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Children Speak

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A Newsletter of the Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights

Message from the President

Being a parent is the most difficult and rewarding job that I have ever had. Our children look to us to nurture, educate, inform, guide, inspire and above all, love them forever!

Shouldn't every parent want his or her son or daughter to be happy and "successful"? Absolutely! This goal may mean different things for different people in different parts of the world. Some parents struggle every day to meet their children's basic needs for food and shelter, while others are constantly stressed because of the increasing demands of work, school, extra-curricular activities and home.

A parent's role is to provide his offspring with "roots" and "wings". Parents give their children a solid foundation upon which they can develop wings. A home that is a haven for its occupants is one that provides a place of warmth and understanding. At the same time, parents should provide protection for their children against becoming involved in situations that can harm them. Children who are resilient because their parents have imparted these protective factors tend not to be involved in underage drinking or drug use, or experience teenage pregnancies and school failure. A sense of self-worth is crucial for acquiring resiliency. Parents can help their children develop self-esteem.

The development of a healthy self-esteem is a major key to success and happiness of children. In my view, this is the central role of a parent. Children need to feel confident about their abilities. A child with high self-esteem will assume responsibility, take pride in his/her accomplishments, tolerate frustration, attempt new tasks and challenges as well as handle positive and negative emotions.

It is not difficult to promote a child's self-esteem - it simply takes a conscious effort to do so! Parents can do a number of things to help foster a healthy self-esteem in a child. First, it is important to praise a child when he/she completes a task or shows a talent. It is also important to demonstrate that you appreciate a child's good efforts even if the desired outcome is not achieved. It may sometimes be necessary to criticize a child's actions. However, it is important to do so without using ridicule or shame and the criticism should not be directed to the child as a person.

Second, parents can help their children become more confident



Riccardo Di Done

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Bringing Children Home

An Interview of Medhavini Joshi, Administrator, Documentation, Training and Research Center (Dotrec), Vatsalya Trust by Maitry Porecha

CS: How important is family in developing a child's personality?

MJ: Since the very creation of society the purpose of a family is to ensure the healthy development of the child so that he/she becomes a responsible citizen in society. Kinship and the rules of society have led to the formation of families. When we are talking about a child having or not having familial support, there are two things to bear in mind:

- the parenting styles of the parents and
- the total family environment and immediate surroundings of the child.



Growing up in an institution in the absence of a family: Children at Vatsalya Trust's Adoption Center

Family Dynamics

There are a lot of dynamics occurring in the intra-related factors of the family.

Say, for example, a family consists of a child, mother, father and grand parents. All four adults will have different outlooks and views about how to raise the child. If family dynamics is used as an ego-game to manipulate the child, this can prove to be detrimental to the child's development.

Attitude of parents

The attitude of parents greatly influences the development of a child's personality. If a parent is authoritarian and dictates terms, the child will become dependent and indecisive in the future.

If the parent abuses or strikes the child for his/her smallest mistake, the child will grow up to be adamant and aggressive. On the other hand, child behavior can be influenced in a positive way by open conversations on the consequences of one's acts. This act of faith develops confidence in children and teaches responsibility for one's actions.

By tradition, parenting does not stop in India, as it does in other cultures, after a

child reaches 18 years of age, when he/she begins to live independently. Children also continue to expect parental guidance throughout their life.

CS: What about those children who do not receive a sound familial upbringing in their formative years? What would lead a parent to abandon a child?

MJ: There is a set of children who do not have the privilege of living with their family. Indian society to this very day does not treat unwed mothers on par with others. They are seen as very unwelcome. Thus these children are either institutionalized or are adopted by their immediate family.

Sometimes parents can't afford the child's sound upbringing and by the time the mother realizes that she is pregnant it is too late to abort.

Also if the parents come to know that the child is terminally ill and in need of costly treatment, which they cannot afford, then they abandon him/her.

Natural and man-made calamities are a few of the major reasons that cause children to be torn apart from their families. Heavy floods, earthquakes, communal riots, constant military attacks and conflicts result in

"The attitude of parents matter a lot in the development of a child's personality"

people getting displaced, with chaotic results often leaving behind children who are orphaned.

CS: Can you describe the life of a child in an institution?

MJ: When one lives in an institution the first thing that is affected is the individuality of the child. In an institution you are not given things that are exclusively yours. Clothes and space are shared. In Government remand homes the child is identified by a number rather than by name. Sometimes, the very name by which you are known is not used.

Institutionalized children fall behind in the social and emotional quotient of development. The speech development of the child gets affected because as a baby the child does not hear as many words in an institution as in a family. Thus, grasping language and acquiring vocabulary becomes difficult, and this in turn will lead to communication problems in future years.

The child in an institution does not get to observe many people and interact with them and is totally insulated in a closed atmosphere. They also lag behind in social etiquette when it comes to greeting people. They are not aware of the working systems of postal departments or banks.

CS: Please explain how adoptions can be a method of giving the child much – needed familial support, love, care and affection.

MJ: In India, the historical importance of adoption has always been seen in the context of someone who will inherit your property. This ultimately leads to adopting a child who is an offspring of your own blood relations or extended family.

The situation is, however, gradually changing. People are coming forward to adopt orphans and abandoned children. These children get a family set up and a chance to come up in life.

“The Family gets a child and the child gets a home”

Here the caste, class, creed or religion of the child does not matter at all because the background of the child is never revealed to the child or to the foster parents.

Thus, when you opt for the type of adoption in which you don't know the biological parents of a child, you develop a different bond altogether with the child.■

Family Values, Peace & Development

Roshni Udyavar

“The family is the nucleus of civilization.”

- Will and Ariel Durant

In the rapidly emerging globalized world, peace, which is central to the advancement of civilization, is largely elusive. Most of the developing nations of the Global South face unprecedented crises - poverty, drought, famine, disease, uncontrolled population growth and irreversible damage to ecology and the environment. War is the norm in many African countries today.

The Industrial Revolution of eighteenth century Europe gave birth to a new set of values based on rationality and scientific truth - values that favored a dynamic productive system. In time, this value system became synonymous with 'development' and came to be used as a tool to obtain power over those who did not possess it through advanced technologies of warfare. The resulting breakdown of society led to the formation of the nuclear family, which was heralded as a success story. The imposition of this value system on the 'primitive' and 'uncivilized' nations of the South led to a complete breakdown of society. These new values were alien and incompatible with the beliefs and attitudes of the traditional society existing in these countries.

Our first task, therefore, is to examine and redefine development - put the individual at the center of our development efforts - not by alienation from society, culture, values and environment.

As a result, they were caught in the web of 'progress' that kept them underdeveloped and backward.

We must recognize that the prevailing development paradigms are fundamentally flawed, severely undermining the potential of the powerful socio-political institution of the family. As Prof. Sihlongonyane of the University of Witwatersrand says, "If one society manages to capture and captivate the attitude, beliefs and practices of another society, the 'object' society is bound to be dependent because their goals, vision and priorities are commissioned by external values. Economic dependence is a result of cultural dependence and underdevelopment evolves out of a history of cultural deprivation."

Our first task, therefore, is to examine and redefine development – placing the individual at the center of our development efforts - not by alienation from society, culture, values and environment. Progress should imply self-reliance, pride in one's culture and most importantly, building a system that sustains the needs of the present without jeopardizing the future.■

(Excerpts from a paper presented at the World Culture and Sports Festival 2002, Seoul, Korea, 14-17 February 2002)

How Rifts in Families Affect Children

By Abraham Yehuda

It is commonly accepted that the family as a unit was established with the evolution of agrarian communities, about 10,000 years ago. The family became the defining self-sustaining unit that lived of the produce of the land, provided for food and shelter for its members – the husband, the wife and the children. Later, it became the base for the education and welfare of the children.

Since this family unit included several generations of parents and siblings, it could be defined as a joint family. This joint family became a cohesive unit that cared for the needs of the elderly and the infirm, the well being of the income-earners and the particular needs of those who could not actively contribute to the unit's well being – the children. Children depended on the family for all its support - food and clothing, education, entertainment, development into adolescent years and finally entry into adulthood.

It was crucial that the family remained a united unit if children were to reap benefits from it. There had to be a mutual support system between members of the family, particularly the husband and the wife; unity and understanding between the siblings and an understanding between the elderly and their income-earning offspring. In many traditional families, the elderly took on the role of being at the top of the hierarchy. Often this created discord between siblings and their spouses as some felt that preferential treatment was offered to others.

In large parts of the industrialized world or in developed countries, the traditional family unit has been replaced by the nuclear family. While nuclear families have reduced the element of friction between siblings and between income-earners and the elderly, the task of providing comprehensive support to the children has been made that much more difficult as parents are entirely on their own without the support system that joint families provided. Each of the spouses had to make a greater effort both in their occupations as well as in their interaction with each other and with the children, to provide security.

Under both systems, family discord, violent or abusive behavior by one of the adults, particularly the parent / s of the children can

cause emotional turmoil in the child. Children of abusive or violent parents tend to react aggressively or, in the alternative, withdraw into a shell. Under sustained pressure of this kind, the child could decide to play truant at school, get involved in quasi-criminal activities in the neighborhood or even run away from home, if the climate becomes unbearable. It is then very difficult to return the child to his natural habitat. According to Dr. Shefali Batra, a child Psychiatrist from Mumbai, "There is nothing positive about not having familial support. Because even if that support is forceful, aggressive or harsh eventually it is support. If at the age of 17 a child suddenly becomes devoid of familial support he/she may grow up a bit early, start earning in order to shoulder certain responsibilities, while others are still studying at the age of twenty. But for a child of four or five, who has run away from home, there is nothing positive. The innocence of the children needs to be preserved."

A happy family life, on the other hand, brings out the best in children. Most children who are successful in their studies and later in their careers have had healthy and amiable parental influence and peaceful and encouraging family life. Children must be complimented for achievements and encouraged to excel in whatever they take up, be it in academics, sports or specific vocations. The child has every right to expect that his parents will provide him with the facilities and tools with which to develop skills while growing up and to offer him a good and healthy atmosphere at home.

Families should therefore have the right values. A strong family is one that sustains its members – that supports and nourishes the members throughout their childhood while growing up into adolescence and later in launching out into independent careers. A strong family unit creates a safe, positive and supportive place for all members to thrive. They are able to utilize resources and to live together in healthy interaction and in cooperation with one another. It is when this does not take place that children are affected.

It is important for families to teach their children to make good decisions. If they have watched their parents making well thought out

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Parenting Function

By H. L. Kalia, Ph.D.

Price: Rs.195/ 7.80 US\$

Book Format: Hardcover

Publisher: Icon Publications Pvt. Ltd.

The book is available at

www.bagchee.com

"A small but bright light in search of perfect parenting of all ages of children"

Parenting is as old as creation itself. And yet it continues to baffle generations of parents. A parent is forever exploring, weighing options and learning through the course that life takes.

The first edition of "Parenting Function" aims at providing parents with not only some insights for better development of their children, but also in helping them in transforming their attitude and behavior from the traditional to one that is more practical and workable.

This book will be useful to parents of children of all ages. The topics covered in the book include values parents want to inculcate in their children, establishing healthy eating habits, dealing with sibling rivalry, dealing with examination stress and even supervising homework!

The book explains how parents can aid their child in making the right career choices and emerge as confident individuals in society. It delves into the intricacies of how the mind of adolescents work when it comes to experimenting with their sexuality, and the role of parents in imparting the right life skills at the right time to their children.

The book analyzes the impact of a single parent on the growth of the child and how a single parent can successfully raise his/her child.

It also deals with special concerns of children with learning disabilities, speech impairment, autism, dyslexia, depression and many other subjects.

Dr. H.L Kalia is the reader head of the PG department Psychology (SNDT Women's University) He has 20 years of professional experience and has to his credit several projects assigned to him by ICSSR,UGC and WHO. Dr. Kalia has authored 12 books and 10 monographs. He is constantly writing articles for various newspapers, magazines and journals.■

Book Review

SEARCH

for Lowering Infant Mortality in Developing Countries

It may come as a surprise in this age of technology and high-end health care that mothers and babies still die during birthing. In rural India, in fact, one woman dies every five minutes giving birth to a child. More than 100,000 women die every year due to childbirth-related causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. That rate is 45 times higher than in the United States, nine times higher than in neighboring China, and three times higher than in India's urban areas. The vast majority of maternal deaths are preventable.



In a country where the probability of infants dying before reaching age one, is almost 62 in a 1,000 live births, there is much work to do in improving the social and health infrastructure, especially in remote villages, which have no access to basic medical facilities. However, the infant mortality rate in 1990 was 84, almost 35% higher than now. This difference has been brought about, by among other agencies, grassroots NGOs such as SEARCH. The Society for Education, Action, and Research in Community Health (SEARCH) saves the lives and health of women and babies in rural India.

A 2006 recipient of the MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions, SEARCH is based in the poorest semi-tribal district of Gadchiroli in the state of Maharashtra, where it offers public health programs for 86 villages with a total population of 100,000. One of its most successful programs trains village women to diagnose and treat newborns for common illnesses as well as educate and support mothers. During a seven-year period, the program reduced the neo-natal mortality rate by 70 percent, post-partum maternal morbidity by nearly 50 percent, and the need for emergency obstetrical care by 30 percent. The Indian government is now considering replicating the program in five other states. The \$300,000 MacArthur Award will help support a

Updates

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new research center to study maternal morbidity and young people's sexual and reproductive health in India.

The founder of SEARCH, Dr. Abhay Bang, who is also director of the NGO, works in Gadchiroli along with his wife, Rani. His work at SEARCH has included

training village health workers and traditional birth attendants to manage reproductive and child health problems and leading mass education and action on alcoholism and alcohol policy, deforestation, and tribal development. He has conducted epidemiological and operations research in primary health care, and his areas of interest include child mortality in rural areas, acute respiratory infection in children, neonatal health care, sexually transmitted diseases, tribal health, women's reproductive health, and alcoholism. He has served as a consultant to both the World Health Organization and the Government of India, for which he is currently a member of the National Commission on Population.

In a recent initiative, seven African countries have partnered with the Indian scientist to learn about and adopt his home-based approach to caring and treating newborn babies.

The SEARCH programme in Africa provides basic health care to babies who are delivered at



Dr. Abhay Bang and his wife Rani through their NGO, SEARCH, have provided training to village women to diagnose and treat newborns for common illnesses in India's villages since 1985



home. Forty village health workers have been trained so far to provide essential newborn care, and diagnose newborn complications such as pneumonia, preterm and birth asphyxia. They are equipped with a basic \$60 medical

kit consisting of a baby sleeping sack, a bag and mask for resuscitation, and antibiotics.

Every year, one million babies in sub-Saharan Africa die within the first month of birth, accounting for nearly 60 per cent of all deaths among under-five children. These deaths occur in health facilities, but many babies also die in remote areas where access to health care is poor. In the Horn of Africa, for example, years of marginalization and under-development have left large areas of pastoralist communities unserved by basic social services, including health care.

It is generally believed that newborn deaths cannot be reduced without large-scale investments in technology and hospitals. Important as these are, Dr. Bang's model has demonstrated the value of simple, low-cost, high impact interventions. SEARCH has provided hope to the thousands of villages in India and Africa, of bringing down infant mortality without expensive neo-natal care. ■

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How Rifts in Families Affect Children

decisions over the years, they will tend to be good decision makers themselves. A healthy, happy family benefits society. It has been established that there is less crime among children of strong families as well as less divorce and emotional problems. When adults in the family set the tone for open communication amongst members and teach children the importance of positive values, then they can solve problems together and help their children transmit their skills to the next generation. ■

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Message of the President

adults by teaching them to practice making positive statements about themselves. So, it is imperative to coach children to be positive about how they "talk to themselves". An example of encouraging self-talk would be "I can find an answer to this question if I keep trying".

It takes patience and effort to put these solid building blocks into place, but the rewards will be shared by the entire community since we will have a society whose future participants will be confident, caring individuals because their parents took the time to help them develop strong "roots" that enabled them to develop strong "wings". ■