

RAISING OUR CHILDREN RIGHT

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*"The surest way of making life 'hard' for our children, is to make it 'easy' now"
(Roosevelt)*

Parents living in fear

A 37 year old educated lady is undergoing treatment for intense anxiety at my clinic. Anxious, as she lives under perpetual threats by her only daughter, a 15 year old, to commit suicide if her demands are not immediately met. The present demand is for a 3G mobile phone!

This is the sad state of parenting in Kerala today - parents living in constant fear of their children. Prompted by many ignorant 'experts' who have been advising our hapless parents that "fathers must be friends" or that "children should be given love"! To them 'love' means never saying 'no' to children's demands; and the experts threaten that the child is likely to suffer from psychological catastrophe in later life if you frustrate him by saying 'no' in his childhood!

Permissive parenting is in vogue now; indulgence is stylish parenting! There is a resentment of controls and limit- sets. There is a terrible mixing of dangerous Western thoughts in our time-tested concepts of Parenting. Discipline has lost its venerable place, as its meaning is distorted by 'experts' in both visual and print media.

Parents who inculcate discipline and self-discipline would be proud parents who raise well-behaved but relaxed children, children who are stable, and in control. Children who are self-reliant and responsible. And above all, in my opinion, children who have self-respect, and are therefore dependable.

Lack of a 'parenting model'

As the pace of societal change accelerated, the concept of family and parenting has become chaotic. There are no role-models for parents; except for the tips in the media, the younger generation of parents has no clue as to what the right parenting style is, or which wrong. Therefore, there is lack of any uniformity across homes on 'Parenting Plans'. And between the two parents, there is a pathological lack of consistency of approach.

In many Kerala homes, young parents resort to permissive parenting. It is the easy path. There is over-involving and then over-indulging. Initially, in younger children, this relationship may do well. Freedom for children not tied to responsibilities later results in 'children-run' homes. There are many households where even 'parent-bashing' goes on, and parents do not know where to seek help.

Intolerance as a social tragedy

Intolerance is the tragedy of our times. Children who do not learn to tolerate the frustration when their needs are not immediately met, children who have not been taught to tolerate criticism - they become emotionally unstable as they grow up. Many of them look for approval all the time; they may be 'angels' outside the home, but at home they can be 'devils' if their demands are not met then and there, or when they are criticized.

The Western habit is of 'slathering praise on their kids for the lowest of the tasks!' Indian parenting has emphasized positive criticism and highlighted the prime place of 'karma' or hard work. The reason why parents offer approval to children modulates their self esteem, and the way they feel about themselves. Parenting that places value on 'hard work' produces children who will not breakdown in the face of criticism or failure. Many parents tell me they are afraid of criticizing the children because they think it will wither them. It is, on the other hand, such children who become vulnerable and 'emotionally brittle'. Parenting is not to protect children from difficult tasks and adversities. The young parents who listen to Western tips go too far in insulating their children from discomfort and distress. Such children grow up to be fragile, needing instant gratification. Such children are the tragedy of our times, intolerant of parents, intolerant of teachers and colleagues, intolerant of rules and regulations.

Disciplining in parenting

'Discipline', as many of our 'correspondence experts' are wont to interpret, is never synonymous with 'punishment'. In parenting, discipline is a Teaching and Training process for the children, to impart mental and moral training for self discipline in later life. Self-discipline and Dependability express as Culture and Character in adults. Both rewards and punishments are used to discipline. The lopsided notion about punishment is misinterpretation about the consequence of physical punishment. This is so very unfortunate, as these misinterpretations have given rise to catastrophic western concepts about 'Child Rights' that are being aped here by several journalists and high profile social activists. This is our highway to doom - the child in the West extrapolates this right against restraints, to end up in shooting his school mates!

Discipline can be totally free of punishments - physical or corporal. But it needs firm, judicious parents. Disciplining children should be without yelling or screaming, without pinching or beating, without bullying or bribing. However, most of our stylish but 'angry, young parents' finally end up doing all of the above!

Regimentation without punishment: Hierarchy

Hierarchical Parenting Strategies created traditional family discipline. Ordinarily, hierarchical strategies - whether in the home, or in a nation, or in any organization - enable to dispense with the need for any form of punishment. 'Hierarchical Parenting' is a 'package' that I teach the families that consult me. This traditional parenting is by parents keeping a 'personal space' from children. The 'father' is friendly with the child, but not 'friend' as the experts interpret to us.

Keeping this 'personal space' teaches our children Discipline without having to punish, Tolerance without having to indulge, and Respect without ever having to yell or scream. Children who grow up in such calm

environment in a hierarchical set-up spontaneously learn tolerance to frustration, tolerance to criticism, and tolerance to rules and regulations. It teaches children the strength of internal discipline or 'self discipline' which has been the traditional Indian expectation from all parenting.

Pathetically, such parenting is rebuked and ridiculed by many in our times, because it is not permissive and not "stylish". Importantly, it is not acceptable to the metropolitanism of our media because it is inimical to the West's concept of discipline and family!

Chua, the tiger mother

Those who trivialize our ancestral, traditional parenting concepts to root for the American, non-hierarchical 'father- being-friend' philosophy must read this book 'Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother', published by mid January in USA. Amy Chua, a Chinese mother and Yale Law Professor, mother of two teenage children talks in this book about how shocking and horrifying many aspects of Western parenting are. Chua describes the way to successful parenting the Chinese style using firm hierarchical strategies. And lo! the Wall Street Journal does a pre-publication of the book and calls it "Why Chinese Mothers are Superior"! According to 'Time' magazine, "her book has become the incredulous talk of every playground, supermarket and coffee shop". In two weeks of arrival in bookstalls "it started a ferocious buzz with the online version read more than one million times". The permissive pendulum in America must be ready to swing the other way to traditional oriental parenting.

Tim to find our 'Middle Path'

Traditional Indian wisdom has always taken the middle path - not too aggressive, never too indulgent. The 'theory of the personal space' with children will outlast all social theories of parenting - not too strict, neither lenient. Constant, Consistent Firmness.

A lot many vocal pseudo-scientists propagate through the media many theories in parenting to legitimize the slide into permissiveness; but there is no need for us to become 'stylish' New Yorkers! The Family and Prudent Parenting are our last and only hope to preserve our social sanity in this whirling world.
