

Good Parenting

Today, within our society, crime is escalating at such an alarming rate, that every citizen must become very concerned. And, what is exceedingly frightening is that the age of the seasoned criminals is drastically lowering. It is common to read and hear of crimes being committed by teenagers – teenagers who should be in school. School children are confronting security guards and teachers, fighting among themselves or being actively involved in gang warfare. Police officers now have to patrol schools. Can you imagine this?

I wonder if this is the dream of parents. Do we as parents nurture our young children so that they can become a part of this environment? I am so sure that the answer to this is an emphatic 'no'. This gives rise to a very important question. Are children today better off than children of yesterday? In some ways the answer to this is yes and in other ways, the answer is no.

I say yes to this question because today, children have so much more and are exposed to so much more. Today, children travel to foreign countries, have computers and computer related games, allowances, gadgets and so many other things that we could have only dreamed of some years ago. Today, technological advancements have provided children with so many things and parents, in an effort to have their children in the latest fashions spend fortunes on designer clothes and shoes. It is common to hear parents boasting of the things they buy their children. Compare this scenario to when we were growing up. As children, we didn't have any of these things and we were quite happy.

I say no, however, because today, despite having all these fashionable items, children are still not fulfilling the dreams of their parents. School children are running into problems with school administration and the law. Families are breaking down (high divorce rates) and children are the ones who end up suffering.

Many years ago, as children, we did not have much of the things I described. Hand-me-downs were the order of the day and simple, cheap toys were our main forms of recreation. Do you remember tops, marbles etc. But what we had then was the strong family ties. Mummy and Daddy were together and we all knew who was in charge. If we wanted something, we would ask and wait for an answer. No was no and there was no way we would ever challenge our parents. We dared not even think of such a thing.

Yet still, we had a wonderful time growing up. I am sure many of you can share many fond memories of picking mangoes, spinning tops, playing hoop and so on – all inexpensive yet rewarding games. We could remember going to the cinema (once in a way) and making such a big deal about it.

For the next few minutes, I want you to reflect on your days as a primary school child. Tell me if these situations did not occur in your home -:

- Your parents sending you to school everyday.
- You could not make excuses for wanting to stay at home.
- You could have only stayed away from school when there was a valid reason.
- You had to respect the teacher at all times.
- You would be severely reprimanded if ever your parents had to be called in by the teacher.
- You parents left the teacher in charge of your academic development.
- Parents insisted that children demonstrate good manners at all times.
- Under no condition was a child ever allowed to engage in the use of language unbecoming of a child.
- Teachers and other community members had the authority to correct you – and such people had your parents’ permission to do so.

Today it is so different. As a teacher with some thirty years experience, I have witnessed a change and sometimes I am so appalled with the things I see and hear, that I wonder if parents are accepting these changes as if they are right or are they simply letting them be because they themselves are too busy and pre-occupied with many other things.

Today, in school, we are finding-:

- Pupils are using language that is absolutely unacceptable
- Pupils show no respect and regard for the simplest rules
- Show little respect to elders
- Pupils find it so easy to be far removed from the truth.

The list goes on and on. Many times, parents have to be called in and many times, I have parents who would challenge the validity of the discussions that we are having. Do you believe that some adults would take the stories of children over the stories of a teacher?

My dear parents please understand that today, as a principal, I am concerned with what I am seeing. It scares me to think what would happen if we do not attempt to address this situation. In the following pages, I will attempt to discuss just a few of the points and I hope that I could awaken a consciousness that would make you realize the importance of the situation and cause you to act appropriately.

Language

It is now becoming quite common for pupils, both boys and girls, to use language that is totally unacceptable. Numerous reports are made to teachers about students using obscene language in schools, both in and out of the classroom. On other occasions, teachers have intercepted obscene notes that are passed on from one child to another. The notes are shockingly graphic in its contents and sometimes, the drawings on these

notes leave little to the imagination. I shudder to think that pupils under the age of eleven can conceive these thoughts. This situation raises very important and relevant concerns. Where are these children acquiring such language – is this type of language spoken at home, on television?

Parents must realize that under no condition, must children ever engage in the use of this type of language. It is quite possible that these children are in the company of older children or they may be unsupervised in the types of television programmes they are viewing.

Parents, I urge you to please monitor your pupils very closely. It is obvious that children would never use this language in your presence, and if ever you are to know, it would mean that someone would have to tell you. If you receive such complaints, investigate them thoroughly and ensure that these habits are broken immediately. Please instill the right attitudes and values in your child – and do this from a very early age.

Punctuality

Punctuality is one trait that must be inculcated in pupils from a very young age. It is a habit that will eventually become very important in adult life. In a work environment, management does not accept excuses for late-coming. Employees are reprimanded for tardiness. In some cases, employees' services can even be terminated if they are habitually late.

Children must be taught to respect time. If school begins at 8.20 am, then the child must be here for that time. It is improper and impolite to enter when school is already in progress. Of course, there might be the odd time when a child is late with a reasonable excuse.

Some parents suggest that they are late due to the traffic situation. But, if the traffic is bad, then a reasonable suggestion is to leave home a bit earlier – a considerate person would make the necessary accommodations in their personal schedules to ensure that he/she is punctual.

Please understand and help your children to understand that time is important and respect for time is equally important. In addition, any child is excused if he/she is late with a reasonable explanation, once the late-coming does not become habitual.

Dress

A child is identified by the uniform that he/she wears. A person who wears a uniform must wear it with pride, as the uniform represents the institution which he/she attends.

Children and parents, more so parents, must know that there should not be variations to the uniforms. For instance, if the uniform states a white pair of sneakers, why purchase a black pair? Wear what is stated. Additionally, children must be taught to keep the uniform clean and tidy. Parents must monitor the uniforms and ask children to explain why the uniform is unusually dirty or soiled. Make them accountable for it – they are not too small. In some cases, parents can even reward the pupils when they keep their uniforms neat and tidy.

I am sure that as adults, you can relate to the fact that we take a lot of time in dressing. We want to look our best and we go to great lengths to achieve this. In the same way, let us teach our pupils to look clean and tidy – and they can start this from a very young age. Just a little observation about dressing out of school – especially girls – Parents, please dress your children in clothing suitable to their ages.

Truth

Yes, Truth. Are you surprised that I am talking to you about children speaking the truth? Being truthful at all times should be the nature of human existence. This facet is the foundation of building good character. As parents, we need to develop this noble value in the lives of our children. Teaching and encouraging our children to speak the truth at all times confer upon them, a sense of fearlessness.

Why do children sometimes lean towards distorting the truth? Children sometimes make mistakes and they become fearful of the consequences that they may face from their parents or teachers. They may try to hide their errors by twisting the truth a bit. Parents need to encourage children to always speak the truth, and the consequences that they would face would be fair.

Today, as teachers, we are experiencing many children not totally speaking the truth. Children look at teachers straight in their faces and speak the untruth. But please remember that when children lie today for their teachers, then, tomorrow they will lie to their parents. As the children grow up we must learn to trust them – and we can only trust them if we know that they are speaking the truth. I have found that pupils distort stories and when they tell these stories to their parents, most of the times, parents believe what the child reports.

As concerned parents, listen to what your child has to say, make sense from it and then discuss with the teacher. When pupils know that parents are not gullible, they would be more inclined to speak the truth. To what extent do you as a parent encourage children to speak the truth? Sometimes, parents tell children to tell the teacher untruths. Tell the teacher that you stayed home yesterday because you were ill (when the truth is that the child was not ill) ; tell your teacher that you didn't do the homework because

When you give your pupils excuses that are false, then eventually they will make false statements to you. Are you preparing them to be untruthful? If a situation arises, let them speak the truth and we at school will be flexible enough to handle such situations. These situations seem innocent and sometimes comical, but what are the hidden messages we are sending. We are teaching then to speak the untruth to get out of sticky situations. Build character by speaking the truth.

“Wherever there is exemplary behaviour, wherever there is righteousness and sacredness, wherever duty and truth are adhered to, there will be victory.” said Shree Krishna.

Respect

Respect is one of the values which are essential for guiding our society in the right direction. It is a major pillar in character building, which should be developed in every child, for our children’s attitude reflects our very own attitude towards respect.

As children, we were taught to be always respectful to our elders. Now, it is our turn as parents to do the same. We must not only instill but demonstrate the importance of respect for God, oneself and for each other.

Your child spends most of his/her day at school and he/she must learn how to be respectful in his/her approach and interaction with peers and more importantly, with teachers.

An ancient Sanskrit phrase goes –

“ Acharya devo bhavo” which translates – treat your teacher as you would God. In today’s society, most parents would scoff at this statement. But, do you believe that you treat your teachers with the respect that they deserve? Your child’s teacher is the one who assists in shaping the minds of children. This includes inculcating proper values and habits such as discipline, honesty, respect, etc.

In order for children to respect teachers, parents must themselves, show respect. When parents come to school to meet teachers, they must be dressed properly, and all interaction must be in a respectful manner. Many times, these discussions are between the teacher and parent and there is no need for the child to be present. In this way, if the parent is in disagreement with the teacher, the child is not privy to these events and so, whatever is discussed between the teacher and the parent stays there. Issues must be dealt with diplomacy and mutual respect.

Sometimes, parents speak negatively and with aggression, in front of the children. Is this a good example? Children will eventually do the same. In our keen desire to make our children more confident, we mistakenly urge them to become aggressive and argumentative.

Children must always know that their parents, the teachers and the principal all have a good working relationship. Avoid making bad comments about the school in the child's presence. Unless you instill respect in your child, he will never develop a desire to learn. Set him on the road to success immediately by simply teaching him to respect his teachers and elders.

Tolerance

As adults, how many of us have at some time or the other run out of patience while waiting our turn in line? How many of us break traffic lights because we refuse to wait? How many times have we grumbled and complained of having to wait on long lines at banks, airport or the supermarket? Similarly, children are sometimes as impatient as adults. A child wants to use the washroom which is being occupied by another – instead of waiting his turn, the child bangs on the door insisting the other child must hurry. The same happens at the water troughs.

Some psychologists (Ronnie Stern, USA) suggest that many adults are killing their kids' abilities to be sociable with kindness. "It's adults who need to learn the word NO or our children will expect the world to say YES to them." It is important that children not have all their needs met instantly. Children who never have to wait for anything at home expect the same treatment at school, and, of course, they are disappointed.

A lack of tolerance is also caused by children with specific learning disorders, for example Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). They are hyper and cannot concentrate for long periods. Waiting on their turn in class is not for children in this nature. Children also model their behaviour after the adults around them. There is a new trend in education towards the collaboration of ideas and co-operative learning in classrooms. This means that children must work together to discover important ideas and concepts. If children are unable to wait their turn while working in groups there will be a breakdown in the learning process.

Many social skills are also developed when children learn to be tolerant – respect, leadership, and discipline. Tolerance also leads to successful family life. The trend in industry at present is such that prospective employees are required to be team players with the ability to function efficiently as members of a team. There is no room for people without tolerance. It is quite possible that a mitigating factor in our spiraling crime rate is a lack of tolerance as criminals are impatient and intolerant.

Parents and teachers can help develop tolerance through these simple tips:

- Even when children are very young, subject them to little doses of waiting.
- Model tolerance and compassion in our everyday behaviour.
- Emphasize that violence is never a solution to problems

- Teach children that all people deserve to be treated with dignity, fairness and respect.

“It is alright for your children to feel special but don’t give them the idea that they are so special that they can get away with anything. Yes, they are terrific but so are lots of other children.”

Dr. Paula Bender

Responsibility

Responsibility is the ability to act independently. As adults, we face many responsibilities and in most cases, we act responsibly each time. But when does an individual start to become responsible? Responsibility begins at a very young age. In a previous presentation, we have already discussed how children are responsible beings, but today we are noticing a trend where parents are controlling and making all the decisions for the child. The child is therefore having little opportunity to act independently or responsibly.

Children must have a sense of self-direction, self-responsibility, self-determination, self-control and self-evaluation. Such qualities are not developed accidentally but must be nurtured and deliberately fostered by parents and teachers. Parents need to make their children aware that they are responsible for many things.

Some of these things include:

- Being regular at school
- Being punctual at school
- Being responsible for one’s appearance
- Completing home-work assignments
- Meeting deadlines
- Remembering messages to others.

Manners

Our manners are the ways in which we behave towards others. They reflect our upbringing. Good manners are very important in our children’s social success. Children are not born with good manners – manners are acquired as we grow. It is our responsibility as adults to teach our children and help them acquire good manners.

Rephrasing our children’s words helps them to learn good manners. When they state their feelings in a less than polite way, help them to say the same in a more acceptable way. Sometimes instead of condemning them by telling them what not to do, we could teach them to do what we want. For example, “Don’t shout in the classroom,” can be changed to, “Please use a softer voice.”

If we teach children the rules of good manners, we will more than likely experience pleasant times with them.

Conclusion

Today, as parents, we are faced with the serious challenges of cable television – the language, violence, adults’ scenes are common throughout the day. Music is also a very serious issue as some popular songs are punctuated with obscene lyrics or describe violent scenes.

Children are being less supervised by parents today, as both parents are caught up with jobs etc. In addition, the divorce rate is high and many children grow up in a single parent home. All these are critical issues facing our children as they grow up. Please work with your teachers to help improve your child.

Parenting is no easy job but the rewards of good parenting are eternally gratifying.

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