

Parenting: A Learned Skill

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Raising a child from infancy to adulthood is a daunting task, a skill parents need to learn. It involves not only promoting the physical development of a child but taking care of a child's emotional, social and spiritual needs. Parents mostly realize the need for education (taleem) but the all important aspect of training or tarbiah, i.e. inculcating positive behavior in a child. The latter is founded upon religion, family, and cultural values and relationships, which is the prime responsibility of parents or guardians. It involves raising a child in such a manner that he or she can become a good human being in addition to receiving factual education.

We often confuse the two, giving our children ta'leem (education) when they need tarbiyah. Formal Education (Tailem) is teaching our children the basic facts of life in school which often consist of sharpening the simple rote memory, Training (Tarbiyat) is developing the ethics and moral values in children, developing the art of conversation, instructing table manner, teaching prayers, highlighting duties to once neighbors, relatives, etc., most are not taught routinely in school. Building relationships with our children is the most important aspect of child-rearing. It has both emotional, social, and spiritual angles.

In Arabic, the term "al-tarbiyah" encompasses involving and contributing to the physical, psychosocial, and spiritual development of children. This involves continuous nurturing of body, mind, and soul. Tarbiyah involves the development of a child's physical, mental, emotional, and reasoning sense. This requires continuous guidance with love and care until the child is independent to play his/her role in society.

This remains the prime responsibility of parents and cannot be outsourced to another adult.

Factors that influence the relationship between parent/guardian and children include community support, cultural influences, parental relationship and temperament, previous experiences, and the educational and intellect of parents.

There are four types of relationship between parent and a child: Each involved a standard strategy based on psychological constructs

Secure relations: The child in this category is dependent on his parents or caretaker. He believes that a person will always be there to protect him. This is the most powerful relationship.

Avoidant relations: The children in this category will not get a sense of security, instead they learn to take care of themselves and thus appear too independent. The relationship they build is often too weak.

Ambivalent relations: The child in this attachment is also insecure. The children notice what behavior got their parent's attention in the past and use it over and over to get their attention. The child in this category is always insecure.

Disorganized relations: Parents are inconsistent with their attitude toward children. Children as a result are confused as to what to expect from their parents. They quickly learn to predict parental reaction and learn to do which acts will make their parents react in a way they like to.

Types of parenting styles: commonly parents exhibit four parenting styles during child-rearing

1, Authoritarian Style: such parents are strict disciplinarians, rigid in their rules, demanding but not

responsive, and expect absolute obedience from their children without question.

2. Authoritative Style: in this parents respect the opinion of their children and are responsive. At the same time, they are demanding, firm, and disciplining their children with affection without the use of power.

3, Permissive style: in this parents have little control over the behavior of their children. They are not demanding and impose a little restriction on their children and are inconsistent in disciplining them. Their threats of punishment are empty without enforcing limits. Role reversal occurs with the passage of time.

4. Detached style: In this parents are neither responsive nor demanding. They are unaware of the need for affection for their children and or careless or lack tactics to effectively discipline their children.

Do parents need to be taught parenting skills? Yes, everyone involved in child care and child-rearing needs to learn parenting skill which is acquired skill. The most common caretakers are biological parents but often, grandparents, guardians, elder siblings or other family members, persons working at an orphanage and other similar institutions, trusted with the care of children are also required to learn the basics of parenting skills and hone their skills as the child grows.

How parenting skills can be developed. There is no one size fit all formula, parenting need has to be tailored to the need of the child. At the same, the basic values to be taught cannot be overruled.

Few essential parenting tips are:

Communicate with child. Talk about everything and ask about everything. Give space and share space. Let them not fear you but love you. Keep communication open and be aware of their child's activities. This will set the tone for their relationship in foreseeable future.¹

Stay connected with your child and develop in them the ability to assess the child's behavior and notice any recent change in them. Creating a reward-oriented environment focusing on the positive outcome and responding to a child's problems with empathy is the key to good parenting.

Stay consistent, Set up regular routines, and remain consistent, this will reflect in developing positive behavior in children.

Be Flexible: recognize the child's needs and adapt to the changing needs of society. Help the children by giving clear directions and offering opportunities to choose and negotiate.

Appropriate boundary setting is most essential that parents to set up healthy boundaries with their

children. This can be reached with parents and child both to an agreeable limit and solution.

Discipline: this is a very important aspect of setting a healthy parent child relationship. Finding the solution to the child's problems, conflicts and behavior are more important in building a strong relationship than punishing children in order to teach.

Built a supportive social network for your child: by reaching out to the community and utilizing the resources available to them.

Focus on child's developmental needs in the early years of their life. This is most important, Play with your child. Take them to new and exciting places e.g. parks, museums, historical sites, etc. Give them small tasks and reward and praise them for their achievements.

Parenting in various stages: Parenting begins well before the birth of a child and continues well into adulthood.

Pre-pregnancy: The mother begins nurturing a child during the antenatal period. Studies suggest that from the 5th month onward, a baby is able to hear sounds and is aware of motion. Studies have shown that the baby is familiar with the parent's voices in utero. Research also shows that antenatal during the seventh month onwards, external factors influence the unborn baby's sleep habits. Planning to have a Family, spacing between birth, selection of one's place of delivery and the doctor, etc. are some aspects of child care that need to be thought and discussed with the potential father and the family.

Pregnancy: Decisions taken by parents, their lifestyles, health, and dietary habits of the mother can have a positive or negative impact on the child. Management of the pregnancy, clinical acumen of physician, hospital environment, and options as regard mode of delivery is important. Parents should ask the obstetrician about the frequency of their visit and who will provide covers for them in case the obstetrician is not available. Learn all about your backup physician as well as your primary doctor. Select maternity or hospital within reach and make arrangements for transport beforehand.² Prepare mother for breastfeeding, immunization, and baby's other anticipated needs, etc.

Newborns: Their basic needs are food, sleep, comfort, and cleanliness. A baby requires feedings frequently this may disrupt the parent's sleep so especially prepare the mother for this and give as much support to her as possible.

Breastfeeding is the only recommended source of feeding. The latter is on demand by the newborn

which is very often, in a normal weighing baby. Babies also require frequent cuddling and caressing. Recognize different types of baby crying representing different needs such as hunger, discomfort, loneliness, etc.

Establishing bonding and attachment is the foundation of the relationships between parent-child throughout life. Lack of attachment does serious damage to a child's health and well-being. Studies showed that children with secure attachment in early childhood will have long-lasting relationships and higher self-esteem. On the other hand, children neglected during early life exhibit more behavioral problems towards authority figures. Studies showed that children with secure attachment have the ability to form successful relationships and have higher self-esteem in adult life.

Toddlers (1-3 years of age):

Toddlers are more active and independent in doing simple tasks by themselves. They need help to explore the world around them, they seek greater independence and become frustrated when they do not get their way of doing things. They need parental support to build their vocabulary and develop their communication skills. At this stage, they begin to understand social etiquette such as being polite.

Tantrums are common at this stage. It is quite normal. It is an essential step to their development. They will learn through experience. Parents need to be aware of such behaviors, threatening children or punishments is not helpful and will make the situation worse. Guide and teach the child in establishing basic routines such as washing hands before meals or brushing teeth.³ Give children responsibilities according to their age. Parents should teach the child how to do things by themselves rather than doing things for them

Preschool: Children at this age subconsciously need you more than anybody else. Parents are role models for them. They expect the pampering you showed to them when they were two or three years old. Sibling rivalry is at its height. Parents need to be more conscious of the needs of such children. They often require more attention, the show of affection, and cuddling. Parents are too exhausted and occupied after the arrival of a new baby in the family that they often overlooked the emotional need of the older children.

Young Children: Children are more independent at this stage. They are beginning to build friendships. They learn to make decisions for themselves. They demand constant attention but learn to play independently. Parents should help their children by encouraging social interactions proper social behaviors

by involving them in activities and household work. Imparting responsibilities and explaining consequences of their actions e.g. Value of money. Proper parenting at this stage will be met with lesser problems when the children mature. Parents who are consistent and fair with their disciplining rule and who openly communicate and offer explanations to their children often find they have fewer problems with their children as they mature.

Adolescents: At this stage, children are beginning to establish their identity and are developing the interpersonal and occupational roles that they will assume as adults. Parents must treat them as young adults. Although adolescents look to peers, parents remain influential in their development. They need to keep the communication open. Adolescence is a time of high risk. New-found freedom can result in drastic consequences. Peer pressure is high. Parents often feel isolated, but they should make every effort to be aware of their adolescent's activities, and be ready to provide and offer guidance.⁴

Parents need to build a trusting relationship with their children and plan activities together, keeping their promises and spending quality time with them. Don't constantly remind children of their past mistakes rather, praise their strength and listen and talk to them.

Adulthood: Parenting is a process. Support is needed well beyond the adolescent years and should continue. An adult child may need financial support or advice which can also include providing an inheritance during life or after death. The wisdom and perspective about life given by parents benefit their children throughout life. Becoming a grandparent has many similarities with parenting. Roles can be reversed when adult children become caregivers to their elderly parents.

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