

COMMENTARY

Challenges of parenting

Deepti Kathpalia

Counsellor (specialising in relationship counselling), Soft Skills Trainer, Feng Shui Practitioner,
NLP Practitioner, New Delhi, India

Abstract

A parent always remains a parent for life. Parenting is a herculean task which needs to be carried out with absolute equanimity and alacrity. Losing young lives to suicide is very tragic. Most young adults of today are far more perceptive about the happenings around them in comparison to the youth of yesterday. The simple yet very effective traits of empathy, compassion modesty and humility can only be taught by setting examples; no book can ever teach anyone these values. Behavioural problems in young adults are a result of deeper familial issues. We have to be responsible for the right upbringing of our children.

Kathpalia D. Challenges of parenting. Dysphrenia. 2013;4:172-4.

Keywords: Suicide. Social networking. Counselling. Rehabilitation.

Correspondence: deepti.kathpalia1969@gmail.com

Received on 14 January 2013. Accepted on 5 February 2013.

*“Relationships are tough even when they are good,
we need to work on them constantly”*

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of life’s longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you,

And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,

For they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies but not their souls,

For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,

You may strive to be like them,

But seek not to make them like you.

-Kahlil Gibran

“Teach him if you can that a cent earned is of far more value than a dollar found. It is far more honourable to fail than to cheat. Teach him to learn how to lose gracefully and enjoy the win when it comes”, “Teach him to sell his talents and brains to the highest bidder but to never put a price tag on his heart and soul”.

These are some excerpts from the letter of Abraham Lincoln to his son’s teacher. How many parents are there today who are imparting such values in their children? I would like to believe that there are a few such enlightened parents out there who are instinctively doing just that.

A parent always remains a parent for life. Their children continue to be the centre of their universe no matter how old the children become, parents keep praying and worrying for their wards not because the children are incapable of looking after themselves but purely because they are parents.

The tender voice of my mother over the telephone telling me to look after myself even though at that age she and my father needed looking after, makes me cry and smile both. My mother sits pretty with the Gods but her lessons in life and living are as fresh and I in my wisdom try and pass on some of them to my beautiful daughter. So many subtle ways in which parents overtly or covertly translate their love, care, and many teachings to their children.

Parenting is a herculean task which needs to be carried out with absolute equanimity and alacrity. Children will and always learn the best lessons from the examples set by their elders, particularly parents.

Every now and then we read or get to hear about young children resorting to suicides to deal with the many challenges they face, especially in the present day context where we do not have many heroes anymore. Today, the world is going through very trying times where human values are taking a huge beating. There is a visible rise in crime, drugs and perversion. A societal breakdown is gradually taking place therefore holding on to one’s own self in such times is difficult but not impossible. Here the role of parents and elders gets more difficult and character building becomes all the more important, right from the beginning. Losing young lives to suicide is very tragic. With the transition that the world is undergoing, the situation gets even more worrisome.

The digital times that we all are living in, there is a visible disconnect between man to man contact and thus a larger dependency is seen on the virtual world, this is leading to an increased alienation, disconnect and very rapid isolation within the family and the society at large. Friendships are being fostered on facebook and other such social networking portals wherein there is definitely a

swell in the number of friends in one's kitty but unfortunately there is no real connect.

Also due to the massive breakdown of the joint family system, the institution of marriage is beginning to fall apart, there is definitely a higher rate of divorce among young couples of today, there is certainly an increased incidence of extra marital affairs. Children coming from such families find themselves completely alienated and alone. Such parents try to compensate for this lack of normalcy by becoming over permissive and overindulgent, but only in terms of material comforts not in terms of spending quality time with their children. By allowing them access to money and gadgetry which gives them a false sense of comfort, also a misplaced sense of what is right and what is wrong.

Here in my experience as a counsellor, I have witnessed some very bright and capable children losing sight with reality because they are only literally living by themselves as both the parents are either in office or busy with their own life. I actually found these young children living by themselves, often having found solace in some unholy affairs, finding comfort in unruly companions or seeking help of a cigarette or some other form of substance abuse, resorting to pornography due to unhindered access to internet. To top it all the pseudo culture of the big cities clubbed with easy access to ATMs, vehicles is a lethal combination.

These children are going to be late starters in life and to my mind will have to make major compromises; a profound sense of inadequacy is setting in as they see their peers and friends who have already moved on. The parents do seem to realise but it's a bit late in the day however even now all is not lost.

Most young adults of today are far more perceptive about the happenings around them in comparison to the youth of yesterday. They are very unforgiving, for example, about extramarital affairs, parental conflicts etc. If and when the children learn or so much as even sense that either of the parent is involved in another relationship their reactions are usually very extreme, from acute rage to absolute indifference. Often these children become very reclusive and start looking for comfort in other things or other people as their understanding of human relationships is what they have learnt from their parents. A big aftermath of such experiences is their inability to foster meaningful relationships in their later years. They often take to substance abuse due to the emotional void they feel in their life. They usually retreat into a shell and can become dysfunctional adults, often posing a threat to their own safety and that of the others too.

"Here another of my clients, a young adult at the threshold of life was found to be listless, unkempt, and extremely reclusive and non-communicative. On studying

the case deeper after interacting intensely with his parents, teachers, his friends and classmates, I found out that he had always been a very happy and a bright child but of late everybody had noticed a drastic change in his behaviour, fluctuating from anger to withdrawal to aggression at times and not surprisingly enough it was the teachers who noticed it first and brought it to the knowledge of the parents, as usual there was denial but after repeated counselling of the parents the matter seems to be following its right course. These are difficult times for the parents as the child is heavily into substance abuse and has to be taken for rehabilitation. It is sad but there is hope. At times when the child does talk to me which is not very often, he voices his resentment for his parents. The details of which I would not like to get into".

Domestic violence in families is another ill that needs to be tackled with caution and care as the repercussions of domestic violence on children of such families are very disturbing. An increased incidence of crime against women in our society has its roots in boys growing up seeing the women in their family being treated shoddily, often being kicked around and badly abused. We live in a society which is obsessed with sons and this blinding love for a son makes the parents lose rationale. These sons grow up obnoxiously without learning the very important lesson of how to respect women because they silently imbibe their father's behaviour and conduct and also of the other males in their family. They instead learn to scorn and look down upon girls or view them as mere sexual objects. Parents must always lead by example and become good role models. The simple yet very effective traits of empathy, compassion, modesty and humility can only be taught by setting examples; no book can ever teach anyone these values.

Children have to be taught that there are choices to be made and there will also be consequences of these choices, visible at some stage or the other. Please remember that this applies more to the parents as the results of their choices will have a direct bearing on their children. Their children will be and are always a reflection of their upbringing.

Where we as parents often go wrong is that in our own pain and anger, we fail to recognise the larger responsibility we need to shoulder and lash out at each other often in the presence of the children making them feel very lonely, scared and insecure. Parents need not always formally sit down and impart basic values to their children. Many a times, it is their covert behaviour that works as education and can help them grow up as confident, secure and responsible adults. Parents must understand that they need to keep their children away from their personal issues and try and resolve them intelligently.

Lack of private space in families often proves to be detrimental in the sound growth of children. If the adults in the family respect their own personal space they will more often provide the same to their children and teach them that every issue no matter how serious it is needs a certain dignity and must be dealt with at the right time and place. To my mind when such a thing happens a solution is more likely to come by, secondly learning to deal with conflicts in an appropriate mature manner helps us delve deeper within and helps us come up with answers, giving us a strength of character.

Loneliness in children is usually an outcome of troubled childhood and this feeling of despair begins to permeate everywhere. The child may be surrounded by hordes of expensive things but most importantly there is negligible interaction between him and the parents, often with the promise of a better next time which usually never comes and precious time slips by, by then it is too late as this young individual has learnt to move on without his parents really being there. There is but an exiguous connect between the child and the parent and by then he has found his own little alcove.

Behavioural problems in young adults are a result of deeper familial issues. Children of such families are found to be cantankerous and rebellious by nature. Browbeating other children becomes their second nature, something they do not realise. Lack of human touch alienates them even further from everybody including their siblings and friends. Its then the virtual friends take over real time friends and family...when such a thing happens it spells big trouble.

This scourge of loneliness and disconnect in families especially among young children is a huge cause of concern. We have to be responsible for the right upbringing of our children. There are signs every parent must look out for:

- Excessive dependence on internet and social networking sites.
- Bullying.
- Reclusive and non communicative behaviour.
- Aggression and temper tantrums.
- Violent behaviour in any form.
- Dazed and listlessness.
- Poor personal hygiene.
- Resorting to pornography or signs of the same.
- Changes in food habits.

Suggestions:

- ✓ Please keep a check on your child without compromising on their dignity and invading their personal space. Do not hound them or play detective at any point in time.
- ✓ Try and keep a constant dialogue with your child and try to be as friendly as possible.
- ✓ Trust your children and never ridicule them in the presence of their friends or others.
- ✓ Your behaviour, your conduct within the four walls of your home and outside, even your silence speaks a lot about you to your children so do keep a watch.
- ✓ There are innumerable give away signs that suggest your child needs help. Keep a watch as his or her silence is often a cry for help, do not ignore it at any cost.

Lastly cherish and appreciate your child for what he is not what he could be. Invariably even we as parents buckle under societal pressure and place unrealistic demands on our children of often try to live our dreams through our children forgetting that he or she is another individual.