

Like you, every parent has a dream – that their children grow up to be good human beings. This means about the same for almost all parents with a few variations. Common aspirations include success at studies, in professional life and in marriage.

Even though becoming a parent is easy, living up to being one is tough, or seemingly difficult. Being a mother of two wonderful boys, age 25 and 24, people often ask me and my husband how we managed to raise them to be responsible, kind, honest, loving, giving, energetic and enthusiastic, fun, driven and considerate. Thinking about what we did as parents has helped me come up with the LLLLEDD principles we very naturally practiced.

1. LOVE THEM – Every human being has a natural tendency to love. This giving of love allows us to actualize ourselves. We enjoy cuddling, carrying and caring for a baby; protecting the toddler; guiding the adolescent; facilitating the teenager and allowing the adult to fly. Parents must freely give off their love without any holds bar. Even when you are upset or angry with your child, make sure that your love and concern comes through. It is equally important to show this love physically. The lap must always be available, as there is no other place in the world that is more soothing and comforting. The hug, the cuddle, the arm on the shoulder, holding a hand, stroking the hair, all are expressions of love. Parents must also demonstrate their love, respect and trust for each other. The fastest and best way to teach your child kindness, compassion and generosity is by expressing the love you have for your spouse.

2. LIVE YOUR VALUES – Children learn through observation. You may give a child long lectures, most of which will not be retained, let alone be lived. Sight is the most developed sense in humans. What you hear, you may forget; what you see, the act, will be understood; what you do, you will remember. Choose the values you wish your children to grow up with. If you want them to learn to be honest; live an honest life. If you want them to be loving, give freely of your love – for everyone and everything equally. If you want them to be respectful, show your respect for everything and everyone. Never, never go against these values. For example, if you are lecturing your children on the value of honesty, but yourself resort to lying to the dhobi or on the telephone, this incongruence will create dissonance between the spoken word and action (koal aur fale) and confuse the child. This dissonance leads to doubt and hinders the process of building self-confidence. Living on values is what is called integrity, and an individual, a family, an institution or even a country without integrity is nothing. Later in life, this integrity will be the source, cause and root of success, professionally, in married life and as

the next generation of parents.

Too often I have seen parents teaching and preaching virtuous values, yet when it comes to making major decisions in life, they resort to actions based on “what people will say.” The “people say” factor is mostly centered on economic and status considerations and have little to do with the virtues being preached. Again, this creates dissonance and puts integrity at stake.

3. DO NOT COMPARE – Never tell your children they are lesser than or better than another. This will make them either arrogant or complexed, as there will always be better or worse than them. Help them decide on their own personal standards and then set new ones to exceed them. In the same spirit, never label your children – don’t call them lazy, loud, stupid, etc. Such judgment will make your child withdraw from you. Labels last forever. They determine behavior patterns in adulthood and carry on even into middle age and later. As an adult, the person is not able to get over the label and often ends up blaming the parent for having instilled such labels so deeply that they do not feel in control.

4. ENCOURAGE – Trust your children – know that they, too, have a way and that, too, is right. Do not force your way on them. The fact that their way is different is the sign of evolution and is their natural process to adapt to an ever changing environment in which the next generation has to learn to thrive. As long as what your children do does not harm them AND anyone or anything else, that act is justified and must be encouraged. Even if their ideas go against yours, do not let your ego come between them expressing themselves. If it is not harmful, it is right. Again, what is harmful and what is not, is relative. That is where parent-child discussion starts. The child has to sell the rationale to the parents and parents have to sell theirs. Again, leave ego out and don’t judge. And don’t ever say, “Because I am your parent, you will listen to me.” Your child’s respect for you will take a nose dive. By just thinking about reasons for your arguments, you will learn a lot about yourself. And this learning and growing together – parent and children – is the best parenting and childhood experience.

Besides, any achievement, no matter how small, please encourage your children. Show them your pleasure and how happy they have made you – without the feeling that they owe it to you to make you happy. You do not have to buy them a gift for any or all achievements – just that encouragement is good enough. Another caution – do not make your children dependent on encouragement. The source of motivation must come from the action and not from your

encouragement. There is a delicate balance between making them dependent on encouragement, and yet to continuously reaffirm their thoughts, intents and actions.

**5. LET YOUR CHILD TEACH** – A normal situation is that parents do all the talking and the children have to listen. This presumes that parents have more experience, more wisdom, more reason. That children know nothing, and knowledge has to be poured into them. Your true wisdom as a parent is tested by NOT talking. Your role is that of a facilitator. You ask the questions, provoke the child's mind and let her/him seek answers. Have trust in the fact that the child, too, is bestowed with infinite potential. She/he may not have experiences yet, but has been, while in the mother's womb, through the entire human evolutionary process. Any perception that has ever been lived, is in the child's mind and can be accessed. Questioning is the processes of accessing this information. When children learn to command their own sources of information, their confidence in life is strengthened.

Again, you can affirm their thoughts and actions by doing what they do. Play cricket, football with them. Get your hands dirty in the sand and mud with them. Play in the rain with them. Climb on jungle jims, walls and trees. Teach them everything - from embroidery, stitching, cooking, typing, dancing to using the drill machine, changing car tyres, hosting guests, shopping, paying bills – but do it with them – hands on; regardless of whether they are a girl or boy. Never say, “you are a girl and cannot do this or that.” Don't confine your child because of your, or so called, societies narrownesses.

**6. DISCUSS MATTERS OPENLY** – Do not have secrets. What ever family issues you have, discuss them openly. Not only family matters, but social, political, economic, even taboo topics, anything – talk about them and involve your children. When they are very young, even then do so in front of them, they pick up the vibes and learn consideration and concern. When they are older, let's say around 8+, you can even ask for their opinions. You will be amazed at the wisdom they possess and the kind of responses you will get. Most of these you should implement. Do not reject them by saying, “Ah! It is only a child's opinion.” Remember, the child's genetic make up and intellectual capacity is updated, yours is outdated.

Allow them to make mistakes. Our children are punished enough in schools for making mistakes. Actually, life's best lessons are learnt from the mistakes we make. Sure they cause damage, but it is all about how a parent handles the situation. From laughing it off at one extreme of the continuum, to allowing a child to make a conscious effort to change it – one thing is for sure, your reaction will determine the value of the learning for the child. Some children will repeat mistakes only to get the attention of their parents even if it means their wrought. That is where parenting is a complete failure.

7. LET GO – When a child is grown and ready, let her/him go and let God take over. Have the confidence that what ever you have taught your children, they are now capable of leading their lives. Do not force your advise, suggestions on them. Let them make their decisions. They have watched you long enough to learn from your mistakes; now let them make their own. Do not hold their hand; you have taught them how to walk, run and sprint, now trust them. Move back. Involve yourself only when asked. Next time you use your parenting instincts will be with your grandchildren; so wait. Patience is the biggest virtue.

These seven principles on parenting have helped my children acquire an inner security that has given them self confidence, self respect, self love and trust. Because of this, they are able to trust, respect and love others. It helps them overcome fears; have courage AND consideration in what they do.

Above all, never think or even consider that your children owe you anything. What you do for them as parents you do for yourself. It is entirely for your pleasure. Any thought, act or talk of them having to pay you back later in life, whether in respect, monetarily or in care, and you will wash out any good you have done. Such expectations enslave children, and they end up living with guilt. As a mother, I live with these five words, “My children owe my nothing!” Instead, I owe them everything for the joy they have given me.

Professionally, too, I work intensively with young people. I find them absolutely great. The younger they are, the more spiritual they are. Then we grow up and get corrupted. All humans are endowed with limitless nobility, it is up to us parents to help them have faith in themselves and assist them to learn how to access, extract and live those virtues.

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