that the final product of this heavy-duty pushing and pulling will be a bunch of miserable adults who may become moderately successful in their careers, if they are lucky.

### **Our God is a just God...**

Not all children possess an identical or even a similar mental growth or capacity to improve their faculties. In fact every child is sure to possess some unique mental ability or other, is good at learning one discipline or other. Instead of rigidly insisting on the first rank and making the children slog at their studies all day and night, a more intelligent way would be to discover the children's natural talent and encourage them to improve themselves in that area. When you find children having difficulty in understanding certain subjects or lessons, extend your help only as much as necessary. It will serve no purpose telling children repeatedly day in and day out to read and study. They will sit at their study table with their books and eyes open and their minds closed. What then is the use?

### **Hope is accepted, expectation is rejected...**

If you read Goleman's 'Emotional Intelligence' you will discover that there is much more to success, to life and to happiness than getting straight A's in school or going to an Ivy League university.



*I know a father who wanted to encourage his son to excel in studies so that someday this star pupil child would appear on TV for his extraordinary accomplishments.*

*The father also mentioned this to him when a student from the son's school was recognized and interviewed on television for his brilliant achievements.*

*On that day the father also said, "When you appear on TV we will also get a chance to be seen on TV along with you."*

*After a few moments of silence the son said, "Dad, I think you have very high expectations for me."*

*The father very proudly said, "Yes of course, that's because you are so talented and capable."*

*The son said, "But Dad, it is a big problem for me when you have such high expectations."*

*The father said, "I don't think it is wrong to have expectation for children especially when they are capable of performing so well."*

*The son said, "It is ok for you because you do not have a problem and you do not have to perform."*

*The shocked father asked, "Tell me son, what are you trying to say?"*

*The son responded quickly, "You know Dad when I am not able to fulfill your expectations, you get angry. You shout at me, accuse me of wasting my time. Have you any idea how hurt and let down that makes me feel?"*

*The father then said, "Okay, what do you want me to do? Are you trying to say that I should not have expectations for you?"*

*The smart son said, "Dad do you think it is possible for you to have hope instead of expectation."*

*The father realized he did not know the difference between*

*'Hope' and 'Expectation', so he asked the son to explain it.*

*The son said, "Dad, it works like this. For instance when you have these high expectations and I do not achieve them, you get angry and mad at me. Then I get upset, hurt and feel disappointed with myself. However when you feel hopeful about me at that times when I do not fulfill your hope, even though you may feel disappointed, nothing damaging happens to me. You do not shout, I do not get hurt. And when I do not get hurt I begin to think for myself and work hard to see how best I can perform, even fulfill some of your hopes and dreams."*

So you can see how emotional interference leads to problems in scholastic performance. Compulsion produces resistance and then there is a block in children's reasoning. Compulsion from within is different from the one outside. Even today many teachers and parents believe that they can teach their children through compulsion. Children taught against resistance will learn very little, forget quickly and will rebel.

### **Parents, have you ever given a thought why low IQ children sometimes do better than the high IQ children?**

Intelligence Quotient is genetic and cannot be changed by life experiences. The reason for this is because emotional IQ plays a very important role in concentration and learning. When children know how to manage their emotions they learn better, they understand better and they grasp faster. Children who don't care about succeeding much at all are so often children who feel hurt, lonely, angry or neglected. A child's self esteem is the result of the attitude the parents have towards their children.

### **Provide opportunities for your children to master his world ...not yours!**

Schools burden children with studies. Homework and schoolwork become distasteful to the children. They have no opportunities to

develop independent habits themselves and this leaves them permanently disadvantaged. In order to help them develop a sense of mastery over whatever they do, which in turn will lead to increased initiative and direction, allow your children to do more on their own.

Research does not support parents being involved in homework. With elementary and high school kids, studies have found a small but significant link between parental involvement and achievement in school. Research has also shown that children in their early teens who take more help from parents were tied to lower results. This is probably because it is also a time when kids are trying to be independent. Even if parents are effective in helping children develop their skills, there is a psychological barrier.

### **Systematize, don't agonize**

**The child may be the father of the man, but the parents determine how the child fares in life.**

The best thing parents can do is to create rules for how, when and where home work should be done. Build a strong environment and then back off. Parents should never never never write anything for the children's home work. Schools too should not be sending any home work which the children cannot handle by themselves. Make it a learning experience for your children. Ask them questions and quiz them on their work. Give them tasks to complete on their own. Sit around so you can check on their progress. However let the children not know that you are sitting there to check on them. Take a book and read, bring out your laptop or IPod, do something which will not distract your children. We need to know what they are doing. A big part of parent's involvement is to know and make sure what assignment is given to their children. It is a good idea to check the backpack every day. For when they are little children they sometimes think that they are done with their homework even when they are not.... so never assume.

The amount of time your elementary school going children spend on homework, whether it is studying or spelling, practicing addition or writing isn't just about getting a good grade. It is about learning healthy study habits, building muscle and memory power that will help your children to sit, focus and think.

Helping with homework is honestly teaching your children to cheat. I have been guilty of it myself. This sends a very bad message that your kids are not capable of doing things on their own. This also makes life too easy for them and creating an unwanted feeling of dependency.

**As good parents and good individuals we are programmed to believe that more is better, but when it comes to helping your children with homework, less is better.**

Many children at the age of twelve or thirteen begin to lose interest in school and become less influenced by their parents' desire to score good marks. It is common wisdom that many teenagers become slaves to their hormones at this time. Studying comes in second when compared to the opposite sex, looks, body, films, dance and music. Developmental psychologists point out that it is actually the cognitive changes that may be more responsible for the lack of motivation in many teens. While these developmental stages influence children as they grow, not all children react in the same way. Many children develop good work habits with the help of their parents and teachers, and this enthusiasm continues through adolescence, their whole life too.

**What can we do to help our children to be aware of the value of constant effort?**

The fact that not all children and adolescents realize that even their greatest efforts will not guarantee success suggests that you can do much to maintain your children's positive attitude about the value of learning.

This effort for the value of learning should begin as early as possible. Children need to be engaged not just in activities that seem easy and fun, but also in challenging ones that can tickle their minds and energy.

The difference between the champions and the ordinary people is that the champions become aware of their potential; they use it to the fullest and achieve greatness.

Get ready to welcome your young winners! Do not forget you are a winner too!!

### *TURN OVER IN MIND*

*(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)*

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# Chapter

## 6

### *Imperatives of Punishment*

Can corporal punishment be used to discipline children?

Corrections and discipline are the way of life.

“Foolishness is bound in the hearts of children; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from them.” Proverbs 22:15.

Children are the parent’s most valuable persons. Parents can teach these valuable persons in most effective ways, showing them what is right and what is wrong.

*“The price of discipline is always less than the pain of regret.  
Self discipline is the biggest investment for success”*

**Why do we punish children?**

The idea of punishing children is to help them think and realize the wrong

they are doing so that they can internalize what is right and wrong. No discipline seems pleasant at that time, but later however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

I personally feel and think that punishment is necessary. It should be purposeful, directed not at the children but at correcting a specific behavior. Most child-rearing experts approve that sometimes spanking is appropriate. In professional groups the question of spanking as a punishment with children is often debated. Our experience with raising children is that there are effective and ineffective ways of using corporal punishments.

Spanking needs to be considered only as an option, as a last resort for children who do not respond to any other kind of discipline. It is done after a loud and clear warning.

### **As children grow, do they need to be disciplined?**

Yes of course, by all means go ahead. Discipline your children. Help them become socially acceptable and self disciplined in a way that will not reduce their self-esteem, but which will help them become aware of what is right and what is wrong, which will make them a success in life.

Again discipline does not mean punishment. Discipline is a careful form of control. It means helping your children learn how to control their own behavior, their feelings, thoughts and actions. This can be difficult when confronted with children who do not behave well. When children lie, steal, disobey or mistreat others, they should be promptly spoken to and then punished. Parents should remember not to assume that this is the end of the problem or that children will not repeat it again. We need to be aware of what is happening with the children now, rather than having the assumption that they will be automatically OK after having been corrected or checked. Keep a silent watch. However remember



the cardinal principle which will continue to be, *the child must never be defined as 'not alright' or made to feel guilty.*

Punishment is effective. When children are experiencing pain, they are unable to ignore or block their minds against the impact of what is being said to them. Therefore a simple direct demand such as, “You are not to steal” can be forcibly and permanently imprinted or incorporated in their minds by the parent against their will while they are experiencing the pain of spanking.

**The growth of a child takes place through encouragement, giving autonomy and also through correction or corporal punishment.**

Children will make mistakes, big and small. That goes with the territory. A parent’s role is to be there by their side. Help them pick up the pieces and remind them that God does give another chance, and failure is not always fatal. In fact failure is a step for success. How much children and we as parents learn from our mistakes!

Parents who insult their children by calling them names, making negative predictions about their future can be sure that their children will internalize these messages in their minds. I know many children who while being spanked were given such messages like, “Why can’t you be like other children?”, “Shame on you”, “I can’t stand a liar” and so on... Unfortunately all these messages are incorporated in the children’s minds as definitions of themselves. Even more damaging is a message predicting the future like, “Do you want to grow up to be a thief and go to jail?” Is it really possible for our children to be like other children? In the process he will start believing that if he cannot be like other children his parents will never love him. This thought can play on his health; he will not be able to perform well.

As you can see, I do not say that parents should never spank or punish

their children. But such punishment will be useful only when there is a sufficient and sound reason for this, that too with a total awareness of certain facts in mind.

**Spank children only after the first five years and only until the child is ten.**

After the age of ten, the child's reasoning is much better for him to understand what is right and what is not right with the help of his parents. Spanking the child at this stage affects his dignity, his self-esteem will be damaged. Corporal punishment and the following reactions can take destructive and adverse forms instead of the intended correction and reformation.

**No spanking until the child is five years old.**

Before five, the children are very tender, soft and delicate. Even though parents beat children with their hands, their hands are very big, heavy, strong and they may hit the child with their full force. The child will get physically hurt and some very serious damage can take place. The damage can be permanent and irreparable.

Also remember that before the age of five the children's complete personality is governed by feelings and their reasoning is not developed. So they will not understand why you are being harsh on them. They may take a decision that their parents do not love, like or accept them unconditionally. Decisions made at that time are made at the feeling level, they are unreasonable and unrealistic.

It is important to keep in mind which part of the body you spank and also how often. Do not spank children on the delicate parts of their bodies such as the head, face, chest, and be careful with his eyes, nose and ears. The back, the bottom and the legs (calf) are the safer places to spank a child.

**Spanking is effective when based on what is being said to the children.**

Understanding parents could point out, “What you have done is wrong, you deserve a punishment for this. You know how much we love you. Yet you have forced us to punish you this way.” The parents’ approach to punishment should genuinely reflect their sorrow at having to punish the child. Though the children are good, the children’s deeds are not good and this is not accepted by the parents.

*When Mr. Satish came to know that his ten year old daughter Neetu had stolen a candy bar from a store, he made her return to the store and apologize to the shopkeeper. Having accepted the apology the shopkeeper wanted to give a candy bar to Neetu. Her father would not let her take it. “She cannot have it,” the father told the shopkeeper, “For it is not her candy.” The father then took her home and gave her a beating.*

*Ten years later, Neetu recalled, “I will never forget the feeling I had standing behind the shop desk after being exposed as a thief. It left such a lasting impression on my mind. That was my father’s way of showing me the kind of a person he did not want me to become. After that, stealing was never an option for me.”*

*Let me share a secret with you about punishing my daughters. Before I raised my hand I would say, “Mummy never calls anybody from the road and beats, but if I am going to beat you today, it is because Mummy cannot leave you like this. I care for you and you are very precious to me.” Then I would give a strong one. To them the message was loud and clear that they were important to me. As a mother, I loved and cared for them but I did not like and will not accept what they did.*

**Your child is not your punching bag.**

Spanking children for you to feel better when you are angry with

somebody else is not punishment. Even when physically punishing children, we should not use punishment as an outlet for our frustrations and anger.

The important point is that if you use spanking as a punishment, it should only be done when you yourself are calm and under control. The mistake many parents make is that they see spanking as a form of retaliation against the children for their misdeed, or as a way in which they can express or ease their anger.

As Aristotle says:

*“Anyone can become angry. That is easy,  
But to be angry with the right person,  
To the right degree, at the right time,  
For the right reason, and in the right way,  
That is not easy.”*

*In a family, a wife asked her husband what he thought of the new dress she was wearing. The husband did not respond immediately because he was absorbed in the newspaper. When his wife asked him again he said, “Just don’t disturb me, this news is very important for my office.” The wife was very angry at his remark and stormed out of the room. A little later when her daughter asked her something about breakfast and Tiffin box, she yelled at her, saying the girl was extremely irresponsible and it was high time she took care of her own needs. For the child, the rest of the day was very difficult. All she could think of was why her mother had yelled at her, it felt so unfair. She could not concentrate in class. She forgot to take down the home work and returned home sulking. In the evening she didn’t feel like eating the snacks her mother had prepared, she had no clue about the home work she had to submit the next morning. She*

*promptly got herself another yelling from her mother ...and so the cycle continued.*

**Children accept punishment and criticism when you also appreciate them.**

It is suggested that a little more appreciation than criticism can go a long way, because criticism makes children lifeless and weak, while appreciation energizes and motivates them to understand the real reason for the parents to punish. If children can reason that the parents are punishing them because they care for them, the purpose of punishment is achieved.

**In a group discussion when corporal punishment was discussed:**

*A senior manager in a therapy group shared , “I cannot think of any time in my life when my father appreciated me, for he only scolded me, he kept beating me and gave me a lot of punishment. This is why I do not want to have a good relationship with my father today.”*

*Another person said, “My father also gave me a lot of scolding, beatings and punishments but I hold no anger or resentment in my heart to not want a good relationship with him. In fact, I have a very good relationship with my father despite all this.”*

*When we explored further, the reason we found was that his father had also appreciated him, while in the earlier case the child was not appreciated at all.*

**A serious mistake is to spank a child and exhibit no serious expectations.**

Spanking will be effective in correcting the child’s behavior if the parent does it with the right attitude. Spanking is appropriate when it is done

briefly and thoroughly without a great deal of discussion or fuss. It should be painful enough for the child to promise not to repeat the particular behavior which earned him the spanking in the first place.

**If you have the right to punish a child, they have the right to punish the parents too.**

Let us also remember that children do not accept that adults have the sole authority to punish them. Children reason and feel that, "If you have the right to punish me, I too have the right to punish you in return." So they adopt indirect means of punishing the parents.

*A girl who had failed in her exams three times in a row was sent to me for counseling by her school principal. She told me that all through the fourteen years of her life her parents had only been punishing and criticizing her. Every little thing that went wrong was magnified and blown out of proportion. Today she was repeatedly failing in her exams as a way of punishing them back!*

**I am reminded of what had happened to a Bank officer who once shared:**

*"When I was a teenager, my father would hit me with a belt in front of my friends. One day I returned home late after winning a foot ball match. My father was very rude and he gave me a strong beating with his belt. I could not do anything at that time because I needed my father's help for everything, I was really very helpless. "Today my father is old and needs me but I do not need him. I do not help him or visit him even though we live in the same city. When I needed his help he hit me with belts, today when he needs me most I give him nothing because I cannot hit him with a belt."*

**Spanking is fruitful only when it is given for the act and not to the doer.**

When children do something wrong it is extremely important to keep in mind that what they have done is not ok, but they are ok. This helps them understand and accept why parents are punishing them.

**Children do accept the rights of the parents to punish them with some consideration keeping in mind the time and place.**

Remember that control is good, so is giving up control at times. For example, you may have planned to get the dusting done this very afternoon. However if you have people dropping in around that time, it can be fun to be with them enjoying lunch, joking, laughing and talking. The dusting can always wait until tomorrow. Let others enjoy seeing you as a real, fun loving, comfortable, open minded human being. Similarly our corrections with children too can sometimes wait. They can be put on pause mode for the time being...try not to ruin the joy of the present moment by unleashing your disciplinary force just then. Postpone this task like the dusting for later. Let your children also see how much you enjoy having fun too.

In the last twenty years there has been a steady movement towards avoiding punishment no matter how small or big the misbehavior or deed. As one writer said, “We are living in a time when the “Child-Centered ethics has become a justification for every sort of overindulgent child rearing practice.” In short, what I would like to bring to the parents awareness is, *too much understanding and sympathy towards children is as harmful as too little.*

**So if there is a situation where you need to consider how you are going to correct or punish your children, see if you can use these hints as you practice them from today:**

**Do not exaggerate or blame.**

If we do this, it will produce guilt and shame beyond what is necessary and will not create the awareness to change. Let us keep a balance. Lack of accountability to the misdeed will erode responsibility, and even then the children will not change.

**Develop an optimistic clarifying style.**

Explain the problems in realistic terms where the cause is seen specific and changeable.

Never forget to remind them again and again that ‘You will always love them and be there for them ... no matter what.’

*TURN OVER IN MIND**(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)*

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# Chapter

# 7

## *Complement Compliments*

Can we praise and compliment Children? Will this create pride and arrogance in them or will this enhance their self confidence and growth?

Praise our children! Why ever not? Surely, definitely, most certainly! We must praise children to let them know their worth, importance and significance.

In fact I highly recommend complimenting children when compliments are called for. Teach children to feel good about themselves so that they can feel good about others too, especially their parents. Every human being loves to feel cherished, special, and important. He enjoys and wants to be nurtured. Only then will a person feel stimulated to make progress and give his best. Of course we need to praise children when they do well. It isn't appropriate to pump them with empty praise for a job poorly done.

Essentially, encouragement means not only skillfully overlooking children's shortcomings; it is also about highlighting and recognizing their assets and strengths. Our job as parents is to help children discover their many gifts and talents, to do well not just in life but to also enjoy the expedition of life.

So often it takes a great deal of depth to be able to appreciate the little things in life. It is important to ensure that children do not become so self-absorbed to find a few moments for themselves and others.

For children to believe in themselves, we need to first believe in them. In order to feel adequate, children need frequent encouragement. A good parent-child relationship depends on whether children feel that their parents trust and believe in them.

Just as air, water, food, shelter, and clothes are basic needs for survival, it is also everyone's need to be accepted, wanted, loved, and recognized. These are equally important as the other physical needs for the total complete development of children. Just as anybody will die when deprived of these basic physical needs, in the same way anyone can face a psychological death in the absence of sweet compliments and recognition.

However, remember dear parents, children are more precious and important than the compliments. Just complimenting our children for the sake of complementing is again bound to create some misunderstanding between parents and children. Children are very shrewd and they can read between the lines. They know the exact difference between reality, pleasing and manipulation.

*In a family, without the parent's awareness, something was happening like a ritual. Every time the parents noticed that*

*one of their children performed well, behaved nicely, helped anyone or did something good, they would appreciate the child. Immediately after this, they would go on a guilt trip for not saying similar good things about the other children. So they made it a point to say something good about the other two children as well. Soon this became a practice.*

*One day, all of a sudden their daughter, who was in her late teens asked the parents, “Is it ok to say a good thing about a particular person who has done something good and to say nothing to the others?”*

*The parents were a bit surprised about this comment and asked the daughter, “Why do you ask this?” The daughter immediately said, “Well every time you praise or compliment one of us because we did something good, you also begin to praise the other siblings, even though you have clearly shown your appreciation for them earlier.”*

*The parents were amazed to hear this from their daughter and began to wonder at the wisdom of this young adult. It dawned on them that this was what they had been doing all along, simply because they believed the other two children will be hurt if they were not mentioned or appreciated.*

In the above incident, the parents were not being congruent, clear or open. Their children had come to notice this. Sometimes the awareness is very painful and hurtful, but successful parents take the pain. They accept their mistakes and change for the sake of their children’s positive development.

For parents to be successful in achieving goals for their children to be happy, healthy and safe, their ability to motivate their children plays a vital role. Children need continuous acceptance; they need to be recognized

from time to time. This makes them feel encouraged, important, worthwhile, wanted and appreciated. A reward offered as an incentive may be beneficial; but remember that children are more important than the reward. And this fact should be impressed upon the child's mind by the parents. A parent's role does not end with the promise of a new bicycle. The promise should be followed by actions like explaining the techniques of bicycle riding, extending to him whatever help he needs in riding the bicycle, and actually assisting him in 'earning' the reward. Children will not respond to the parents' rewards unless the recognition feels worthy of the effort that is demanded of them; parents need to remember this.

So a pat on the back will go a long way in improving children's performance in any area. It will help in building and developing the confidence and overall personality of the children. The danger lies not in complimenting your children but in comparing them with other children and saying, "You have done much better than that child"

In studies as in other areas, parental expectations should conform to the children's capacity and aptitudes. Children should be encouraged and appreciated liberally. Appreciating the children is an intelligent way to guide and develop them. This encourages them to spontaneously do something which is beneficial. **Creating a compulsion within children to learn is creating the awareness in them on their decision making abilities.**

Compliments need to be based on the age, maturity and sex of the children. What motivates a four year old will not motivate a sixteen year old. Some children are motivated by material objects while others are motivated by words of praise. Some thrive on looking good and dressing up while some others seek to develop their capabilities and talents.

In many schools and families extremely high standards are set, the children are so anxious for success. But when they do achieve success

whether at home or at school, achievements are rarely rewarded or even acknowledged. And this causes anxiety and an inhibiting effect on learning.

We must learn to look at the glass and describe it as half full and not as half empty. There is a tendency amongst all of us to not praise our own children in their presence, because we fear that the children may become proud or arrogant. So we tend more often to criticize and advise, rather than compliment. Not praising children when they deserve praise is very harmful, damaging and destructive.

*Rani, daughter of Mr. Koshi, was a very intelligent student. The day she heard that she had won the state rank in the 10th standard board exams, she rushed home to tell her father the good news.*

*Rani said, "Daddy, daddy can you believe it, I actually got a state rank!" Her father, who was watching the business news on TV responded, "I know all about it, now get me a glass of water."*

*Rani's excitement and happiness immediately vanished into thin air, giving place to shock and disbelief.*

*Angrily she told herself that day, "Never will I strive to get a state rank again. Can't my father offer a single word of appreciation? Doesn't he understand how much I gave up to get this rank, how many nights I stayed awake, how many movies and parties I missed in order to study while all my friends were having a great time. Why do I have to sacrifice all the fun in life? All for a state rank which no one appreciates?"*

*Slowly Rani began to lose interest in her studies and she even began failing in her subjects. This was the time she was brought to meet me.*

*While discussing the situation with Rani, she admitted, "I am not saying my father is not proud of me. He will sit in the first row to hear my name announced on the school annual day. I know he praises me to my teachers, to my friends and his friends too. But why can't he say all these word of appreciation to me?"*

*When I asked the father this question, he said: "If I praise her to her face, I believe she will become proud and no longer work hard to get a state rank again."*

*I told him that Rani had already decided she would never again work for a state rank since she was not appreciated. He was shocked,*

*He said: "I will do my best to help her." In spite of the help he offered, Rani did not get a state rank in the 12th grade; she just about managed to get through.*

Thus you can see how brilliant children turn mediocre, for want of right encouragement. Even if children are not extraordinarily talented, we should encourage them and boost their self-confidence by complimenting them on whatever skills and talents they are blessed with. As far as possible, we should also discourage other members of the family and friends from criticizing our children.

*I remember how a child who could draw, was encouraged by his family to draw and scribble even on the walls and tables! To the amazement of the other family members and the visitors to their home, the child's parents would interpret every line and add meaning to every little scribble of his. That child grew up believing he had artistic talents and today he is a well-known artist.*

Now, I am not recommending an explosion of colors and crayon decorations on your walls and upholstery by your budding artists! What I

am trying to put across is how faith can create the confidence in children.

To ask a toddler to help you is to tell him that he is capable of performing. We are often two years behind in our estimation of what the children are capable of doing.

**As parents we can give some positive messages to children like:**

- ❖ You are capable of taking care of your own things.
- ❖ You did it so well.
- ❖ I am proud of you, the way you managed the situation.
- ❖ How wonderful you remembered it, there was no need for me to remind you at all.
- ❖ I am confident that you will be a great success in life.

Be certain there will be oversights and lapses, but give messages with confidence in your children's ability, knowing that these messages will be firmly implanted in their mind along with your reinforcing praise for the rest of their lives.

The very word 'you can do it' is charged with a magical power of its own.

Create the belief, sustain the faith. We can do it.

(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)

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# Chapter 8

## *Turbulent Teens*

All children change when they enter their teens. This sudden transformation is usually a shock to parents. How should parents ‘Accept’ ‘Manage’, ‘Support’ and ‘Cope’ with these changes in teenagers?

A Teenager’s task of growing up is tremendous. Too much is happening at the same time and time is less.

It is said, “Toddlers step on your toes and teens step on your hearts.”

Coping with teenagers in the 21st century is a hard demanding task. The rapidly deteriorating morals and slipping values can be a stressful

journey particularly when children become teenagers. Parents think that they correct their teenagers because they care for them but the modern teenagers have their own version. They think that their parents need yet another excuse to criticize or they have nothing better to do with their time.

Children experience restlessness and discontent when they reach their teens because of certain changes in their personalities like psychological urges, social commitments, painful self-consciousness and biological changes. As parents we are not able to understand this because by the time we become parents we forget that the same happened to us when we entered our teens.

**Here is the data as given by many parents and teachers in a research.**

**Today's teenagers are ...**

- ❖ More troubled emotionally.
- ❖ More lonely and depressed.
- ❖ More angry and unruly.
- ❖ More nervous and prone to worry.
- ❖ More impulsive and aggressive.

**If there is a remedy, I feel it lies in how we prepare ourselves to accept teenagers unconditionally and prepare them to face life.**

Teenagers do not see beyond today. If life seems awful and unbearable today, they are sure it will never ever get better. The transition from childhood to teens is a turbulent bumpy ride, scary at times. But do not give up on being a parent before the job is done. Stand firm on the things you know to be right and true. Teenagers will not accept it, but they need to know that while everything in their life is changing, when it comes to the question of values, you as parents are not changing, and your values

of right and wrong are also not changing. Talk to them and make them understand that you will listen to them, to everything they wish to say. But they too will have to listen to your values even if they do not accept them now.

Children have all the questions when they are eight years old and they have all the answers by the time they hit the teens!

This is the time they think and also decide that they know everything; and of course their parents know nothing. Do not be shocked. It is a part of the growing process. It is also very natural.

*Mark Twain once said, “When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty one, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in these seven years.”*

### **A young mother recently shared with her parents:**

*“By the time I realized that my parents were right, my daughter is here to tell me that I am wrong.”*

And somewhere if the teenagers sense disapproval, they never hesitate to keep secrets from their parents. Actually they experience a sense of power by withholding information, which again sows seeds for further differences. How do we give them the confidence to confide in us directly? Believe me, if they catch even a speck of insincerity, they would not see their parents as trustworthy guides. Genuineness is highly important, so we must first live the values we believe in.

### **For Parents:**

- ❖ It is not easy to watch growing children, who turn from pleasant children into ‘unruly’ ones... from precious jewels to a 24/7 riot act.

- ❖ It is worrying to see teenagers lie in bed, sometimes acting deaf, staring into space.
- ❖ It is bewildering to watch their shifting moods and to listen to their endless complaints.
- ❖ Suddenly, nothing suits the teenagers' tastes. The house is uncomfortable, the car is junky, food at home is awful and the parents are old-fashioned.
- ❖ Teenagers want to go well before time to their school or college and return home well after school or college hours and no one dare question them about it.

Parents need to be aware and accept this phase of restlessness and discontent during this tempestuous season.

There exists an inbuilt radar system within teenagers which detects what is happening around and registers all of this in their minds. No parent should ever ignore or forget this important fact.

- ❖ If parents value neatness, the teenagers choose to be sloppy.
- ❖ If parents insist on good manners, they love to interrupt conversations.
- ❖ If parents respect language, teenagers decide to use slang even foul language especially in front of the parents.
- ❖ If parents treasure literature, teenagers prefer to fill the house with comics.
- ❖ If parents like peace, teenagers will fight, argue and rock the house with earth shattering noisy music.

It is especially hard to tolerate the appearance and reappearance of annoying mannerisms such as nail biting, nose picking, skin chewing or feet tapping, etc.

Life becomes a series of frustration for both parents and teenagers.

Parents sometimes face difficult delicate dilemmas, especially as they survive the teen years of their children.

### **Sometimes Parents Feel Frustrated and wonder:**

- ❖ How am I to help -----when help is resented?
- ❖ How am I to guide -----when guidance is rejected?
- ❖ How am I to communicate ----- when attention is taken as attack?
- ❖ How am I to understand -----when children withdraw?

### **It is then the relationship with children becomes a heart breaking.**

Confused parents first try to check such behavior in a kindly fashion. When reasoning and gentle persuasion fall on deaf ears, parents get tough, become angry, rebuke and ridicule their teenagers. This causes frustration on both sides.

There is a need for parents to become aware of their own irritations, frustrations and to make special efforts not to express them. This will be a shock to children when they realize that they have not succeeded in irritating their parents.

*A teenage girl used to talk to her friend on the phone everyday for hours at a stretch. Everyday her mother would reprimand her and interrupt her daughter's calls with comments like, "That's enough, stop it now".*

*One day when the girl made her usual call, the mother did not say anything. The call went on for even longer than usual and yet the mother kept quiet! After her conversation was finally over, the daughter asked, "Mummy, how come you didn't get angry this time when I was on the phone?"*

*The mother's unemotional and detached response was, "What's the use of getting angry? It would have been a sheer waste of*

*my energy and time!”*

*This set the daughter thinking. After this, even though she did continue with her phone calls, the duration of her talk time had drastically reduced!*

Similarly, instead of scolding teenagers for watching TV for too long, parents can ask them gently, “Will you be watching TV for some more time? I hope there is enough time to complete the homework for tomorrow?” Then it will be a matter of the teenagers creating and keeping time to complete their work and study. If the teenagers fail to keep their word and do not finish their homework, remind them. Even after this if they do not complete their home work, it is now their problem how they are going to face their teachers the next day. Don’t worry, at school they will learn. Some children are fast learners, some take their own time, some learn with pain, some learn easily, while some learn with difficulty. But one thing is sure, with our understanding and support most children learn well.

**“Be disabused of the concept that there’s a magical time for learning and if missed out, it’s lost.”**

Parents expect their teenagers to help them especially with housework, without being asked. If help is not forthcoming, they blame the teens for being selfish. If they are not helping you without your asking for help, that does not mean that they are selfish. More often, it is important to keep in mind that the parent and teenagers have different needs and priorities.

*A busy working woman was struggling to get through one of those days when there was no help in the house and she had to cope with it all after a hard day’s work at the office. Rushing home to get the dinner cooked in time, she became more and more exasperated by the fact that her teenaged daughter had made no move to help her at all. Finally, the mother yelled,*

*“Doesn’t it occur to you to help me? Haven’t you noticed how exhausted I am today? Your father will be home soon and you know eating late doesn’t agree with him. Have you no consideration for anyone in this house?”*

*The girl looked surprised and waited for her mother to stop shouting. When the mother finally stopped, she quietly said, “of course I’ll help you Ma, if you need my help. Why didn’t you ask me earlier? It is your need to see that father eats on time. Doing housework and cooking is not my need now, maybe it will be later! Also, please don’t shout, I’ll be glad to help you out anytime.”*

*Then the mother asked the daughter, “by the way, what is your need now?”*

*The daughter promptly said, “You know ma, to read this best seller, talk to my friends and watch TV.”*

*There was sulking for some time. The mother decided to follow her daughter’s instructions to ask for help. She ignored her daughter’s sulking, gave her instructions and together they cooked dinner...and much later they all sat down to watch their favorite program on TV together.*

If children’s priorities and needs are different from those of ours, that does not make them selfish or inconsiderate. Talk to them and help them understand our needs, remembering that as parents we need to understand their needs too.

Make sure your teenagers understand that their strong moods swings and feelings are normal, a natural result of everything happening inside their bodies and because of some physical changes and desires which are designed by the Almighty.

*A child's father who is a good friend of mine shared with me that he had come home from work one day and had just reminded his daughter to remove her school bag from the living room as some guests were expected to drop in later that evening. The next thing the poor father knew, his daughter had promptly burst into tears yelling, "Everybody in this house is only after me," She ran into her room and threw herself on her bed, sobbing her heart out.*

*He asked me, "What did I do wrong?" I said, "It's not you, it's the 'Hormones.' He said, "Is that right?" And I said, "Right." He was relaxed and said, "Just wanted to check with you."*

Teenagers do not want instant understanding when troubled by their conflicts and moods. They feel unique. Their emotions seem new, personal and private to them.

### **It is not helpful to ask a teen:**

- ❖ "What is the matter with you?"
- ❖ "Why can't you sit still?"
- ❖ "What has happened to you suddenly?"
- ❖ "What is bothering you?"

These are unanswerable questions and even if teenagers understand what the matter is, they will not be able to say, "Look, mum, I am torn by my conflicting emotions. I am engulfed by irrational urges and unfamiliar desires."

### **Okay, so let us understand that sometimes:**

- ❖ Teenagers do not mean to bump----but they do it anyway.
- ❖ Teenagers do not want to drop things----but it happens any way.



- ❖ Teenagers do not want to sulk----but their moods create havoc any way.
- ❖ Teenagers do not want to be rude----but their words pierce your heart any way.

The search for a personal identity is a teenagers' life mission. When they look in the mirror they often ask themselves, "Who am I?" Perhaps the answer they get is that they are still not sure what they want to become? They are pretty sure about what they do not want to become, they are afraid of being a 'nobody' or an imitation of somebody; and to become 'a chip of the old block' is their worst nightmare. They become disobedient not so much to defy their parents but in order to experience their identity and autonomy.

Every child has some imperfections about which he is excessively sensitive. Unfortunately the world usually takes note of these imperfections to tease and ridicule the children. These issues hurt them deeply; sometimes the hurt can go a long way. When it comes from a parent, the damage becomes permanent. For parents it is best not to give importance to the weaknesses and instead focus more on the positive points.

Experimenting with their looks is a part of the identity struggle of the teen years. Teenagers need parent's guidance and support in their decisions so that they do not harm their health or carry a permanent scar.

*An incident comes in my mind of a thirteen year old girl. God had blessed her with enough beauty and brains. But when one is thirteen is anything enough? So obsessed was she in this quest for perfection, she spared no effort in learning and memorizing every beauty tip from every fashion magazine. One day she came across a new tip for flawless skin in a popular magazine. The remedy involved applying a mixture of homemade juice of some vegetables.*

*The girl decided to reach for the Promised Land by going through this routine without consulting her mother, totally forgetting they were leaving town next morning.*

*The young lady couldn't wait for the new dawn and she rushed to the bathroom to examine her overnight 'peaches and cream' complexion. When she saw herself in the mirror next morning, she couldn't believe she was the same person who had gone to bed the night before. Huge bumps, even larger boils, puss and blood, the words of her Geography lesson kept coming to her mind ... volcanoes, molten lava, explosions ...*

*Well it took a year of intense medical help to heal her burnt skin. But it took much longer to recover and rebuild her lost confidence.*

*She is now twenty four years old, she continues to be beautiful and her skin continues to act difficult.*

The mass media- TV, radio and magazines magnify pimples, bad breath, dandruff, height, weight, posture and offer very friendly advice. One is lucky if the teenagers can escape without feeling dejected or defective.

**Parents need to become aware and accept the following points to facilitate the growth of their teenage children.**

- ❖ Teenagers resent unsolicited help and recommendation.
- ❖ Teenagers struggle to be grown up, independent and self-contained.
- ❖ The teenagers' need is to feel capable of finding their way in life, without parental influence.
- ❖ Concern is usually perceived as interference and babying, advice as bossing them around.

**Says Anita, aged eighteen:**

*"God how I wish my mother would stop talking about my*

*happiness all the time. It is she who makes my life miserable and sad. Her worrying drives me crazy. She not only wants to live my life for me, she would even breathe for me if she could. She believes I am so delicate that I will melt in the rain if she isn't around to hold an umbrella over me. Why doesn't she leave me alone to live my own life?"*

**Says Gopal, aged sixteen:**

*"I am so sick and tired of my father's advice. He is always talking about my future. Sometimes I feel sorry for him. He is so worried and concerned about my future he doesn't realize that he is actually ruining my present! I have no confidence in myself, I feel like a failure."*

Teenagers are hungry for experience while parents try to feed them with explanations. Finally they are left feeling undernourished. Their parents' silent love is their main support. Protected in his parent's affection, support and respect, each teenager must risk on his journey alone. Concerned parents serve their teens best when they stand by their side with assurance and wait.

**A friend's daughter once said after the death of her mother:**

*"My mother was like a harbor, a port... she didn't command or dictate to me about anything. When the wind blew strongly and my ship was tossed around in the deep waters, I knew I could always drop anchor in the safe harbor of her heart. When the need arose, like a safe harbor to a ship lost in rough seas, she was always there for me with outstretched arms to take me in...and I took refuge in her arms whenever I needed her most. After that, I could come out of the 'harbor' and pursue my own journey of life, independently...knowing the harbor called mother would always be there for me. How I miss her ..."*

**Children do need their parents' help even if they do not acknowledge it. The help needs to be extended in a subtle and sophisticated way.**

**The important thing is to balance our concern with their feelings.**

Teenage is a time of quick changes in both the physical (biological) and mental characteristics of children. At this stage they would prefer to be left alone. Simultaneously, they will ardently desire to enjoy this stage of their life to the fullest, through a variety of experiences. This is also the time when fantasy blossoms in their hearts, and imagination rules reality.

*As one teenage boy told his mother, "Mama, please talk to me nicely, because I am going through a very difficult time."*

*He said this when his mother was fussing about the way he was eating, sitting and sleeping. Even little things like ruffling or smoothing his hair, pulling his shirt collar out would trigger another world war.*

Parents should recognize and respect the teenagers' desire for solitude and privacy. Yet, they should also be careful to maintain 'surveillance' over the teenagers and shoulder their 'guardianship' responsibilities. With empathy and love we should play the role of understanding friends and join them in their world of dreams and fantasies. It is important to never ever ridicule or make fun of their ideas and hopes.

In fact parents should explicitly convey to the young adult-child that they too were once young, they too had dreams and desires, fantasies and hopes.

*I still remember this incident, I was a school counselor, when a few XII standard students came up to me and asked a question.*

*“When our parents and teachers were teenagers who were the ones broke the glasses, who failed in exams and who fell in love?”*

*I was astonished and was not prepared for this question! I thought for a few moments and then said, “I do not know about your parents and teachers, but when I was a teenager I did all of this.” They immediately relaxed, became very happy and spent a lot of time with me, comfortably enquiring and talking about teenage realities.*

Parents should let the teens know that as parents they are ready and willing to render help any time they seek assistance. Only then will teenaged children grow up healthy, without irrational fears and anxieties.

*Ramesh was an eighth grade student. Very impulsive, playful and careless in his studies, he was once punished in class because he hid a report card of another student just to tease him. When the teacher came to know about Ramesh’s mischief, he was given punishment for a week. He had to stay back after school for two hours helping out at the library. In the evening when his mother came to take him home, he was very sad. He sat quietly in the car with his head down.*

*When the mother enquired about his strange behavior he said, “I have been very naughty in class today and have been punished for a whole week.” The mother asked, “What did you do?” Ramesh responded, “I hid Ratan’s report card for fun and the teacher came to know about it.”*

*After a little while, the mother asked Ramesh to go to the teacher and apologize to her, to make a promise that he will not do this again. The mother’s suggestion gave a lot of relief to Ramesh and he said, “Can I do this tomorrow?”*

*The mother turned the car back to school and told Ramesh that he would do this right now today and not tomorrow.*

*Ramesh went to the teacher. He cried, apologized and promised that he will never repeat this again.*

*The teacher forgave him and sent him back. When Ramesh came to the car he gave a broad smile to his mother and his mother understood. The gates of happiness had opened again. He stuck to his mother's side all evening, even when the mother went shopping; he held on to his mother's hand and helped her carry the groceries to the car.*

*His mother told him, "You can always come to me whenever you are in trouble. I am your mother and I will always help you and love you no matter what!"*

*Ramesh said, "I know mom, I also love you"*

*After this incident there were many sweet changes in Ramesh's life.*

Be well prepared to counter your teenagers' arguments with one from your side. And when all else fails, tell them that's the way it is, regardless of what the others are doing.

*In a family, a young girl in the eighth grade wanted to go for a sleepover at her friend's house to which her parents objected.*

*She said, "Everybody in my class is doing this except me".*

*The father then said, "Name two people who are doing this."*

*In the beginning she could not name anyone. But after a while she kept giving the same name twice, every time her father asked her. After some time the father asked the girl, "Now give me two names of the girls who are not doing this." She was able to give more than two names without much difficulty. She got the point.*

**What your teens beg for at sixteen, they may regret by seventeen and maybe even for the rest of their lives.**

**Teenagers do not like to be told what they can do or cannot do and parents are often forced to surrender to their teens' demands for freedom.**

Teenagers want space and the freedom to live their lives on their own terms. The idea of having fun has actually evolved over the recent decades. Going for slumber parties, chatting on the internet, and late night parties beyond midnight are the freedom requests the teens demand.

Films and television bring a whole new world into our living rooms and children are often on their own to surf the channels and see for themselves whatever they want to see and what we don't want them to see.

In most of the colleges, students not only smoke, drink, some even think that to upgrade their lifestyle and social status it is a must to take drugs and have pre-marital sex.

Peer pressure is very strong and teens are forced to live up to a lot of expectations from their friends as well as their families. Very few children are in a position to stand firm in their principles and values.

**Recently one college student shared with me:**

*She said, "I know many of my friends drink and smoke only to be a part of the crowd. They think it is fashionable and stylish to hold a glass of beer in their hands. Since I am the only one who takes a soft drink, they laugh at me, make fun of me and call me a backward girl from a village, a country bumpkin. I do not want to do something my heart and conscience do not allow. I can't do something all others are doing, just to be known as a cool girl."*

For the parents it is a big struggle. It is high time parents and teenagers sit together and talk about what is possible and what is not in these situations. As parents, if we restrict our children from every kind of freedom, reasonable or unreasonable, there will be a tendency for them to become vulnerable. Coming down heavy on teens is not the solution. Parental disapproval often drives friendship and romance between the opposite sexes to go under-ground. It is best to keep the communication channel open. Take your family and your teenagers into confidence and work on an understanding that suits both you and your teenagers. Following the middle path usually works out best.

It is not only the teenagers who are going through this stormy period, the intense strain and anxiety. It is equally confusing and difficult for the parents too. They are also under heavy stress, wondering whether they should or should not grant this kind of freedom.

Worrying alone is not going to help us solve the problem. Clarity of thought, a careful balance between the past and future, our many years of cultivating the values, tons of patience, tolerance, and many many deep breaths ... Let me not terrify you with the rest of the list. For each situation is different, each teen unique and each parent an expert on their children. What you decide and plan will work.



TURN OVER IN MIND

*(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)*

[illegible]



# Chapter

## 9

### *Mature Independence and Immature Dependence*

**H**ow long can children remain dependent on their parents?  
When do they become independent?

Parental care is gratifying to small children, but growing children need to have a voice and a choice in matters affecting their lives.

There is a tremendous pressure in society for children to grow up too fast.

**Do children need their parents love, understanding and support all their lives, no matter what?**

Oh yes, even when they are married, even when they become parents themselves. Parents and children depend on each other all through their lives; however the quantity and quality of dependence will differ as the seasons change.

Parents, let us not forget one important factor. Every child is a unique individual, with a distinct personality of his own, with a special potential given to him by God. During childhood, children depend on their parents and on the other members of the extended family for almost everything. Parents too depend on their children to fulfill the natural instinct of parenting. The total dependence of children on parents is perfectly ok until the age of two. As the children grow, this dependence on each other slowly and gradually needs to be reduced. A new born baby needs its mother fulltime. We may have heard mothers say that they cannot join a group picnic or attend a party because the baby is very small. The father could not sleep the whole night because the baby did not sleep well. So you see, both father and mother cannot have what they want because the baby is still small. It sounds good and looks ok for some time, but if this 24/7 involvement is not carefully handled and reduced as the months and years roll by, the child begins to resent it as he grows older. The parents will also find it difficult to fulfill the constant needs and demands in this manner. For all of a sudden, parents feel insecure and empty, when they are not able to do what they have been doing all along for their children.

### **Challenges and struggles are a part of life and a sign of growth.**

Challenges and struggles are good. Without them we would not be truly alive. We would have no reason to exist. Also there will be no sense of accomplishment. A child's struggle begins at birth. When parents try to remove every roadblock from their children's path, they end up creating a fantasy world and an emotional prison for their children. When children have not learned to appreciate the concept of struggle at all, when home becomes the only place on earth where they experience zero struggle, they won't ever like to leave home. Actually they can never leave home. Even if they leave home physically, they will never grow up and leave emotionally. Under these circumstances, why would they? The stage is set for disappointments. The deep fear most parents experience is that children will break if they have to struggle. This is so real and

so powerful for some parents. Teenagers are incredibly resilient. Parents who experience this fear first need to focus on their own shortcomings during childhood rather than projecting them on to their children.

### **When children don't have to struggle, do they grow up?**

No, not really.

A child who is guided fondly through the struggles of life will emerge from it with self-reliance and confidence.

When life does not provide an adequate amount of resistance, instead of experiencing the joy and satisfaction of facing everyday battles, these children end up finding life cruel and depressing. This is unfortunate because those who have learned to enjoy the struggles often find life's challenges more exciting.

Tempting though the idea is, we cannot cover children in a bubble wrap to keep them from getting hurt or keep them in our nests forever, under our total control and influence. As they become older, friends will become more important in their lives. And this is how it will be, it should be. However, that doesn't mean we should throw up our hands in despair and assume we no longer have any influence over our teenagers or that we are no longer needed. Celebrate the fact they are enjoying the normal sweet joys of growing up and revel in the pleasure of watching them have fun. As they reach their adulthood, they will need our input even more.

### **When this immature dependence in a parent child relationship is not reduced, it becomes a symbiotic relationship.**

When children of such parents grow up, they find it difficult to have a good relationship with others, especially with the opposite sex. Some parents are very possessive about their children and do not allow them

the emotional freedom to enjoy the roles they have to play in the future, like student or friend, husband or wife.

*There is a young man who is from the film industry. He had money problems of a different kind. Earlier he did not know what to do with all the money he was earning, for he had no idea how to spend it. As a child artist he had always given his earnings to his mother and he continued doing this even when he became a young man.*

*All was well in Paradise, until he became a husband. When he continued the habit of giving his salary to his mother, his new wife became very upset and angry. When he gave the salary to his wife, his mother got very upset and angry and stopped talking to the son. He was very confused and didn't know what to do with this problem. The poor boy was being pulled from both sides. When he spoke to me he said, "I am going through an emotional tug-of-war."*

*The mother was too comfortable in her role of many years holding the purse strings. Had she instead educated the son on how to invest or spend his money, so much heartache could have been avoided.*

**We as parents can instruct, we can lecture, we can teach or advice... In the final analysis however, it is the child who has to take the decision if what has been taught will work in that particular situation or not.**

*A daughter was instructed by her mother that when she married, she should be the one to serve food to her husband. When she became a new bride, she really looked forward to this experience. However every time she went to serve food to her husband, her mother-in-law wouldn't allow her to do so. The mother-in-law told the daughter-in-law in no uncertain terms to wait in the bed room. Serving food to the son came under her*

department.

*The daughter-in-law was very confused, upset and did not know what to do. When the husband came to the bed room he found his wife, crying. It was too much for the new husband; he had not come home after a hard and difficult day's work to put up with all this. The husband yelled at his wife for being difficult because he could not understand what was going on. He had not seen such things happen in his family before.*

For persons like this young husband, it seems that there is no redemption from such situations. They may react by withdrawing, by becoming anxious, or by rebelling and resorting to aggressive behavior.

Children, even when they are adults need to manage some of the work by themselves, like serving food for themselves, polishing their shoes and ironing their school uniforms and not depend on their mothers or fathers for every little thing.

### **There is a time to be attached and a time to be detached.**

If your children are currently the sole focus of your life, do not expect them to be friendly with you or to always support you emotionally. It is impossible for children to meet all your needs. You are a whole person by yourself, so slowly and systematically distance yourself from them. The reward will be great for both. This careful distancing does not mean that you are chopping your relationship with your children. It means that you are supporting your children to be what they want to be and what they need to be. This helps parents to have their own freedom to explore life even when children have flown the nest.

### **Children crave independence.**

However there will be times when they need our input even more than ever ... but until then, wait your turn. The more self-sufficient we make

our children feel, the less hostile they are towards us. A wise parent will not make himself increasingly dependent on his children. While it is true that very young children are dependent both in body and mind on their parents, that dependence certainly does not give the parents the right to dictate the children's behavior every moment of the day, to choose their way of life, to set the pattern and pace for their thinking, or influence them to spend their childhood living as adults instead of as children.

Parents need to accept and respect the individuality of children, of their desire to experience freedom in their own right. Mothers who cannot or will not recognize this concept, who openly or subtly command and enslave their sons and daughters, keeping them under their control should remember that these children can turn out to be pretty unpleasant when they get married.

**Is it possible for the parents to treat their children as friends then?**

**Of course, it is possible!**

When parents think of themselves as their children's sole guides, they cannot place themselves as their equals. Understanding parents should behave and conduct themselves as good and trusted friends who walk as equals with their children on the path of life. However, do not expect the same the back - slapping-buddy-pal-relationship they share with their peers. For that little distance they maintain with you could be the result of their respect for parents.

Have you ever wondered what it would mean if you could parent your children as a friend. Believe me when I say this, if your children are not your friends you don't know what you are missing in your life as parents. Without doubt, the parent-child relationship is very pure, sacred and beautiful, even though it remains the most complex one too. Despite sharing this special bond, there are some emotions that affect the relationship. These are emotions of resentment, competition and of course love. Parents and children remain friends for most of the time,



but sometimes they can be bitter enemies as well. Wonder what evokes such strong emotions in this simple and pure relationship? When your relationship with your children is friendly, you will enjoy the precious gift of being a parent. Parents need to be aware how much friendship is accepted by their children and when they need to return to their parents' position.

Again there are parents who think that being like their children, behaving like them is to be their friend. Children hate it when their parents behave in immature ways especially in front of their friends.

*A seventeen year girl shared with me, "It makes me squirm every time my mother talks to my friends exactly as I talk to them, on the very same topics young people like us discuss and using the same language we use. She even agrees with their points on which by the way she will never agree with me. I know she wants to be good to them and please them, but during those moments I die of embarrassment. God, what she puts me through!"*

Often a mother does not allow her children's friends to build a smooth relationship with them. Because of her over-protectiveness, over possessiveness, anxiety, or fear of rejection, she vigorously throws herself between the children and their friends. Thus both at home and at school she closes in on her kids.

### **Make them responsible early.**

For instance teach your five year old child to tie his own shoes laces. Intentionally put in an extra five or even ten minutes into your morning routine so that he will have time to tie his shoes himself. The first few times when he gets it even approximately correct, please notice and affirm his accomplishment. This will sustain the behavior once it is learnt. Exposing your children to very small doses of frustration like this will

help them learn that waiting is not the end of the world, and that they are separate from the parents. If you feel guilty that you are not taking good care of your child, know that it is an expression of love when you help your child learn life's lessons.

*In a family there were two daughters aged nine and seven. The mother would tell the daughters to clean the dining table after dinner. No one really knew whether they kept forgetting, whether they did not like to do this or they wished to watch their favorite cartoon on TV at that time. In the beginning the mother kept reminding them every day but finally after two or three weeks both the girls started doing it without being reminded. The mother was very happy that the daughters were taking responsibility as they were growing up and she made it a point to generously appreciate them without reminding them of their earlier forgetfulness.*

*She told them, "I feel so proud to see you both as responsible growing girls."*

### **Tears help in healing.**

When your fourteen year old daughter comes home crying from school because she had a fight with her best friend and sobs to you that her friend is no more her friend, it would be a good idea to listen. Be a good listener. You can say things like, "It sounds like it is really painful for you. I am sorry you are hurting so much now." Avoid giving her advice. Just listen, listen and listen more, some more, even more... Sadness helps us heal.

Tears often come tinged with sadness. Simply being with your children and listening to them without giving advice sends a very powerful unconscious message that they believe they can handle life's pain. Of course listening and validating are all that is needed to let them know how much you understand, care and love your children.

## Don't take security for your child's deeds.

*Your seventeen year old son, a junior in college, walks into the house after breaking an expensive projector in the Science lab. The college has asked him to pay a heavy amount for this. Ask your son, "How much?" and then you say, "That is a lot of money." Say this with respect and reverence. Let your tone not be sarcastic or horrified. Do not go into 'fix it' mode immediately. Wait a few moments. This will be uncomfortable for both of you, but when he realizes that you are not going to provide him the security, his mind will start thinking about what needs to be done. If he asks you to pay for it, very calmly help him understand that much as you would like to do this, you are more afraid of what will happen if you pay it rather than if you did not. Then immediately ask if he would like some help figuring out how much money he has saved from his pocket money and how to set up a plan of payment so he can get this little debt paid off in a couple of months?*

All parents like to completely smooth out the path for their children. This is only natural. Competent parents resist this urge because they know that to smooth out all of life's rough edges will over time cripple their children and keep them from growing up. That is essentially the choice a Proactive Parent has to make. Allow children to learn from their own mistakes and also from those of others. Truly speaking, learning never ends. We continue to learn and grow from our mistakes all our lives.

Sometimes it is our job to go bat for our children; at other times they can handle it on their own. Obviously the older they get, more responsibility shifts to their shoulders. Smart parents let children experience the natural consequences of their actions.

**How our children succeed in the future when they are on their own is directly related to how well we prepare them today.**

**Just ask yourself the following questions:**

- ❖ How will I know that I have succeeded in laying the correct groundwork?
- ❖ Am I helping my children gradually prepare for life outside my nest?
- ❖ Am I ready for the day when the children will step out independently?
- ❖ Am I wondering if I have done all I can to prepare them and myself?
- ❖ How will I make sure the foundation I've built is solid?

Even in a healthy family, a semi permeable boundary exists between the parents and children. This means that while they are closely connected to each other, they are also separate from each other. When this boundary begins to dissolve, it results in emotional disturbance and turbulence for the children, for the parents or for both.

**The boundary between parents and children needs to be very clear and flexible.**

When parents and children have a very weak boundary between them, the result is chaos. When there is a rigid boundary between parents and children, the result is disconnection and isolation. By keeping the boundary clear and flexible, parents become aware when children resent their interference; this is the time they as parents need to become flexible enough to change themselves. When parents become aware of their children becoming withdrawn, some change is again needed. This system works very well in the family as far as dependence and immature dependence is taken into account. As we continue to strengthen the family ties and pave the way for more joys to follow, inner peace, security, harmony and comfort become treasures to be enjoyed not just in the present, in the future too.

**One of the realities of raising children is that by the time you've become an expert at it, you're out of the job.**

I personally think it is important to provide adequately for our children's needs, to equip them in their spiritual, physical, mental, emotional, and social growth, to provide opportunities for them to continue their development outside of the family. Let us not just drift through the years, but be intentional about what, about how and why we do it.

Let us think ahead to give children the love, unconditional acceptance and practical skills they need for a life beyond our nest... What a delight it will be to watch them spread their wings, soar high into the future God has planned for them. Parents are the source He uses to accomplish and complete His divine plan for these beautiful beings.

### *TURN OVER IN MIND*

*(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)*

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# Chapter

# 10

## *Sex Education*

When is the right time or age to educate children on sex and physical intimacy?

In the opinion of the Psychologist Milton, “Very young children should be reassured and told not to worry, because that is all they can deal with.”

Children even when they are five years old are naturally curious and ask questions regarding God, money, sex, society, etc. When children ask questions about sex tell them they will be told about this as they grow older. When parents are silent about these issues raised by children, this not only intensifies their curiosity, but also makes them suspicious of their parents who have been inadequate in supplying information. Right from elementary school it is important not to misinform them. Adolescents are reassured by being told facts that positive and truthful.

Sex is no longer a forbidden subject these days. It is taught in schools and colleges and discussed at home. Children, especially teenagers are eager to learn all they can about sex. They are deceptive and perplexed; they expect realistic and personal answers.

### **Should sex education be offered to teenagers?**

Let us not forget sex is already taught on TV, in the cinema, in school, on the streets ... Our children are exposed to sex in many ways. It is the parents and teachers who often fear to share intimate information. Young children need to be taught to face such issues honestly. Open discussions about sex can enhance our children's ability to make wise decisions about the facts of life.

### **Sex education has two parts: information and values.**

**Values are best learned at home. Information can best be given by experts.**

Parents need not answer provocative questions. They are entitled to their modesty, discomfort and lack of specific information. When children ask genuinely, then the parents can give the answers within their knowledge and comfort level.

*An eleven year old boy came to know of the word 'child molesting' for the first time in school because his friend's younger sister had become a victim of this cruel act. When he asked his mother about it, the mother who was well prepared with an answer replied, "Child molesting is when a grown up person hurts an innocent child mentally or physically." I found this to be a very sensible and understandable answer for an eleven year old boy.*

Parents should encourage their teenagers to take part in discussions on



sex, which are sponsored by schools and community centers. Information imparted with objectivity and honesty may decrease hostility and also increase the trust between the generations.

One option is to talk to the children about the ‘facts of life’ as and when they themselves begin to ask questions on the subject; letting them learn the facts gradually, piece by piece, step by step, in order to comprehend things accurately and in proper perspective. Never respond to queries or doubts with lies or fictitious information. When we indulge in this and the time comes for the children to learn the actual truth, it will be very disturbing for them. There will be two other possible reactions too:

- ❖ My parents are so ignorant about the facts of life that they could not explain it to me.
- ❖ My parents cannot be trusted; they tell lies and hide facts from me.

*An eighth grade girl became very upset when the Science teacher explained in class how a baby is conceived and born. The girl went to her teacher after her class and said, “My parents are not like that. They are very nice religious-minded people and they cannot do such things. Please do not talk like this about parents.”*

Anyway, somehow or the other children come to know about the facts of life much earlier than their parents expect them to know. Sometimes they come to know through their friends, sometimes through books, TV shows and also sometimes through some incidents or situations which they witness or experience themselves in life.

It is never easy for parents to talk about sex to their children. It has always been a challenge to know exactly how one should teach children about sex. I know when it was my turn I too found it very difficult, especially

when my girls were moving into their teen years. Help your children to cultivate a healthy physical, mental and spiritual attitude so that they stand strong when they enter the adult world without you. Support them to overcome the temptations and to experience the reality of life in the years to follow.

*In a family the mother used to tell her children to turn around or close their eyes every time a violent or romantic scene happened on TV. One day the elder daughter quietly went up to her mother and told her, "Even though you ask me to close my eyes, I already know what is happening in that scene there!" From that day the mother became aware and the children were not asked to close their eyes or to turn away.*

Responsible parents do not lie to their children. They protect them from information that is too difficult to handle at a young age.

A new survey has shown that parents tell at least 3,000 lies to their children while bringing them up. They tend to lie about mere things in order to make their children behave properly, when they do not know the answer to the questions, when they feel embarrassed or find it difficult to answer the questions their children ask. The most commonly told lie by 84 % of parents is about sex.

It is ok to explain to your teenaged children that crushes and attractions are normal, but they should not enter a physical relationship just because someone asks them to or because it is the most happening thing in peer groups and they do not want to feel left out.

Children do talk about sex, especially when they are with their friends. Sit down with your children and make sure that your daughters and sons understand that God invented sex and thinks it is a great idea FOR

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**MARRIED COUPLES.** It is a question of self discipline.

It is a good idea to warn and educate children on how to protect and save themselves if anybody forces them into having sex. Temptation will always be there but children need to be trained in their values of purity and boundaries very deeply and strongly. Know your kids well and always stress on purity of thought and deed. Poor choices in this area can create lifelong scars, so smart choices and clear plans are always the best option. Take care to let them know it is not your intention to preach but to protect.

With all your heart, congratulate them when they stand up for their values and for what is right. Set the standards with care, at a reachable height. Sometimes too much information is not good. It is okay to tell your children, “There are certain things I don’t want to discuss with you now. When the time is right I will surely inform you about it.” Always give an answer, but do not give any more details than you feel is appropriate. Never lie.

Unless you discuss these doubts, you will never know what is in your children’s heart. They will not come out with a deep genuine question unless you set the scene for a safe, nonjudgmental dialogue beforehand. Children want answers. Gently, carefully and skillfully, guide them to the truth.

Talk openly with your children. Let them know they can talk to you about anything on earth. Help them understand sex is a natural union, nothing dirty, ugly or scary... a beautiful sacred act – willed by God, between a man and a woman ... when the marriage vows are taken ...

*(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)*

[illegible]

# Chapter

# 11

## *Freedom of Expression*

Is it right for children to express their feelings without any consideration for others?

Expression of feelings is the birthright of children. As they grow older they learn to be considerate to others with the help of their parents and others around them.

Children have feelings. They are sensitive too. They are born like an open book, what is inside and what is outside is the same. This is why they are congruent. When children are born, they do not know how to hide or control their feelings. Parents must take this into account.

It is absolutely fine for children to express their feelings without any consideration for others until a certain age. For until this time, the children's reasoning is not developed. This will differ from child to child

as each child is unique and different. Of course from time to time they want to take a few liberties, especially with their parents or with the people who are close to them and understand them; they do this because they are congruent.

Children are born only with feelings. They develop reasoning and adapt to the parents and others in the family later. Opinions, beliefs, attitudes, prejudices begin to form after the age of two in general. In the beginning, the entire personality of children is governed mainly by their likes and dislikes. The heart totally rules the head. Thus it is very hard for the children to control their feelings and not be open in expressing what they feel. Slowly they understand and learn not to express their feelings in a congruent way.

**The question here is ‘HOW LONG?’ can a child afford to express his feelings without any consideration for others?**

As children grow, parents start teaching the different rules and regulations in order to get adjusted and accepted in society. This transition is a very difficult time for children. When children adjust well, as parents and others appreciate them for this, gradually children learn to be dignified, to not hurt others, to be respectful and to also understand the importance of etiquette. Society demands this and children are expected to behave in a particular manner in order to be accepted as members of society. Didn't we all go through this quality control system when we were young? In fact it is a must for everyone.

Generally two year old children behave in a congruent way because they express their feelings as they feel. They have no fear of being judged nor are they aware that they are hurting others. Have you noticed that even we as adults unleash the congruent child in us sometimes? (At least that is what I presume!)

Keeping in mind that each child is unique and each child is brought up in a different family by different parents and is from different family backgrounds, it is not possible to pinpoint the exact age or time when children become incongruent. While it is important to teach children to be incongruent on occasions, it is even more important for the parents to be congruent. You cannot have an emotional relationship without having access to your own emotions. This will be a metaphysical impossibility. For no emotion means no emotional intimacy. Can you actually say you have no time for any emotional intimacy? If so, how can you expect to understand your children's feelings without understanding your own emotions first?

If you cannot relate to this, you may as well say goodbye to having an emotionally connected family and definitely to a warm, fulfilling, wonderful parent-child relationship. The truth is that as children start developing their reasoning powers and gathering values, they also begin to handle their feelings. With the help of parents they realize that it is not good to hurt other people by expressing their free and frank feelings all the time. If children do not learn this when they are small, this can pave the way for insensitivity and they may face problems when they grow up. At this time children need their parent's guidance, care and love to understand the value of not hurting the others around them.

“All our miseries in life arise,  
From feeling where we ought to think  
And thinking where we ought to feel.”

*Sometimes my daughters used to fight. They would hit, push and pinch each other. I used to tell them, “Excuse me girls, in this house all feelings are permitted, actions are limited.”*

It is a must for all parents to learn this by heart and to use it with their children whenever, wherever it is necessary and possible. It works.

The practice of talking and sharing their feelings helps children feel connected and prevents loneliness and isolation. Kids who feel lonely at home will seek confirmation and affirmation elsewhere. Expressing their feelings helps them develop a view of themselves, based on how the members of the family, especially the father and mother accept their feelings and give their observations and remarks on their smartness and positive behavior. Make your home a safe haven.

More importantly, keep in mind that many parents do know the importance of this, which means they have learnt how to express their emotions. It is sad that only because of their busy schedules they do not get adequate time to enjoy their children.

When you ask or request your children's opinion, when you give them time to share their joys and frustrations, you confirm their sense of worth and value as a member of the family. Making the time for our children is a worthy investment. The time and the quality of time matter a lot to the children. Actually isn't this the case in any relationship?

When our daughters were young girls, we used to have informal meetings regularly to know what was happening in everybody's lives. In those meetings we would have brain-storming sessions, make vacation plans. We used this time to discuss important issues or decisions and also set up family policies. My husband was very particular to always end these meetings on a positive note, and to balance correction with love and encouragement for things done well. Even today they tell me how they used to wait for these meetings and still miss those discussions.



**Explain to children that sometimes feelings get in the way of facts and relationships.**

If a mother and son have an argument over something, they could both feel that they do not love each other at that time. But that is not the fact and it is not true. The love between mother and son cannot change because of a few arguments. The feeling caused by the argument is a temporary one and it will get resolved by itself.

Emotional growth can be stunted and children can remain pathetically withdrawn or they can retaliate with unbridled rebellion. If we try to bend and hammer them to shape according to our own needs, these “Over bent twigs do not develop into sturdy trees.”

In every area of life dear parents, let us make it a point not to lose sight of the fact that people are far more important than the material pleasures of life, more important than the fine crystal or any other precious non living things. Since all our feelings are given to us by the Almighty, we must train our children to deal with their feelings as well. However, if parents themselves are still clueless about how to deal with their own feelings and grudges, how on earth are they going to impart this important aspect to children?

- ❖ We win children’s attention when we listen with a third ear to their feelings.
- ❖ We win children’s hearts when we express our feelings in a way that they understand.
- ❖ We win children’s respect when we are genuine in expressing our feelings, when words and feelings match.
- ❖ We win children’s admiration when we accept their feelings.

May these thoughts support you and your children in this quest for mutual love, trust, respect and understanding each other’s feelings.

*(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)*

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# Chapter

# 12

## *Values and Cope-ability*

How do parents develop children to acquire positive attitudes, healthy conduct and values, especially the value of respecting their parents and elders?

First of all let us examine our own values... Children learn their values, attitude, and conduct mostly from parents.

Every parent's goal is to pave the way for children to become balanced and well-rounded individuals who are able to cope with the world, who can eventually make it on their own and lead a happy fulfilling life.

**Respect cannot be demanded, it needs to be earned.**

Because of the general shift in our society from an autocratic attitude to a democratic attitude, many people, especially parents are faced with challenges which they are not well equipped to face. Decades ago, the

father was regarded the supreme authority in the family, the mother was subservient to him and children were subservient to both. Today we see a radical shift. This sense of social equality has been reflected in the attitude of children too. Children today are not willing to submit to the arbitrary role of adults.

When we were young, children showed tremendous respect to the older generation. Actually there was never really a choice. Now we see it eroding every day. Respect should never become an option. Continue to work on inculcating this precious value, until they start showing respect without the parent's prompting. Also encourage to disagree politely and respectfully.

Every child is born with self respect and it is essential for parents to bear in mind that from the time of birth, children demand and protect their right to be respected and accepted as they are. Many a time we forget this and we are not even aware of this fact. We assume that because children are small, they will not get affected by the parent's insult.

Parents often complain that children do not respect them. My observation is that parents also do not respect their children. Parents show a distinct lack of respect towards their children by nagging, yelling, hitting or punishing them in the way they think best or maybe even in the way they were treated in their childhood. To establish mutual respect, we need to respect our children as human beings in their own right. Whenever parents control, dominate, over-protect or pity, they are violating the fundamental rule of respect for their children. Whenever they allow themselves to turn into doormats, they are violating this same rule of respect for themselves. 'Shut up', 'don't do this' – all these indicate the parents' autocratic handling of children. They get hurt and will not learn to respect others. They may even start to learn similar ways of hurting the people around them.

Parents need to respond, keeping in mind the difference between tolerance and sanction, between acceptance and approval. Parents need to tolerate and accept much but sanction and approve little. A doctor or a nurse deals with a patient even when he comes in bleeding; his condition though unpleasant is tolerated and cared for. It may not be the happiest sight or the prettiest picture in the world, but it has to be treated. Similarly, when children do not accept or grasp the parent's values, it is absolutely important that we as parents let them know we do not approve of this indifference to family values. As parents, we tolerate when they do something wrong only because we love and care for them; but that does not mean we are happy with their wrong acts. We do not sanction something which does not match our values or which is not good for our children. The refusal to sanction is also part of the treatment.

The only way children can acquire internal structure is by examining the external structure. We need to guide, teach, gently correct, and help children move towards competence. Self-esteem after all comes from competence, not from incompetence.

Children learn without teaching. They are natural observers and notice minute aspects quietly. Sometimes, they can shock you with their observations. As parents, we start wondering, "I don't remember teaching this, how on earth did he come to know it?" Know and understand what we believe in, live up to it, seek to actively instill this in your children's heart. This is the most important thing we will ever gift them.

When we teach the practical life skills but neglect their spiritual orientation, we have literally left out the heart of the matter. Human beings are born with an invisible hunger to understand and a desire to know that there is a Creator who has things under His control – especially when everything in this world makes no sense.

**Too much pushing can drive them away. It is a fine line we must walk.**

What is important and right to us becomes our value. For example, how we spend our time, money and energy. This is what is important to us and what is important to us becomes very clear to children, whether we tell them or not. They learn from the way we live our lives.

**Train children the way they should grow and when they are older, they will not depart from it.**

The habits and beliefs we instill in our children when they are young are the ones they are going to remember later, so let us give them enough moral guidance to grow into adults who take time to care about parents and the other people in the family. Help children build lifetime values and attitude to face the future with confidence. For what sense does it make in bringing up children who are neat, polite and charming but are indifferent to people who are suffering, who are not moved to any action or reaction at the heartache or grief of others? I am not saying that children should not be polite or neat but they should also be taught not to insult or attack, not to threaten nor comply when threatened or ill-treated. Never ever encourage children to remain untouched when a person is hurting or experiencing life's pains.

**Educate children about modesty, which includes your modesty too.**

Since the most important part of building the personality takes place in childhood, it seems worthwhile to share some ideas on how to mould children. Early life building blocks consist of parental teachings, corrections, standards, permissions, applause and 'how to' information that a little person records in his mind. Since everyone comes out of childhood with a built in record in his brain, what can Proactive Parents do to make this body of internalized experiences as life-enhancing as possible to the children?

Parents play the most important part in shaping the character of children.

From birth, children gather their values only by imitating their elders. So the behavior of their parents, their day-to-day routine, their speech and actions are actually observed by children and unconsciously recorded in their minds. Parents therefore have the immense responsibility of consciously developing and molding their own personality and behavior in such a way that the children can safely imitate them and follow them as their role model.

Honesty and decency are not qualities that are ‘just acquired’ or ‘just learnt’. Neither can children force these on themselves nor can we as parents force this upon them. It is the parents who by their practice set the example. Remember, the parent is the model for children especially in the early formative years. Children look up to the parents as a source of security, as someone worth emulating, as someone who will give them unconditional love and accept them as they are.

There is nothing wrong with our Indian values and our Indian culture. In fact we are very rich in our values; our culture is very deep and unique. While we need to understand our children and ourselves, we also need to care enough about each other to make the values and culture work. This is not because we are afraid of the people and the culture but because we as parents care for our children, other family members and friends, and children too in turn care for their parents and other family members.

Another important point to keep in mind is to also teach children how to become responsible understanding parents in the future when it is their turn... This is also an essential part of bringing them up. We as parents want to instill good work ethics and family values. However, loving them does not mean giving in to all their whims. To love children is to bring out the best in them. Your child will always remain a part of you because of the genes you share and more importantly because you nurtured his heart and showed him what it means to be a human being in this world.

It is disheartening to see today's parents so hard-pressed for time, unable to fulfill children's emotional needs. Parents should ensure a healthy environment for themselves and their children. Children brought up in a happy atmosphere naturally and spontaneously imbibe these good qualities and worthwhile values.

What we do as parents matters a lot. We choose the family road. We can try to force children to be polite or successful or to blindly follow our advice; but if we don't follow these things ourselves, we will swim against a current that will overpower us. We can lead them in a certain direction or we can convince them to change, but we can't make the change in any enduring way unless it makes sense to them. What makes sense to children is what they see going on around them. Whatever we do will be what they do, whatever we believe is what they will believe, whatever we value is what they will value. Oh yes, they might do the exact opposite too when they rebel.

Proactive Parents must pass on a torch of wisdom, a flame of awareness and realization that teaches children how to take responsibility and connect deeply with God and others. When this happens, children develop a strong character, as individuals who know who they are, who are ready to make a difference in fulfilling God's mission for their life. Don't we want to pass something on to our children that far exceeds what we received from our parents?

**Here are four guiding principles when it comes to practicing etiquette in families:**

- ❖ **Guard the Golden Rule.** Treat children the same way you wish to be treated.
- ❖ **No double standards.** Be equally thoughtful to children as you are



to strangers and co-workers.

- ❖ **Respect requests.** Reflect on what your child has asked you to do or not to do.
- ❖ **Congruency and simplicity** is the finest quality for the family, in fact for life itself.

Children do understand etiquette; they can ask polite questions at the right time and the right place, but these must be taught, deliberately and consistently just like ‘please’ and ‘thank you.’ Manners and respect are learned by repetition, there is no better, quicker or easier way. It has to become second nature. Do you know it takes **twenty one days to turn an action into a habit?** Children will learn these things **if we do not give up.**

But this does not mean that they have to always follow the etiquette and manners and forget what they really want to say, what they want to do. Being open and being frank are also very important values. This gives each member of the family an opportunity to understand and support each other. Some of the things we are trying to teach children will not make sense to them now. Some would not even make sense until they have children of their own. Some may never get it at all. Keep trying any way.

Every family is unique with its own traditions, practices and celebrations that bind the members of the family together and are passed down from one generation to the other. When children are very young the family unit is their whole world, the corner stone around which their identity is formed. Later on, as friends and outside influences join, children begin to re-evaluate how they wish to fit in the areas of life. As the push and pull relationship between friends and family increases along with their entry into teen years, children test their wings.

I have seen many homes where television dictates and dominates family time and togetherness, where the dining table turns into a home office or craft area. Nothing really offensive or criminal when families eat in front of a television set; except that while eating, each one will be doing their own thing. Communication happens in accordance with the TV serial or program on air at that time. Also the parents are missing out on one of the best opportunities to connect with their children and to influence them on the good culture, values and identity of the family. Mealtime is also a great time to learn what's going on in your children's lives and to help them understand the facts and realities of life. Those children, whose family eat together on a regular basis and communicate while they are together, cultivate good values and understanding of their family. The negative influences and habits around them do not affect such children.

**The value of endurance needs to be developed as early as possible.**

Children will not shatter if they wait a few minutes. When a two year old child wakes up from his nap right when you are in the middle of cooking or doing something else, tell the child you will be coming in just a minute to get him. If he throws a tantrum, even if it is a big one, continue doing what you are doing, but for not more than three to five minutes. When you are done with your task, walk with poise and a smile, take him in your lap and thank him for waiting. Then attend to his needs. Don't make a big deal of it.

**The value of giving to others...**

It is very important that children also learn to value you and other family members. Let them know how much you love and care for them by celebrating their birthdays and important days in their lives like result day, their match day, Sports day etc. Also remember that by doing all this, you are passing on to their lives the value of sharing or giving to others. When children are young, we help them remember to make or buy gifts and cards for their parents and family members. By the time they are in

their teens the accountability must slowly shift to their shoulders. This needs a creative approach, for most often teenagers do not enjoy direct telling, advising, or asking.

*I remember helping my daughters grasp this value. I began mentioning what I would like to have for my birthday several weeks prior to the day. Even though it felt awkward and selfish, I said, "In case anyone is wondering what to give me for my birthday this year, you are most welcome to ask." They laughed but a few days later, I saw them often whispering, in deep consultation with their daddy. I also noticed a very urgent and mysterious trip to the shops. The reality was I did not want a gift from my daughters, this was not the point I was trying to make. My point was for them to learn to look beyond themselves, beyond their own needs and to invest time and money for the people who play an important role in their lives.*

*Did this work with my girls? Oh yes, today it is a joy to see, hear and experience how they use this value of theirs not only in their family but also with the other members in their respective families after marriage. Try it with your own family, and if you have a 'gift-less' birthday, gently tell them how you feel. Hopefully children will grasp the concept of remembering and acknowledging important days of important people in their lives by giving to others, and also carrying it with them into adulthood.*

The Values and habits your children learn from you in childhood will accompany them throughout their lives.

‘There is a wonderful mystical law of nature that the three things we crave most in life – happiness, freedom, and peace of mind are always attained

by giving them to someone else.’

*Peyton Conway March*

Repeatedly remind them on the importance of reaching out not just to family but also to those in need of love and support. Remember,

“True help should be given not as ladder from earth to heaven,  
Not as a witness to any creed,  
But simple service simply given, to their own kind,  
In their hour of need.”

**Teach children about the value of managing the losses in life which include Death, Divorce and Debt:**

Sometimes in life we do anything and everything to feel better but nothing works. Yes, when we lose someone we loved the most, we miss the person even years after his or her death. We become incapable of enjoying anything as the date and time approach year after year.

Children need to be taught about this reality of life too. I remember when I lost my mother ... this was the first death in my part of the family. I took a very long time to come out of my sadness. Many people helped me become aware and spoke to me about this reality of life. They reminded me that the other family members were also suffering because I was sad even on festivals and important days like birthdays and other happy occasions. For during these times I missed my mother even more. One day a dear friend of mine shared his experience which helped me to cope with this sad reality of life. I asked God to help me acknowledge my grief and honor the memories of my dear mother.

The first thing I did was to focus on the blessings and the gifts in my life that God the Almighty has given me abundantly, especially the gift of a mother.

Secondly I started talking about the memories of my mother and the more I spoke about her, the better I felt.

Thirdly, on every death anniversary I started doing something special to commemorate the blessing she had been in my life.

Who said death is easy to understand? But then again, is life in its many countless shades and colors any easier? Is it ever possible to get over or completely forget the loss of someone who carried us in the cradle of her heart? Whose love is so vast, unconditional and boundless? Not at all, but we can eventually make our peace knowing she is finally in God's sacred land, bathed in His light and love...where sickness and suffering can never again touch her, even though we believe he or she is far far away ... When I lost a parent how unprepared was I for this eventuality.

Today I request parents to guide their children in this painful area well before such an event has to actually happen, for death never gives adequate warning all the time. Sometimes it is the loss of a parent, a loss of a sibling, a grandparent or a friend...sometimes an overnight health problem, even an accident. Stop living in denial. It's not going to be easy. But face the pain, encourage your child to go through it, and to talk as much as she wants to on this subject. Many children sometimes act completely indifferent. Watch out, for this does not mean he or she has no fears or feelings on this topic.

Death or divorce ....we lose someone very dear. In death we eventually teach our child to release, to offer this precious person to the Universe and to the One who created and gifted her to us for some time...

In divorce the pain is equally raw, but there is a sweet consolation that the parents continue to walk the earth, even though on different planes but not on different planets. If the parents handle this difficult situation

with sensitivity and care, parents and children can continue to meet, and continue the love.

Debt and recession bring in heartaches of a different kind. When a parent loses a job, or lands the family in huge debts, when the order gets reversed ... so often there is a sudden switch of roles ... the mother becomes the breadwinner, while dad spends all his time watching TV. When budgeting becomes the operative word...when the luxuries you had taken for granted seem like a faraway dream... ..when pent up anger spills over and egos clash...Oh no, not easy at all. A lot of sensitivity and acceptance is a definite requirement. Let us learn to be kind with ourselves during these times. To feel the helpless victim, or to think even the heavens are plotting against us, being harsh on ourselves or on our loved ones may feel like a very natural reaction, but at this point in time it is more important to look for solutions, not more problems. Through loss or gain, we want to save this beautiful nest that took many loving years to build.

So often people find their time of prayer and relationship with God a great source of strength...Some others who have not been actively engaged in making time for Him can use this as an opportunity to begin again. Let us hold on to the faith and the confidence that we are going to make it...we are going to see good times again...let us keep repeating this to ourselves and to the children over and over again. Never ever give up. Let the children also understand this is difficult, but together we can cross these rough seas... He who brought us to it will definitely take us through it. If change is the only constant factor in life, this change for all we know could be a breakthrough for some amazing possibilities...new vistas, new frontiers, new heights to be scaled...Of course one has to be very careful, cautious and realistic during this time. Let us make sure to include the family in all the major decisions ... for they've had just about enough surprises for now.

One always needs to keep dreaming. As we give energy and life to our dreams, this season of new beginnings may not be what we had envisaged for ourselves or the family, but we can create a new path... This can become a season for sowing new seeds of understanding, experiencing renewed solidarity in the family, and new directions for a harvest of plenty.

We may even wonder how we managed to ignore the simple sweet pleasures of life. More importantly, let us never forget to count our blessings each day as we offer thanks to the Creator for His unseen hands, for His invisible protection and the greatest gift called family.

***Love is the true winner...Always!***

### *TURN OVER IN MIND*

*(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)*

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## Part II

### *Parents Be Aware*

This is something we as parents should read at least once a month or whenever the need arises.

This book has been primarily about pain, the pain of growth and change. It has been my intention to justify this pain and in this process to open the doorway to a degree of joy that is only available to those who are fully aware. Now, when joy is a bi-product of awareness, what happens with unaware people? Unaware people are unaware because so often they are afraid to face reality. They choose freely, impulsively and on the spur of the moment... Regrets follow later while realization may or may not even happen.

So, let me share with you my thoughts and experiences on the different kinds of awareness keeping in mind the parents!



# Chapter 1

## *Be Aware of Your Awareness*

Aware parents are truly alive simply because they sense and know how they feel about themselves and about their children, they have an awareness of time and place.

Aware parents live with the awareness that the present golden time will never return again. They also know that their time on the planet is limited. They are aware that when they die, everything from the mountains to the trees will continue to stand tall and majestic, but they will not be around to enjoy them. So they want to see everything as poignantly as possible.

Experiencing children with similar awareness, always knowing and keeping in mind the age factor, seeing them as what they are and who they are, realizing that they are individual human beings of infinite worth,



# Chapter

## 2

### *Unconditional Acceptance*

Be aware of unconditional acceptance of your children so that they feel encouraged, important, worthwhile and recognized.

The cry of every human heart is, “love me most when I deserve it least; that’s when I need it most.”

Unconditional love works. It is life’s most powerful motivator and has far greater depth and meaning in life than most people realize. It always does what is best for everyone and can empower children to face the most difficult problems. We are born with a lifelong thirst and desire for unconditional love, which children get for the first time with their parents. Our hearts desperately need it like our lungs need oxygen, because it is life giving.

*We love you ...*

*We want you ...*

*We accept you as you are ...*

*We believe you ...*

*We are so grateful to God that when we wanted to have a child,  
God gave you to us ...*

*These are the statements that can save life or give life to a  
child...*

Even before birth, children come to know whether they are wanted, accepted, loved or not. For as long as parents continue to live they should never forget or ignore this important point in the relationship with their children.

The human brain is a memory bank, a storehouse of all the varied experiences a human being undergoes from the moment of birth to death. In fact research has proved that even a nine week mind of a fetus can be conditioned by talking to it. We can easily say that the experiences even before birth are also stored in the human brain. What a powerful brain God has given us! Let us use it in a positive way.

The messages, suggestions or commands given to the children primarily in the first five years after birth or even before birth have a great relevance and impact on the children's whole personality. Children's behavior towards themselves and others is largely based on the specific experiences they go through in their childhood, on what they think of themselves and others when they are small. So how about conditioning these young minds with a feeling of being wanted unconditionally, letting them know that we love them as they are? That they are treasured, so very dear and so very important to the parents...

In our country, the first question asked when a child is born is usually,

“Is it a boy or a girl?” No child is born as a child. How many of us even wonder if the child is blessed with good health and a sound mind?

*I remember in a family, when the grandmother was given the good news of the third baby girl's arrival, she was not happy. She said, “A girl, oh no, not again.” The second granddaughter heard this and asked her grandmother, “Did you say the same thing when I was born too grandma?” The grandmother had no answer to this question.*

To take the journey of parenting is not a process of trying to change our children to become the people we want them to be. A lot of times we may have already discovered that the efforts to change our children is a futile exercise and have ended in failure and frustration. For this is a journey of exploring and demonstrating genuine unconditional love even when our desires are not fulfilled and our values do not match.

Unconditional love needs acceptance without any conditions. Learning to truly love is one of the most important things we will ever do for our children. Unconditional love is the fruit and sum of all the love in a parent's heart.

We as parents so often refuse to develop an attitude of acceptance of what is inevitable in certain situations and environments. We are prepared to accept that it is the nature of a lion to roar, of a mouse to squeak! But we are not prepared to accept the people in our lives as they are, especially our own children.

How often we have seen ourselves and other parents set up rigid goals for children, “My child must become a doctor or an engineer and if not all this, may be a nice person at least” Just tell me, who exactly is this nice person? Does anyone really know? No one does, except the parents!

Ridiculous! Just think of the pain and sadness this rigidity creates in children? And then we grumble that they are not able to cope with the realities of life and do not succeed.

*A son of a school headmistress was forced to take Science in the twelfth standard in order to become a doctor, much against his wishes! He did not like Science. He also felt if he did not become a doctor, he will not be accepted or loved by his parents and the other family members. So he tried his best to get the required percentage of marks. He could not achieve this in spite of his best efforts. Though he did not fail in his class, his marks in Science were not up to the mark, and his parents asked him to repeat the class in order to get the required marks in Science for the dream seat in a well known medical college. It was not easy for this young adult to go through all this humiliation, to sit with his juniors while the other friends of his batch had already moved onto the next class. So he rebelled against his parents and did not study well. It was a shock to the parents to realize that he had even started failing in Science. His interest was in music and he had been learning to play the guitar. His parents punished him by breaking his guitar; the guitar lessons were also abruptly stopped. The child rebelled even more; he refused to go to school, locked himself in his room and withdrew from his parents, the other family members and friends. His inner feeling was he was not ok and his parents were also not ok, because they did not help him become ok.*

If we do not really help or allow children to decide and select upon the subjects of their own choice or to develop their hobbies and other extra-curricular activities, it is a frustrating experience for the children and they grow into irresponsible adults and citizens. They can even take a decision to kill themselves.



I say this with a lot of heaviness in my heart because I have personally counseled so many children experiencing an intense level of anguish, choosing to end their lives as an escape from all this badgering in the family. This is definitely not **unconditional acceptance**.

*I know a family where the father wanted to play tennis when he was a young boy. Due to the financial restraints at that time, his own father could not help him do this. When the boy became a father, to fulfill his childhood desire and ambition he wanted his son to play tennis. Soon a good coach was arranged, an expensive racket and tennis balls were purchased from Japan. The father became a member of a club so that his son could learn the game from expert coaches and also move with the right tennis crowd. However the one thing he never realized was that his son was just not interested in playing tennis, but to please his father he had agreed to go for the coaching sessions. After sometime he began feeling tired and bored. The game held no interest at all.*

*One day he whipped up enough courage to tell his father, “Dad I do not want to go for tennis today.” The father agreed because this was the first time the son had asked for a ‘day off.’ Soon there came a second and third time. Then the father said, “Look son, I have given you the best I can. My father could not do all this for me even though I was very much interested and keen to play the game, because he could not afford it at that time. So do not give me excuses every time you have to go for these coaching sessions. You have to learn tennis for my sake.” The father forced him to go for tennis practice. The son went for the tennis lessons because he did not want to displease his father again.*

*After a few weeks, the same thing happened again, the boy did*

*not want to go for the practice because of his half yearly exams. This time the father said, "I do not know what more I can do. I am tired. I have done my best for you. Anyway you are free to do whatever you want to do or do not want to do. This is your life." The boy was furious at the controlling sentiments of his father and immediately asked him, "What did you just say daddy? That my life is my life? **This is my life, and I am free to do what I want to do with it**".*

*The father then said in an angry tone, "Oh yes, do whatever you want to do with your life."*

*The son responded again saying, "You know Dad, why do I sometimes get the feeling as if my life is not my life, that it is an extension of your life?"*

*The father was shocked and took a decision not to force the son anymore. The son did not learn tennis. The classes were immediately stopped. The son went ahead with his education, became a rank holder and an achiever in an area of his choice.*

Instead of insisting children obey their parents blindly, a discussion between the parents and children should be held say at the dining table to bridge the communication gap. Or if the need arises to talk to them individually, understand the difficulty as to what could be the real reason for the children to not obey.

**Children who are accepted unconditionally have the energy that creates the belief that anything is possible to achieve.**

When children are accepted unconditionally, they have the energy to perform better. Aware parents would find it easier to accept their children unconditionally and so they find it easier to achieve their goals. Children need to be accepted as they are ... no comparisons ... no conditions ... just as they are...

It is said:  
“The crazy person says,  
I am Abraham Lincoln,  
The neurotic person says,  
I wish I were Abraham Lincoln  
And the healthy person says,  
I am I and you are you.”

*I can never forget my own first grade report card. In three places, the teacher had written in bold red letters and underlined the words, ‘No good’, after which she had added, ‘Promotion will not be given.’ In shame and humiliation, I looked at the judgment, ‘No Good’, and ‘No Good.’ I hid my report card right until the night before it had to be returned to the class teacher. Crying with fear and shame I then showed it to my parents. They were outraged. Not at me, God bless them, but at the teacher. The teacher could feel their wrath when they confronted her with this cruel judgment on their six-year-old daughter. What mattered to me at that tender age was that they were there for me, no matter what. Knowing that, I knew I could survive anything. I still believe that! I know I have sailed through many difficult situations with a smile, with that faith and belief. What a blessing and gift my parents have been to me. They gave my whole life a very clear message, “no matter whether I fail or pass, their love will never change.” **This is unconditional acceptance.***

**Every child needs to know that there is someone on his side, no matter what. This is what parents are for. Children can survive difficult or even traumatic events when they are sure of their parent’s presence, unconditional love, guidance and protection.**

*A friend of ours told us about a five-year-old boy in the United States who was playing in his front yard. The gate had been left open and there was a swimming pool across the road. Alarmed for the boy's safety, our friend rushed across the street and immediately closed the gate.*

*He told to the boy, "be very careful and do not go near the swimming pool for you may hurt yourself."*

*"Do you think I would do anything to hurt my precious body?" replied the little boy immediately.*

*What a blessed child! How fortunate to have been told that his body is precious! He knew this awareness is accompanied by rejoicing in the magnificence of the mind, body and soul... of who he is...*

Unconditional love cannot be earned. Unconditional love is not based on any kind of performance, looks or good behavior but because we value the child as he is. If children try to earn this love from their parents, this creates a vacuum in their hearts. Love is a feeling. Love can create all the difference to our physical, mental health, and even spiritual well being. Unconditional love encourages motivation in children and the relationship with parents and others feels meaningful and worthwhile to them.

Accepted children have a better opportunity to form healthy and happy personalities than unaccepted children. The worth of parental acceptance is invaluable. Approval and affection fortifies the children, so that they can confidently step out into the cold world without freezing. Rejected children often resort to desperate and clumsy methods to squeeze warmth from outsiders like neighbors, teachers, playmates and others in different ways. Their awkward methods, their need to gain reassurance by testing

those who are friendly towards them make them appear a nuisance to others. They get rebuffed and snubbed. The world outside becomes as cold as their homes. They want to give and receive love but they are unable to radiate to others the warmth that they themselves have never experienced. It can become a serious problem for them when they have to play other roles in life.

*A sixteen-year-old girl shared once how she was tempted to enter a physical relationship with a boy, because she felt so unloved in her own home and longed for acceptance and recognition from her parents. She belonged to a very affluent family, where there were no wants for money or possessions. The parents were extremely busy building their business empire, they never did get any 'real' time to talk to her, to listen or to understand her difficulties; they were never around to share her joys, her dreams, her anxieties and sorrows. Since the parents never really spent time with her, when she found a little acceptance and love outside her home in the form of a young boy, she could not reason the rights and wrongs of the situation. This young boy exploited her need for attention and she was scarred for life. Lack of guidance, love and unconditional acceptance from parents left her with a lot of guilt for many years.*

*When she came to me, she wanted to kill herself and did not want to face her parents.*

How often do you tell your children by word or deed that you love them? To feel secure, children must have at least one significant person to love them unconditionally as they are. Telling your children that you love them, especially when they least expect it and communicating with them through words, touch, body language or gifts is extremely important.

**To love a child unconditionally is difficult but it is life transforming.**

**This is the key to lasting, fulfilling relationships not only with children but with others too.**

**Ask yourself:**

- ❖ Do your children know that whatever be the circumstance, you are with them and will go out of your way to help and protect them?
- ❖ Do they feel that you love them just the way they are?

**Take a good hard look at yourself and examine your own worth...**

“When God was creating your child He knew from all the children of the world, your child is the best child for you, and from all the parents of the world you are the best parent for your child.”

You are invaluable. Let your children also feel that you are crazy about them no matter what, because they are invaluable too.

### *TURN OVER IN MIND*

*(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)*

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# Chapter

## 3

### *Conditional Acceptance*

Be aware of your conditional acceptance of children let them know again and again they are capable, worthy and important.

Parents should be confident of their children's capability and potential to achieve their goals in some area of life, about their ability to perform. So many mothers say, "I have to do this, I have to do that for my child... or he or she will not study, or she will not play the piano unless I sit with her." I think we discount the ability of our children to do something when we talk like this. In other words, we are actually telling the children that you are not capable of taking the responsibility, or doing something on your own. These self-imposed obligations are supported by the age-old view that children know nothing and can be properly brought up only through strict discipline."

The more we tell children 'you are capable,' 'you can do it,' they become

responsible. Parents, especially mothers feel that it is the duty of a mother to do everything for their children. This is true when children are two years old or even less. Remember, while doing this, a mother is fulfilling her needs of motherhood too. When the same children are older, she cannot blame the children or get angry with them if she feels drained or tired doing everything for them. She has taken leave of the fact that she has been performing the very tasks that her children are most capable of handling on their own. In other words, she is the architect of her own exhaustion and frustration.

**When you see something good make it a point to tell them.**

*Recently my husband paid me a lovely compliment! He told me that I organize every little thing at home so neatly and efficiently, everything is placed with so much care and order that it is easy for him to find whatever he needs. I was so thrilled and excited by these words of praise! Don't ask why or what happened to me that day, I became so energetic, so charged and motivated, I cleaned and tidied not only my shelves but cleaned all his cupboards too. I have never had this kind of energy to do this on other days, but on that day I had the energy of an entire football team. And mind you, I am not a child or a teenager but a grandmother of five.*

So recognizing a good thing in children is giving them confidence and energy to do their best.

**Make a special effort to find the good in your children. Share this with them, without adding any delay, advice or suggestions.**

I have noticed certain people especially parents and teachers saying, "Very good, there is scope for improvement... or 'you did well, next time



you need to get more marks.”

*I was having a group of teenagers for the ‘Managing Self’ program, a two day session that aims at discovering and utilizing your potential to the fullest.*

*A fifteen year old boy shared an observation with the group...*

*He said, “One should never ever get a 99% in his exams.”*

*The group laughed and asked the boy, “why”*

*The boy said with a smile, “It is a huge problem.”*

*Everybody was surprised and asked again, “Tell us how and why?”*

*The boy said then, “Try it and you will know what happens. Your parents will be after your life to find out why you didn’t get the missing one mark; believe me there is never any happiness about the 99%. The usual remark will be, “next time you must get 100 out of 100.” The missing one mark is what they will think and talk about for the rest of the days.”*

*I asked the boy, “Do you feel encouraged?”*

*He said, “No, I feel totally discouraged and unhappy. Forget the 100; I do not even want to get 99 out of 100.”*

This reaction from a parent is not even conditional and is invariably accompanied by advice or suggestions.

Sometimes we are so busy rushing from one activity to another, we do not even take time to see the good things. To recognize the good in children, parents need to have a relaxed mind and a relaxed body.

**Make a special effort to find the good in people and in children, and tell this to them without any hesitation or preconceived notions.**

Sometimes parents have assumptions or a fear of telling a good thing to their children, because parents think that when something good is told, the children will turn arrogant. There is another fear that they will not continue to work hard or do well in life if these compliments go to their heads. Remind yourself to discover the good things in your children and tell them immediately after that specific event which caused so much happiness and pride...without any postponement.

### **Let us not wait for perfection.**

While many parents realize that their children are doing very well in studies or in any other activity, they refrain from telling them immediately, because they want to wait until the child gets the perfect result. This has happened to so many children. The perfect child, the perfect mark, the perfect achievement, the perfect behavior and the perfect life...What is perfection really? When the precious children who are everything to parents do not get recognized for their efforts? When they do not experience happiness or the joy of life which they so rightly deserve? How damaging can this process be? There is a great risk ...when children do not get the recognition for their achievements, they can lose interest and eventually stop working towards their goals.

Dear parents let us find out what unique gifts and talents God has given our children. Every time we recognize the goodness in them, let us be quick to encourage and appreciate these beautiful beings from the bottom of our hearts.

*(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)*



# Chapter

## 4

### *Feelings Syndrome*

Be aware of your feelings and your children's feelings too.

God has given us feelings for our use; we must use them in a constructive way without hurting others or ourselves.

Feelings are given to us by God. Whatever God has given us is beautiful... feelings are also beautiful. It is we who give them the shades and colors. Remember, when we do not express them they become harmful to us.

**Every parent faces the problem of accepting different expressions of their children's feelings.**

As we have mentioned in Chapter No.11, Part One, when children are born, their whole personality is governed by their feelings. Some feelings contribute to the children's efficiency and wellbeing like gladness, satisfaction, love and excitement. Some feelings do not. In fact feelings

of anxiety, anger, guilt, inferiority, jealousy and loneliness hinder the functioning and the growth of the children as they grow in age. So it is very important for parents to train children and help them understand when, where, why and how to express their feelings. Usually around the age of two, when the training period starts, children are told not to be congruent, so they slowly start to hide their feelings and become incongruent. They are also confused at this time about their feelings and about themselves. Will they be loved if they are congruent or will they be loved if they are not? Children are generally loved and appreciated when they are not congruent. This leads them to a doubt about the unconditional acceptance of other people especially their parents. Children may lose their real self and start pretending by not expressing their feelings! How long can this go on? They may become confused about their identity and will always have this question in their mind about themselves. Should I act the ideal child to please my parents and others or can I be myself and please myself? Such children live their lives with painful moments and suppressed feelings within them. The hidden truths in their soul trickle out in compulsive destructive behavior forms, which create more painful truths that are compulsively expressed in a perpetual flow of pain. For many parents the quantity of energy consumed by this continuous process is so great, that most of their lives are consumed in this ceaseless negative feedback cycle. The maintenance of their children's trembling equilibrium is the sum-total of their experienced reality.

To become winners, children need to recognize the feelings that trouble them and to also deal and conquer them. Children should be taught a crucial aspect of mental health that a person should always listen to his feelings; whether right or wrong they should be heard and listened to, but should never be controlled by these feelings. To deny its presence is to live a lie. Be ruthlessly honest with yourself at this point, because if you are not, you will never succeed in the battle against feelings.

**It is an art to feel free to express emotions and to carefully balance between emotions expressed and not expressed for the purpose of love.**

When children are given the freedom to express their feelings, they begin to grow emotionally and start reasoning on the importance of not hurting themselves and others, because when you hurt someone you love, you yourself will not be happy.

It is also a very serious problem for parents when children hide their feelings and are not congruent with them. Parents will not know what is happening in their children's lives.

So a good idea will be to give freedom to our children to help them understand and experience the value and importance of feelings in their day to day life so that they understand their feelings and ours too.

### *TURN OVER IN MIND*

*(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)*

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# Chapter

## 5

### *Be Aware of Your Hidden Agenda - The Enemy Within*

Being a parent is so much easier and enjoyable when we are not unconsciously controlled by the ghosts of the past.

We are actually responsible for the destiny we have chosen to create for ourselves during childhood. The alternative this book has attempted to promote is that the awareness and a consequent willingness to understand and accept how the experiences of our life determine the choices we make. Always keep in mind that we are granted a small yet powerful degree of freedom to choose. Whether we wish to fulfill our destiny with essential joy or essential misery is the crucial choice which is in our hands. To be the driver of your life or to let the hidden agenda drive you...

**Let me state clearly what the great Gestalt Psychologist Fritz Pearl observed:**

“Every person’s life is his or her own and whatever we discover about reality as we pass through from birth to death is exactly that which we create.”

In the past few decades much has been discussed about the factors responsible for mental health and mental illness. The importance of childhood experiences in the shaping of personality is the most important one.

**Let us decide to first break free from the preconceived notions and assumptions we have gathered in the past.**

Most of our difficulties, problems and disappointments are unconsciously created by certain unwanted unnecessary thought patterns within us. By detecting and correcting them with gentle adjustments, an immediate increase in efficiency and personal happiness can be brought about in the family and in the relationship with children.

When we were younger, we were told so many things about our looks, performance and behavior. It is registered in our minds and can block us even now after all these years; even more while parenting. So many beautiful things are told to us all through life, yet it is the negative stuff that so often chooses to stay within; unfortunately they become the dictating force in our lives. The elements that went into our early development hide our real self. Unfortunately by nurturing them we not only sabotage our growth, we become a block for other’s growth too; we find it difficult to have an easy genuine relationship, especially with our children.

Many of us are aware that there are unhealthy emotional forces within us, which sometime take us in directions we do not want to go. This can apply to children and to us too. Many of these influences, ideas and experiences of our early years are good and they must not be overlooked.

But by the same token, many were not so good and we must learn to manage and deal with them.

**A message whether positive or negative that is given to growing children unknowingly becomes their hidden agenda or life's motto later.**

**Do you remember what your childhood motto was?**

For so many of us it was, ***“the better you do the more you will be loved and accepted.”***

This childhood motto sometimes becomes our mantra and rules us like a ruthless dictator. If you have identified any hidden agendas in your life, then bring them to your awareness now, to this moment. Get off the passenger's seat. It is time now to jump into the driver's seat.

One of the things I have attempted over the years in helping parents overcome their problems is to see how often they are tied up in knots of their own creation and to work through their 'Hidden Agendas'. Instead of living by the wonderful truth that it is God who is our guiding light, the Master Planner of the Universe who shows us the way, we are unfortunately influenced by the commands of certain childhood experiences. If we do not unmask our real self, we do not achieve victory. The process of unmasking will take time and may even require the help of a counselor or a Psychologist. But it is never too late. Thank God for that!

*I became aware of one of my hidden agendas when I became a mother for the first time. My daughter gave me the awareness to unmask my hidden agenda when she was only five years old. When I was a child, I was told by my mother a few things about*

*my looks, performance and behavior. This had registered deeply in my mind creating a few blocks, which bother me even now sometimes.*

*For example my mother would say, "It is not a good thing for a girl to spend so much time on herself especially looking at herself in the mirror." As I was growing up, every time I wanted to dress, attend a party or dinner, it became very hard for me to spend even a little time dressing. I felt I was wasting my time. I would also experience a feeling of guilt when the woman in me wished to pamper my vanity.*

*When I became a mother, I tried giving the same message to my elder daughter, but she did not pay much importance. When I saw that she was spending so much time on herself, we both went through some challenging times in our battle of understanding each other.*

Thank God I have learnt to recognize that the fears, the hurts, unwanted messages and negative experiences of life can sometimes stay within, and encroach into our lives even when we are adults. We are controlled by the experiences of the past that have never really been recognized and dealt with.

I understood before it became too late that my mother in her own way had meant well. Her advice to me was a typical reflection of her times ...but that did not mean every tradition had to be continued. What really matters today is that I don't have to dump the discomfort of my growing years or my growing pains on the next generation. It is more important that I understand that it is ok to think differently and to create the change for the changing times. Values are timeless but a certain amount of flexibility makes life worthwhile.

I know after more than six decades on this planet, even now the hidden agendas threaten to raise their ugly heads sometimes; these are the moments I need to do some heavy duty unmasking in order to evolve into a complete person. It takes extraordinary courage, unimaginable dignity and incredible determination to listen to that small inner voice over the roar of the old hurts. In every single case when people listen to it, they are rewarded beyond their wildest expectations.

### **Now, time for some more questions:**

- ❖ What are the Hidden Agendas that control our lives?
- ❖ Are we the drivers of our lives or are we being driven by these unhealthy emotional forces?
- ❖ How do we deal with these forces from our past, which tend to influence and control our present attitudes and reactions?

Memories cannot be burnt or erased. To forgive is possible, also easier than to forget. What matters is how to not allow the past to become a dangerous weapon that can damage and destroy the present. Let us together make a conscious decision to lovingly gather the treasures and gifts of the past and offer them as a present for the future.

### *TURN OVER IN MIND*

*(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)*

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# Chapter

# 6

## *Spousal Correlation*

To win someone, you must be winsome.

The problem of perception, assumption and our reaction to each other can explain what is happening or how we are managing our relationship with the spouse.

Children feel great when they see their parents happy and healthy. They want their parents to love each other and stay together. When parents have some misunderstanding, the children feel miserable and insecure. This affects the growth of the child spiritually, mentally, physically and socially in a very negative way.

*I know a family where the father and mother were not talking to each other because of a recent misunderstanding. Suddenly there was no fun in the house, everyone everything had become*

*very quiet. There were two children in the family. Everybody in the house including these two young kids was moving from one room to another without making any noise. The scene changed in two days when the parents had made their peace and had started talking to each other. Oh yes, things were back to normal! The house was now lit up with laughter and excitement. It seemed like it had come alive again. Their little daughter noticed the change in the atmosphere. Delighted that the parents were once again sitting close to each other, were communicating in a very friendly and loving way, she made a comment to her parents,*

*“Why can’t the two of you be like this all the time?”*

*The parents were so taken aback by this remark, they took a decision that day **not to fight or have arguments in front of their children.***

Children notice and can tell a lot about the way a father and mother behave and relate to each other. It is even more obvious by their words, touch, glances and expressions. Small issues carry surprising significances.

### **Another important point to remember ...**

When children are not happy at home because the parents are unhappy, if the parents are constantly fighting because of the problems in their marriage, it disturbs the children’s entire personality and concentration very seriously. So parents, please make it a point to create a healthy, happy, nurturing and comfortable environment at home for your children to perform to the best of their potential and ability.

*In a family, a husband and wife were experiencing a lot of stress, as their marriage was going through a lot of pressure and difficulties. There was a lot of bitterness and anger in the relationship. The husband blamed the wife and the wife blamed*



*the husband, sometimes the argument became so bad that they would shout and use foul language. So often the shouting would end in physical abuse. The couple had two children. Watching the frequent violent and loud exchange between their parents, their initial reaction was fear. These scenes would silence the children completely; the misery made them withdraw into a private shell of sheer hell.*

*Whenever the elder son sat down to study he found it difficult to concentrate because all that he could remember and see before him was the fight that had happened. It had such a strong negative impact on his mind that the text books on his table, the homework he had to give in next morning at school did not matter anymore.*

*The elder son was brought to me by the father and mother and they told me, “My son was doing extremely well in class, but now we do not know what has happened to him. He is not studying well and is getting very low marks.”*

*I asked the parents, “What could be the reason for this?”*

*The father quickly responded, “We do not know, he has no problem as far as we know. We give him everything he needs.”*

*When I spoke to the elder son alone, he said with a lot of embarrassment and hesitation, “I am not happy at home so I am not able to concentrate.”*

*I asked him what could be the reason for this. Again with a lot of reluctance he said, “The regular fighting at home between mummy and daddy is very frightening, and I am fed up”*

Parents cannot do the studying for their children but they can surely provide the basic facilities of a happy and peaceful atmosphere for the children to feel comfortable at home, in order to focus and concentrate on their studies and other activities too.

**Remember parents, building and maintaining a rock solid relationship with your spouse is the foundation you can give to your children. These children are going to play the same role in their lives in later years.**

*Recently, when I appreciated a young husband who was taking wonderful care of his wife, he spontaneously replied, "This is exactly how I have seen my father take care of my mother." What a gift his father has given not just to his son and his daughter-in-law, to the future generations as well.*

**Be aware not to build your whole life around your children:**

A very important point to keep in mind is to take care of your marriage. Do not give the last priority to your husband or to your wife. Go out for dinners, movies, meet your friends, attend parties and functions with your spouse, have fun **without feeling guilty**. Make your time together a priority. This will help you spend more time together and understand each other better which will help you in your parenting too.

Children can decide on the strength or weaknesses of a marital relationship in a family, just by observing their parents. Children can figure out that dad and mom have their own life in addition to their life with their children. Children are important no doubt, but your marriage must last longer than the parenting years. And if the marriage is happy and healthy, the children will be too. Even if your children are very young, you can still take time to take care of your marriage. I specifically encourage parents to keep at least a small part of their lives to themselves. Are there exceptions to this rule? Yes of course, when the children are sick, having exams or any other important activity in the school or outside.

Loving, caring parents spend a lot of time with their children. However as loving partners in life, they also need to spend enough time alone and

with each other, with no children in sight... They keep their marriage glowing and sparkling... with laughter, love and enjoyment ...

Focus Point: Keep your marriage alive.

TURN OVER IN MIND

*(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)*

[illegible]



# Chapter

# 7

## *Effectual Communication*

“Have the right word in your heart and on your lips,  
We must select the right word for the right occasion.”

Communicate with your children. Words are threads with which children and parents are woven together.

A time tested method in understanding your children is to communicate with them. Use precise words when you communicate with your children. They will be frustrated when you use too many words to confuse and manipulate them. It is so important to encourage a free and frank exchange of views between the parents and children. Good parenting calls for simple unqualified statements that do not confuse them. Children prefer, appreciate and understand ‘Straight Statements.’

❖ “Come to me, Ramsingh.”

- ❖ “It’s time you put away your toys Kavita.”
- ❖ “Ramesh, please do it now.”
- ❖ “You will solve the problem.”
- ❖ “You can think”.
- ❖ “You can do things well.”

**Children are confused and are not able to understand when parents are:**

- ❖ ‘Not straight’ while communicating to them. Imagine a little child’s confusion when her mother says, “Mummy would sure like you to come and sit on her lap when you’ve put away all the toys darling!”
- ❖ Or if for instance Asha asks “Mum, can I go swimming with my friends?”

And the mother’s replies, “Okay, you can this time.”

This means that the mother does not have the time to think this out or come to a decision.

A straight answer would be a ‘yes’, or a ‘no’, or ‘I don’t know if it’s safe,’ ‘I’ll have to find out but I don’t have the time to do this right now. So for now, the answer is no.’

‘Yes’ and ‘no’ make sense to a little child. The parents reduce the impact of the words when they are caught up in a lot of hemming and hawing using words like,

- ❖ “Well, oh, I would say you could, if you’re careful.”
- ❖ “Yes, I suppose it’s all right, but no, you’d better go ask your father first.”

The word ‘No’ by the way communicates a lot more information to a

child. The same ‘No’ also loses its impact when it is preceded by “How many times do I have to tell you?” Angry words like ‘leave me alone’, ‘get lost’ are more harmful and negative than a simple ‘no.’

**The Tongue has the authority of life and death. Think before you speak.**

As with anyone and everyone, we should think before we speak to children also. How many parents are still struggling for apt words while communicating with their children? Harsh words carry as much force as a physical blow, for words have the potential power to destroy or build children’s personality. Words can heal or bless, blister or beat. Bitter words carve deep emotional scars.

**The words of anger which we use with our children will not be unnoticed or easily erased.**

*I can still recall the words of one of my teachers who made me stand in a crowded classroom and said something that pierced my young heart, leaving a deep scar. The hurt has gone now, forgiveness has dealt with its residual effects, but the incident is still stored in the memory bank of my mind. I am not able to erase it.*

Try not to be rash in communicating with your children; do not be hasty in uttering anything without giving it a thought.

**“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you, but do this with gentleness and respect.” – 1 Peter 3:15 Holy Bible**

**Talk to your children in a way that they also want to talk to you.**

*Anjali was amazed when her fifteen year daughter Neelu told her that she wanted to go out with her friends for the whole*

*day. I personally thought it showed marvelous maturity on the daughter's part. But the mistake Anjali made was she had told her husband about the outing without giving enough details, without informing her daughter. He doubted the daughter and believed she was not giving the exact information to the mother. When Neelu came to learn of her father's suspicion, she was naturally very upset. She sent a text message to her mother saying she had thought this was just between the two of them and she seriously doubted if she could ever trust her mother again.*

*Here the mother had made the mistake of not clearly communicating with her daughter; not clarifying her doubts, not getting the relevant details of the program like with whom she was going? Where she was going? Who else was joining them? What time would she be back? And so on.*

Let us figure out how to have a clear understanding, so that we can pave the way for meaningful conversations with our children.

### **Children need to know they can confide in you.**

If your children have to worry about you sharing what they say or do with other people, you can bet they won't be talking to you much. They may hide what's going on in their lives. Sharing with someone like your sister or a friend is a support system, but it is not a good idea to talk about everything your children do or say, especially in front of them. It is definitely not a good idea to have others take over your role and dictate or lecture to your children.

### **Acknowledge that you have said too much, communicate clearly that you realize you have hurt them and you feel miserable about it.**

When you wish to earn the lost trust, when you realize you have hurt your children, apologize immediately. Do not keep your lips zipped. Lecturing



does not help and children do not like long advice. The main mistake parents make is not shutting up when they should.

*A fourteen year girl told her mother that a boy in her class wants her to be his girl friend. Even as the words entered the mother's ears, she began a lecture without waiting to listen to the whole communication. The girl had to swallow the rest of what she wanted to say and listen to her mother's lecture and advice for a full ten minutes. Finally, when the mother actually stopped, she said, "Mom, I have already told the boy that I am too young."*

*Had the mother just held her breath and listened to the entire communication first and spoken next, she would not have drained her entire energy or her daughter's patience and time so much. Also there is a strong possibility she may have destroyed what could have been an in depth discussion between the two of them. Instead she had discouraged the daughter from talking about the meaningful issues and incidents that were happening in her life at that time.*

No doubt every one of us has a need to vent out our feelings, but remember even children need to vent out their feelings too. When we parents jump the gun and get into advice mode, we send negative unspoken messages like, 'I don't have faith in your ability to handle this problem on your own.'

Children simply want their parents to listen very carefully when they face any problem. They will let you know what they need, if there is a need at all; it could be merely a listening ear or even a suggestion. Though they find it difficult to express, you will come to know through their words, body language and behavior, when you listen to them from your heart.

When your children do or say something you don't agree with, it is easy to blow up, but the last thing you want to do is to react in a way that will discourage the children from sharing with you again. When you are having a heart to heart talk, you will feel and experience many emotions - anger, frustration, fear, even tears. At this time it is ok to tell your children 'I need to think about this, give me some time.' Sometimes if you over-react, go back later to your child and admit that you didn't handle it the right way. Then tell her what you would have rather said. Children know their parents aren't perfect and admitting it increases your credibility and respect in their minds.

### **In their hearts children do not want to upset their parents:**

A face to face conversation is always best, especially the important ones, but if your children spend more time texting than talking, take advantage of their technology obsession. According to a study, 53% of teens think text messaging has improved their relationship with their parents, simply because:

- ❖ Texting gives children more space but allows parents to keep in touch as often as necessary.
- ❖ Children get to edit their messages before sending, so there is less chance of saying something they will regret later.
- ❖ Children are more likely to alert you about things through texting than they would if they had to call all the time.

### **“A soft tongue will smash the bone”**

It is said that the ultimate reality is silence. The word that cannot be altered is the divine word - silence. Be wise to watch your words. If the temptation arises, choose not to say anything. It is better to hold your tongue, to hold your peace than to say something you will regret later. It is said, “Even a fish would not get into trouble if it keeps its mouth shut.” Teach your children to hold their tongue too. It is a good thing to remind

ourselves of this as well, because children are watching and our words often reflect the condition of our hearts.

**Communicate with your children keeping the following points in mind:**

- ❖ Be precise
- ❖ Use words they will understand
- ❖ Speak at their level
- ❖ Treat them with dignity and respect
- ❖ Do not explain too much
- ❖ Have regular communication
- ❖ Both positive and negative must be communicated

When you first start asking your children for specific information, they will invariably start complaining, calling it an ‘investigation’. However they will also be on alert because they now know you will be asking questions.

**There is a transfer of wisdom from parents to children when wise words are used. Unwise words have the opposite effect.**

The bottom line is to keep the communication lines open with your children at all times. If you do this, you will find parenting an easier experience. Sit down with your children and have a face-to-face, heart-to-heart talk about how you feel and listen to their feelings. When parents make a direct statement with a primary message that you care and understand his feelings, it goes right into the hearts of children. Even the toughest child who receives such a powerful message will melt in no time.

You can and must give the freedom and opportunity to children to talk about things directly and openly concerning them, because you care and you wish to help and understand them. When parents understand

their children's difficulties and problems, sometimes children shed tears. This means you have touched the heart of your children and they have understood how much you care for them.

**Explore your communication levels with these questions:**

- ❖ How do your children feel about the way you speak and act around him or her?
- ❖ How does your behavior affect your children's sense of worth and self-esteem?
- ❖ Would your children say you are a support and blessing to them...or that you are overbearing and embarrassing?

**Think about it.....**

*TURN OVER IN MIND*

*(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)*

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# Chapter

## 8

### *Listening Sensitivity*

**Listen to your children so that they feel encouraged to communicate with you, because listening shows that you care for what your children have to say. It shows that they are important to you.**

Listen to the words, the music behind the words, the body language, to the thoughts as well as to the silences. This surely helps the parents understand their children and to maintain a good relationship with them. Sometimes the facial expressions, verbal messages, the attentive ears and eyes can convey all the wrong information. Various physical movements and expressions are attempts to communicate feelings and emotions like anger, fear, and conflict. Even when children are silent they may be telling the parents a lot about themselves and their feelings. Parents should be clearly sensitive to these non-verbal signals. By listening with the ears, eyes, and mind, by picking on the signals we get the full

message. To remain alert to signals, verbal as well as non-verbal can be quite demanding and exhausting. Parents do all this because they love their children dearly and they are willing to do anything for them no matter how exhausting or tiring it is.

When we are born, we are born with a sense of hearing only, so most of us hear. Listening is an art which develops later. It is achieved by constant practice and effort. We do not listen to what others say because we make assumptions based on our past experiences, on what we just heard; these are often faulty because of inadequate information.

One of the usual problems in a parent - child relationship is that people have lost touch with the art of listening. We are so busy talking, thinking about what to reply and what to say next, we forget to listen. Yes listening is becoming a rare commodity. Little wonder why parents seek psychiatrists and counselors so often! These visits are termed as 'bought listening' because the parents pay somebody else to listen to them and to their children.

### **What is listening really?**

- ❖ Listening is an expression of love.
- ❖ Listening is not obeying.
- ❖ Listening needs full attention.
- ❖ Listening solves the problems.
- ❖ Listening makes the other person feel light, free and relieved.
- ❖ Listening is exhausting.
- ❖ Listening takes time and energy.
- ❖ Listening is tough, talking is easy.

The Lord has given us two ears and one mouth so that we speak only half what we listen and listen twice what we talk. Listening is the finest art and one of the finest recognitions one can ever give or receive.

When parents make a point of listening to the needs and feelings of children, they develop a sense of trust, acceptance, being loved, wanted and appreciated. Effective listening helps children to heal and grow. Listening plays a crucial role in having an understanding relationship with children.

When parents do not listen to their children, children also do not listen to their parents. It is a pattern. When children understand the importance of listening from their parents, they too start listening to them.

**There are three kinds of listening. Let us explore and become aware of what kind of listeners we are:**

### **Superficial Listening:**

This is when I pretend to listen, but I am not really listening. I may nod my head but I may not really pay attention to the person, to what he is feeling and saying. In my mind I may be simultaneously thinking of something and planning for something else.

### **Selective Listening:**

A second kind of listening is when I listen to certain parts of what the person is saying and ignore the rest, which is selective listening or choosing to listen to a part of it. In this kind of listening, I listen to what I want to listen to or in something which interests me, which I am concerned or curious about.

### **Deep listening:**

In this I do real listening, serious listening. I give my total attention, listen as much as possible to all that the person is saying and to all that the person is trying to communicate through his verbal and non-verbal ways. I listen not only to the thoughts, but also to the feelings, not only to the words, but also pay attention to the body language. When I listen to the

music behind the words, as well as to the silences, I find and feel that this type of listening helps me understand the other person better.

There is another kind of listening. It is known as listening with the heart. When we have a ‘heart-to-heart’ talk, these are moments of intimacy and openness, when there is a mutual commitment and trust that goes beyond language.

### **To which category of listeners do you belong?**

So do you think parents, we can take a decision to “be quick to listen, to be slow to speak, and slow to anger,” to enjoy a great relationship with our children?

Touch others by being an empathic listener, appreciating the good in them and understanding other’s feelings.  
Treat yourself with care. Listen to God’s voice and your own too.

### *TURN OVER IN MIND*

*(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)*

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# Chapter

## 9

### *Good Vs Responsible Parenting*

The greatest handicap that a child can suffer is to be raised by ‘Proper Parents’, always-trying-to-be perfect.

As parents we mean well for our children. Performing all their tasks and duties all the time is not the answer to achieve this. Forcing the kids to swallow everything on the breakfast table before school every single morning, simply because you believe only you know the size and capacity of the stomach of your child ... now this is a dangerous pattern to set. And once set, it is really hard to change. The more parents do for their children at various stages, the more they are babying them. This develops blocks about certain aspects of life for children. These blocks are the very ones that must be gently removed if we want to become complete parents and find balance in our lives while relating to our children.

**Let us not confuse ‘Good Parenting’ with ‘Responsible Parenting’ and understand the difference between these two.**

**DIFFERENCES BETWEEN**

<b>‘GOOD’ PARENTS</b>	<b>‘RESPONSIBLE’ PARENTS</b>
Good parenting leads to behavioral problems due to too much criticism, judgment and control over their children. These parents make all the decisions for their children and suffocate them.	Responsible parenting helps children blossom because these parents love, honor, trust, listen, allow self-monitoring and in the process teach their children self-control and self reliance.
Good parents are well- intentioned. But their behavior robs their children of self- confidence, self-esteem and independence. These parents do not allow their children to learn from natural consequences.	Responsible parents believe that parental support is about supporting their children, giving them freedom to learn and grow in a natural way. They understand that there are natural consequences to everything.
Good parents believe that their children’s behavior reflects on their competence as parents. So they don’t allow their children the freedom to learn from their own experiences. These parents are afraid of failure for their children.	Responsible parents do not feel guilty when their children misbehave; they are subtle in their methods of giving freedom to their children, but they do help them feel free. These children when they become adults will be more inclined to initiate activity and creativity.
The excessive efforts on the part of good parents fail to achieve what is truly desired, leaving serious dents in the personality of their children when it is exposed to excessive efforts. For instance, irregular toilet habits occur with children whose parents lay too much emphasis on toilet training at a very early age. Many kids who stutter and stammer owe their speech difficulties to their parents’ anxious efforts in insisting on ‘proper talking’ and ‘no stuttering’ in their early years.	Responsible parents handle their children in a relaxed calm way and children enjoy growing up in such an environment. Responsible parents believe training their children is not as important as letting them know and understand who they are. Children learn as they grow. There is a specific time in every child’s life when the natural growth takes place, if it does not happen they consult a doctor.

<p>Good parents over protect their children from every upsetting and distressing experience. These children grow up to be scared children with a lot of phobias when they grow older.</p>	<p>Responsible Parents gradually and consistently encourage their children to deal with more of the struggles of life. Such children are less fearful later on. These parents know that short term inconveniences will have long-term benefits.</p>
<p>Good parents continually watch and comment on their children's behavior. These children do not have much courage and confidence to face the world on their own. Such children are reprimanded in front of others and are never allowed to disagree with their parents.</p>	<p>Responsible parents guide but they do not impose or force their thoughts or views on their children. Such parents are naturally respected and trusted. The children quickly respond to the voice and words of their parents.</p>

Do you run behind your children ruining your back and knee muscles every time you bend over to catch them, petrified they would fall on their rear ends while they are learning to walk? Is this exactly what you are doing even now? Even now when your children are in their teens?

So parents, may I suggest you sit down alone where it is quiet and there are no distractions. Listen to your inner voice, to what your senses and your heart are telling you. You will get the answers whether you come under the category of **Good Parents** or **Responsible Parents**.

I am sure you will be willing to change if there is a genuine need for change. Even now you are doing so much for your children's growth. Why not add an extra point today if you need to do so?

*(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)*

[illegible]

# Chapter

# 10

## *Quality Time Structuring*

Be aware of the time you spend with your children  
The important ingredient is the quality of time, not quantity of time

Spending time with children is the most worthwhile and enjoyable time in a parent's life. Why did you want a baby in the first place? Think about it. Was it to obtain a new possession? Or did you wish to create a life that will bring joy, to make a family? Ideally these are questions people should ask well before they plan to bring a new life into the world.

In the busy pace of modern life, it is easy to overlook the need to build a positive friendship with your children. Actually this does not take as much time as we may think. As I said before, the important ingredient is the quality of time, not quantity of time. When you feel and think that you are reasonable with your children, believe me your children too

become very reasonable with you. They will not be unreasonable in their demands because they get to understand your difficulties too. An hour of positive relationship-building is worth more than several hours of conflict time.

Be aware that you and your children jointly plan the way you will spend your time together. Each child needs to know that it will have his own special time with you. Some parents just don't know how to play and have fun with their children, they think having fun means being silly and not productive. Spend some time with your children doing what both of you enjoy. If there are children with different tastes, you can allocate the time with them as long as each of them feels that he will get a special time with you.

So often both parents agree on the mother working outside home after the baby is born. There is nothing wrong in leaving the child in proper care. But in such a case during the hours they spend at home, parents should spend their time with the child in the best and the most useful, positive and enjoyable manner. How we put that time to the best use with the child and for the child is more important than how much time we spend with the child.

A reasonable and fair division of responsibilities between mother and father is rare. Super mom tries to pull in the main load. The result is a scarcity, not only in finance, but also in her health, energy and emotions. Does the executive father, the swiftly ascending corporate executive really cook for the family 2 or 3 nights a week or even less? Does he spend his days vacuuming, doing grocery shopping, taking the children to the dentist or arranging out of school care? Even if he does, chances are that everyone becomes stressed and harried. For full-time working women, the addition of housework makes it an almost unbearable work load. In such circumstances, with the resultant tension the mother finds

it impossible to look after the children, to give them the necessary time, love and attention. As the pressure builds, the children sometimes become a source of bitterness. To many of these parents who have come for help I have often asked, “You wanted this bundle of joy, didn’t you?”

A day in the life of a parent with small children is a mixture of fury and amazement, frustration and excitement. It can also contain a sizable portion of fantasy and failure. A reasonably healthy family life can evolve if there are sufficient funds to buy the personal services of a caring constant devoted nursemaid. But where is she to be found?

It is important and it really matters who takes care of the child. What impressions or words will be recorded in the little person’s mind? Will it be those of the mother or father? Or of someone else who has provided most of the care in the significant, impressionable years from birth to five?

In the changing scenario of the 21st century, Grandparents who used to live with their children and grandchildren as part of the family are increasingly not doing so. Grandparents played an important role in modulating the psyche of the children during the early part of transforming the children’s personality.

Of course, many women and men are today doing a admirable job raising a family and working outside the home at the same time. Not all ‘latchkey children’ seem to suffer. Other factors apply too.

*A young director proudly proclaimed in his office one day that he was a new father. He shared with his colleagues that his wife and baby were doing fine and would arrive home from the hospital the following day. He also said, “My wife works as a senior manager in a big company” and then added assertively, “But she is taking time off to be with the baby. She does not*

*have to return to work for six weeks. And after that we have to see what we are going to do for the child. Hope it will be ok!"*

The father is thinking about the wife and one can see the planning for the job and career. What about the child? That is my concern. Will the baby be OK? The answer is, probably not.

In many families, there is often no choice. Both parents have to work outside to fulfill the needs of the family. Both parents have invested years in their careers that provide a substantial measure of fulfillment and self-esteem. Must all this be deprived when they have children?

A lot of research has gone into this area of both the parents working and leaving children at home with some body else. It is believed that the minimum requirement is that one parent, preferably the mother should be at home or be constantly available to the child, until the child has made a decision about his capacity to understand written communication. Children make such decisions about the time they are in the first or second grade, sometimes later, occasionally earlier. They may not be able to read a lot, but parents will know if the children are 'good readers' or not by this time. The Parents will also know if they 'can't read'. Reading is the primary tool for the children's independence: to read instructions, to communicate and to do their homework by themselves.

A good six years off for a baby is minimal. Six weeks off for children is unfortunately short of the ideal. Considering that one-half of children's knowledge is to be attained in the first four years of their life, it is of great importance that they are maximally cared for, guided, instructed and loved during those years. What will be the children's experience when the parents are rushing to meet deadlines every day? Impatience, hurry, absence and a strange feeling of changing 'parents' while children are in the care of baby sitters and questionably qualified nursery attendants?



The recording in the children's mind can otherwise be tenderness, availability, support, appreciation, safety, reliability, nurturing, teaching, patience, a helpful and cooperative father-mother relationship, lots of hugs and kisses, tons of fun, along with the powerful message to the child, "I belong to them, they enjoy being with me."

In almost every home today, both parents work. They leave the children in the care of crèches, day-care centers, servants or relatives which affect their mental make-up or emotional stability. To make up and fill the gap that children miss

when both parents are away on work, it is important to keep in mind the quality of time we spend with our children when we are at home.

Children need love and care. They need to be listened to. They need participation. Many of the current problems children face are due to lack of intimate contact relationship between parents and children. Often this is because both parents are working and are frequently away from home. When they return, they find little time to spend with their children. Many of the complaints that children bring to their parents in the evening are handled improperly. Often they are pushed aside as being irrelevant or over-magnified.

Some fathers believe that if they do not work the extra hours they cannot provide every luxury to their families, especially to their children. We definitely need to strike a balance here.

*A busy father was postponing a family outing for a few months. Finally when the daughter nagged him about it, he got very angry and said, "You have a car and driver, why don't you go with your mom and sister, I am very busy. You know I want you to have a good life, it is important I have to work very hard for this."*

*The daughter lost her temper too and said, “Daddy I do not want your car or driver. I am asking you to come with us, I want you Daddy. I don’t want to have a good life without you, I want time with you.”*

The materialistic good life with all its attractive comforts and luxury will not bring intimacy in our family life for which children openly and silently long and ask for. Many parents confuse love with working hard for material things. Believing that these things are so essential to their well-being, they begin to literally live for these comforts. There is no end to man’s wants. If too many resource-draining possessions are driving us towards excessive working, then one way to restore intimacy and balance in our family life might be to do a hard reality check and decide for ourselves what our priorities are.

**This is a question which I throw to all parents, “Are nonliving things more important than living things?”**

*In a family, the wife and children had just returned home after a summer vacation. The wife found the house very untidy and dirty. She immediately ran to collect the cups and other items in the living room to take them into the kitchen. The husband who was in the same room was anxiously waiting to talk to his wife who had just returned after the holidays, wanting to spend time with her, to tell her all that had happened while she was away and to also learn how she and the kids had enjoyed the holidays. He was irritated with this rush of activity the moment she had stepped in, but he did not say anything. Suddenly when the wife looked at him, he smiled sarcastically. The wife asked, “What happened?” The husband replied, “Nothing, I am just thinking how important and lucky these cups are, at least you are touching and paying so much more attention to them, whereas*

*you have not even enquired how I am or how I managed without you all these days?”*

There is no such thing as impossibility or inability in this respect. Anything is possible if we consider it our top priority. If we think tidying up the house and removing cobwebs is more important than playing and taking care of the children, we will naturally tend to give our time to that chore and leave the children uncared for.

*In addition to working full time, a young mother of two children was also completing a Master's program. No doubt she was always busy.*

*Whenever her children asked for something she would say, “I have no time for this now.” The children stopped communicating after some time.*

### **So often simple pleasures are replaced by serious priorities!**

It is true we can't stop what we are doing the moment the child wants to talk, but when you as parents say, “Not now, I am busy,” you are sending a message that he or she is low on your priority list. Naturally your child will stop coming to you. If you cannot stop your work immediately, a better option will be, “can we or let us talk about this later.” Fulfill the commitment with a one-on-one time, **well before** the child reminds you. If you do not do this, he or she will think twice about coming to you again. In fact children may bottle up their feelings or turn to friends for sharing. So often the advice from them may not be accurate or even the best option, because after all the friends are children too.

Our child is of paramount importance, our top priority. If our child ever seems particularly stressed or angry, let us drop everything and give the child our total undivided attention. Nothing else is as important as this precious bundle of joy!

*(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)*

# Chapter

# 11

## *‘Fly the Nest’ - Actuality and Reality*

Be aware of an unexpected realization in your life of your  
needs versus children’s needs

In every parent’s life a day comes when there is a sudden realization, ‘My child is no longer a child!’

This is an exclusive moment of jubilation and apprehension. It is a joy to learn our seed has grown into a sapling. There is also hesitation for we can no longer protect him from the rough winds outside the home. No longer can we stand between him and the world, or shield him from life’s dangers. This realization teaches us that the child is now a grownup, capable of facing and must face life’s inescapable challenges, unaccompanied by his parents.

However some time or the other, there is a conflict in every parent’s life.

The reason for this is as parents it is our need to be needed and wanted by our children, and as children it is their need not to need us. This conflict is real. We experience it every day as we help those we love and adore to become independent of us. To let go when we want to hold on requires the utmost generosity and love. Only parents are capable of such painful greatness. God has filled these large hearted souls with so much strength, empowered them with so much love. We must see this hour when we let go our children as the finest hour in our lives.

Parents! Are you preparing yourself for this moment, when your children will leave home? This is a reality we can never escape!

*When our elder daughter left home to do her MBA, I was just not prepared for her to leave home. We took her to the railway station and in a little while the train moved. I had to soon drop her hand and in a few moments I could not even get a glimpse of her sweet face. I cried all the way back home and for several days I thought my heart would break every time I began missing her.*

*Slowly I realized it had been our joint decision to send her out to study. Didn't she leave with our consent and blessings? Why the pain? Why this sadness? I began to wake up to the fact I was not prepared to face the reality that I needed to manage and carry on without her.*

*That was the day I took a decision that when it would be time for my younger daughter to leave home, I would prepare myself well ahead. It was not easy, but I was a little more experienced now and this helped me enormously.*

*Soon the time came for my younger daughter to leave home for college. My husband and I accompanied her to the hostel to see her room at the University. We met some of the students who*

would be her future friends. The moment had come when we had to leave and she had to stay back. I hugged her, kissed her and said, "God bless you, you take very good care of yourself. I will talk to you soon."

She looked at me and said, "Mummy, aren't you going to cry even a little bit?"

I said, "You are prepared and so am I. We have discussed about this at home. So I am ready, aren't you?"

She said, "Yes Mummy," with a smile and tears in her eyes.

All of us were very emotional, busy controlling the tears in our eyes. But surprisingly I was not as sad as before. I knew she had to complete her studies to fulfill a glorious destiny and of course this is what would benefit her and me too. The moment had come. I knew I needed to face it with courage and dignity. I am happy God helped me and I did.

Dear parents, it hurts tremendously when this phase of parenting life is over. It hurts a lot. 'Preparation' is the key word. This new journey in children's life is a part of the natural process of growth. God has designed us this way and we have to accept the facts of life. Start preparing right now.

Similarly when parents spend twenty or more years raising their children and suddenly one bright sunny morning... children leave home after their wedding. The pain is even more when it is a girl who has lived in her parent's home for more than twenty all odd years. One fine day you conduct her marriage and the next thing you know, the new bride doesn't even talk about the home in which she lived these years of her life. All she can talk about is the home in which she has hardly lived for twenty days. What is this sudden magic that has happened to make her talk about her new home as my home, my kitchen, and my living room, all in a matter of a few days? How does this happen? This is the mystery of life.

Giving autonomy does not come naturally to us. Let me tell you what comes naturally to all of us... to want, to hold, to protect, to control, to advise, to be powerful and indispensable to our children. But the law of nature has its own plan for every creation...

In nature we can see how birds lay eggs, watch their little ones crack open the shells the mothers ferociously guard for days on end... one day as always flapping their wings in goodbye, they fly the nest... This is the law of life... natural, beautiful... cannot and should not be prevented or changed.

TURN OVER IN MIND

(Your situational inferences, thoughts and action emanates)

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## *Think It Over* *A Few DON'Ts*

I give here ten tips for parents. These tips have been formulated after meeting, listening and talking to many children. They are the fruits of experience with children of different age-groups. They are the words of a child to a parent.

- ❖ Don't spoil me. I know quite well that I ought not to have all that I ask for. I am only inspecting you out.
- ❖ Don't be scared to be stiff with me. I prefer it. It makes me feel more protected.
- ❖ Don't let me form bad habits; I only have you to depend on in the early years of my life, only you can help me choose my lifestyle.
- ❖ Don't correct me in front of other people. It will help me if you talk to me quietly and in private.
- ❖ Don't badger. If you do, then I shall have to guard myself by coming out to be a deaf or I may even blow the roof off with my anger.
- ❖ Don't close up my queries. If you do, I will stop requesting you and will search information from someone else.
- ❖ Don't ever advocate that you are faultless or flawless. I am taken aback to learn that you are neither.
- ❖ Don't ever think it is beneath your dignity to apologize. An honest apology makes me feel warm, making me want to love and respect you.
- ❖ Don't overlook I enjoy researching. I would not be competent to get on without it. So please, try to put up with it... at least for now.

**Do read these points from time to time and think about it.**

# *Being 'Change' in Changing Times*

## *The world is in a constant state of change.*

Perhaps the most elusive bit of wisdom that we must all eventually acquire if we want to be competent especially as parents is the fact that the only effective way to create the change in anyone's life is to change yourself. You can never change someone else.

Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones who have been waiting for change. We are the change. We need to change. Only we can change ourselves.

When a problem exists, we need to change ourselves in order to solve the problem. If we remain passive and believe it will go away on its own, it will never be solved.

The most important point is to make ourselves aware that we cannot change anyone; we as parents can only help children to become aware of what is right or wrong, but we cannot decide for them to take final decisions for the decision is always theirs, even the decision to change has to be theirs.

Any success involves change. Change is necessary because what we are doing in our lives is obviously not meeting our needs. Accepting change is the secret of Proactive Parents. When children refuse to change, the parents take the pain to change themselves. So often seeing the change in parents, the children may also take a decision to change.

Changing one's mind, behavior and attitude is not sin. In fact it grants permission; it tells the child 'change is all right', 'change is good', because change fulfills our unfulfilled needs and wants. We are equipped to meet the new circumstances and conditions around us, we will fulfill our dreams and hopes because we have the greatest power ...to change ourselves.

Though change is a continuous process for successful parents, remember working on even one change consistently can turn a whole system around. Oh! And do not change everything at once. One change at a time works better!!

## *End to Begin*

Dear parents, I think I will now stop. It seems that I may have been successful in adding some confusion in your minds on *Proactive Parenting*.

There is nothing new in what I have said. The Bible, Shakespeare and Freud in their different ways have said it all, much more than this. Since the time language emerged, many have spoken the timeless truths about human nature. So is the case with the relationship between parents and children too.

The real life drama in which parents and children are engaged every day does not give time for practice or careful thought. However, with these strategies we now have very clear directions to which we can return, so that we do not lose our way completely ever again.

In reading this book, you will find many suggestions on what you could do differently with your children – perhaps too many. It is not my intention to make you feel that everything you are doing is wrong, nor do I intend to overburden you with an idealized, exemplary way to raise children. I assume that as a concerned parent you will read this book, take what seems applicable and change a thing or two in the way you raise your children. And I admire you for that.

Another important point to keep in mind is that even a single change can have a reflective effect. In a book of this nature, it is easier to talk about parenting skills as if they are as simple as learning to swim, but this is not the case at all. Nearly all the skills I have presented are interconnected. Also learning one skill will inspire change in other areas too. In other

words, emphasizing just the points of parenting suggestions in your home will have a snowballing effect. Once you start, things just keep changing for the better. Though tough, hard, and difficult, I know parents will do it because you are capable and your love for your children will propel you to do so.

**Whatever we decide today:**

Let it fill our values,

Let it cover our thinking,

Let it sink into our hearts.

Let this become our whole personality, for then we achieve  
our goals.

As a student of the Behavioral Sciences, I am tempted to compare the parent's role with that of a psychiatrist or a therapist.

Dr. Eric Berne, the father of Transactional Analysis, gave three principles for therapists or counselors to keep in mind when working with their counselees:

Here I take the parents to be the therapist or the counselor, the children the counselees.

❖ **The first concern of all healing arts is not to injure or hurt anyone.**

When children get hurt, they do two things. Either they sulk or rebel. There is also the problem that they refuse to think at that time and do not understand the importance of parental love, care and concern. Thus they are not willing to change. They rebel and continue repeating the same mistake again and again.

❖ **The second task is to locate the healthy areas in each personality.**

This helps to nurture children, and to strengthen their potential. In this way they will have the energy to develop other potential areas in them. When children are recognized or told a good thing about themselves, they feel good, they feel energized: this energy and power comes from within. They are willing to do what is right or good for them and for others, because they are now able to think and reason things out. This gives them the strength to change according to the situation and to be a success in life.

❖ **The third point to keep in mind is that neither the therapist nor the counselor cure anyone.**

They only treat their counselees and patients to the best of their ability, being careful not to hurt, finding good in them and then waiting for God and Nature to do the healing.

Being open to other options, being willing to experiment with our child raising methods and beliefs will show the kind of flexibility that ultimately serve us and our children well. Life is not a test. Life is to be lived as best as we can, as creatively as we can, as fully as we can and as respectfully as we can. The same is true for our efforts as parents.

Dear parents, don't be afraid to experiment. Please take this to heart. Nobody gets anywhere without experimenting. No matter what your own 'filters' tell you, children are amazingly flexible, loveable and reasonable.

By all means try something different, especially when you are anxious about a particular parenting dilemma. Sometimes anything is better than business as usual. Believe me, even changing an everyday routine can release the unconscious; just about enough to allow you to generate new

and effective solutions to the actual significant problems in your life, especially if you are also open to new ways of ‘seeing’ your children, the world and yourself.

No doubt parenting is a hard job – a continuous challenge. You will face good and rough weather, your children will turn bitter and even hate you sometimes. During these seasons of trial, just bear in mind that if you have never been detested by your children, you have never been a parent.

Your Parenting won’t be perfect, your children won’t be either, but you will be a parent with intention. No one is going to grade you every New Year’s Eve on your parenting skills. No one is keeping scores. You don’t have to do it perfectly. You can’t do it perfectly. You will make mistakes, some of these mistakes will lead to temporary heart aches, but again heartache is a necessary growing and enriching part of life. Nobody gets through parenting without some pain. Accept this truth and you will find the experience of being a parent much easier. It is true, it is worth it.

One final thought dear parents, let us understand one point that we are not only parents. Let us also start thinking of ourselves as human beings who have a great potential for growth and change; we play different roles in our lives too. We often do not live up to our own beliefs and it is not possible to do so. Let us be kind to ourselves and to our children too. Remember, you have the responsibility to protect and guide your heart. Don’t give up and don’t get discouraged. Let your heart be your guide, it holds all the answers and treasures.

I sincerely hope you have benefited from this book. I wish you the very best as you begin and continue one of the most rewarding experiences of life through...

*Proactive Parenting* - THE HAPPIEST HARDEST JOURNEY OF ALL.

*"When God was creating your child He knew from all the children of the world, your child is the best child for you, and from all the parents of the world you are the best parent for your child."*

"Join Lily on a unique voyage in the ocean of a parent's heart.

Cruise the sparkling waters of timeless wisdom, simple truths and sweet insights.

A preventive care medicine and happiness prescription in one ...

a welcome antidote to today's multitasking over stressed 21<sup>st</sup> century parent ... for every mother and father in search of a treasure more precious than any ever found...

Get ready to open a new door to embrace a new way of life!"

*- A parent / business woman /*

*artiste*

"...we could and should enjoy parenting our children, just as or even more than we enjoyed being a part in creating them. 'Proactive Parenting – the happiest hardest journey', perhaps becomes the hardest, only when we unnecessarily cross the boundary beyond being the happiest – happily interested in their growth and well-being, enjoy being responsible for providing all the needed support-system and environment and ultimately feel happy to see them grow.

On the contrary, major problems crop up, only when:

- Parents assume unnecessary responsibility/authority to unduly discipline/control and in that process make a 'bonsai' of their child rather than help in tending and blossoming it to be a full grown tree out in the world.

- Parents expect their children to dream and realise their parent's dreams rather than their own REAL – and let Him work in and through them to accomplish His great purposes, as per His unique personalized divine designs and plans.

- Ultimately, when their children grow even beyond their parents' imagination, parents do not have the courage of conviction and magnanimity with a special sense of humor to admit and tell them and the whole world, that their children are what they are, 'not because of us, but in spite of us!..."

**Dr. George Neelankavil**

Chairman & CEO

Consortium of International Consultants & Administrators