

How NOT to Become A 'TIGER-MOM'!

Papa Bear's Happy Parenting Rules



Gopi Menon

**A Common Sense Approach to Parenting that Rejects
the Depressing 'Tiger Mom' Parenting Style**

Papa Bear's Happy Parenting Rules

*DON'T become a 'Tiger Mom'
or a 'Pussycat Dad'!*

By Gopi Menon©2020

**A Common Sense Approach to Parenting
that Balances Love with Discipline**
(which applies to Toddlers as well as Teenagers)

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PREFACE

This little book is based upon common sense rules of parenting that I set up for myself, from a very young age by observation, long before I became a parent myself. Since I felt that these were common-sense rules, I never thought they were worth writing about. So, I never did get around to publishing it as a book.

However, recently I came to realize that many parents seemed to be quite *unaware of how to balance love with discipline* when bringing up their children. There are so many different books on how to bring up *toddlers, tweens and teenagers* as though each stage in their growth needed to be compartmentalized.

But all children are basically the same whether they are infants, toddlers or teenagers, though that idea may seem counter-intuitive. If we look on each child as an individual unique human being, albeit smaller in size, then we would not need to compartmentalize them according to their ages.

So, I finally decided to publish this book of parenting principles that apply to all children, whether they are infants or toddlers or the so-called 'terrible' teens.

What precipitated this decision was when I recently came across a book by an American woman of Chinese parentage who was proudly called a 'Tiger Mother'.

I was shocked at the book and decided that it was time I published a happy alternative way of parenting which has served me well both as a parent and a grandparent.

So, this little book is born out of my indignation and my disgust at what some people consider to be good parenting!

DISCLAIMER

This book is based entirely on my personal experiences with bringing up my own children, and is shared here purely for educational purposes.

It is obviously not meant to diagnose or treat any specific behavioral problems with children for which the help of professionals must be sought.

INTRODUCTION

As stated in the preface, I was prompted to write this book of common-sense parenting because of the 'tiger mum' book.

How can a mother be so heartless in dealing with her children, while claiming she did it for the good of her children's future? It is even more shocking that she can openly defend her style of parenting, especially while living in USA.

She seems to think that 'results by any means' is acceptable. Even so her arguments seem flawed – since the younger of her two children rebelled, she can only claim a success rate of 50%. That too assuming her elder child is truly successful and happy.

I read in the media that her elder daughter supports her mother's actions which reminds me of the 'Stockholm Syndrome' when a girl kidnapped by a gang ended up falling in love with her captor.

NOTE: According to Wikipedia, *'Stockholm syndrome' can be seen as a form of traumatic bonding, which does not necessarily require a hostage scenario, but which describes "strong emotional ties that develop between two persons where one person intermittently harasses, beats, threatens, abuses, or intimidates the other"*.

I dread to think of what this daughter will do to her own children in the future, under the pretext of doing it for their own good - thereby continuing the cycle of abuse!

When we submit children to mental or physical trauma at an early age, the results can be far reaching. It can be carried over into their adulthood and affect the way they treat their own children. This can be the beginning of a vicious cycle which needs to be broken.

The 'tiger mother' herself, is a good example of this. She endured and even accepted as okay the excessively strict upbringing from her parents, rationalizing to herself that it did no harm. Thus, she feels it is acceptable, even admirable to inflict the same on her own children.

But if anyone can intentionally punish her children harshly over several years (whatever the excuse may be), then something is seriously wrong with that person's psyche.

Being an Asian parent myself, I would consider it remiss of me if I did not speak out strongly against that book. That book gives the impression that Asian parenting is based on excessive discipline. It may be true that many of the older generation of Asian parents believe in the adage: 'spare the rod, spoil the child'. However, I am thankful this is not always true among the more enlightened Asian families at present.

My own parents (of Indian origin) were loving and understanding and never used corporal punishment. I too have followed their example and have brought up my children with love, respect and discipline without having to resort to '*excessive discipline*' which is only another word for *bullying those who are helpless!*

All three of my sons have grown up to be mature, caring adults, with their own loving families. They are also successful in their own right, in professions of their own choosing. My wife and I had always given them absolute freedom of choice in what they wanted to study and succeed at. They have also chosen their own mates without any interference from us the parents.

So, this book is just my little protest about assuming that good parenting is all about excessive forced discipline where only results matter, where the child's feelings are not taken into account.

Coming to the book in question, there was a section in her book about how she used to force her children to practice for hours at the piano, much against their wishes! *She even admits that she found 'tooth marks' on the piano where she had forced her daughter to practice.* What horror the kids must have gone through, for them to have to vent their frustration like that!

Personally, I feel that such a person should be charged with 'child abuse' and not feted as a role model for good parenting! She says it helped her daughter to be a good pianist.

I would like to point out there are much greater world class pianists who were **not** forced to play the piano by their parents. *They practiced intensely and for hours because they had a passion for it – not because they were afraid of punishment.*

The Tiger Mother's philosophy that '*forcing a child to do things against the child's wishes*' is good for the child (because mother knows best?) is untenable. She claims that her daughter turned out well because of her 'tiger mother' tactics.

I vehemently disagree! That would be like saying "*Oprah's success in life is to be attributed to her being abused as a child! This brings us to the absurd conclusion that "Every girl should be abused as a child if she is to become super successful as an adult!"*" How utterly ridiculous?

So, I am motivated to write this book about my 'Papa Bear' approach to happy parenting that I have used to raise my children and now seems to work even with my grandchildren.

The 'papa bear' approach runs counter to that of the 'tiger mother' approach as well as to opposite 'laissez-faire' approach of some parents in Western countries. It is all about balance between love and discipline - not

doting on and not being overly strict. The emphasis being on *'a little discipline together with tremendous amounts of love'*.

Personally, I believe that ***love itself is a strong force for discipline when a child will do the right things not out of fear but out of love and respect for its parents.***

I often hear of parents complaining that it is very difficult to bring up children. They seem to be at a loss to know just how to balance love with discipline.

Some feel that too much love and affection will spoil the child and so tend to become strict disciplinarians. An extreme case is the case of the 'tiger mother' described earlier, who mistreated her children in the name of discipline.

Others do the opposite and shower too much love without providing any discipline at all. Still others hope that money will replace the time they spend away from their children. Yet others just follow what their parents used to do saying: *"if it was good enough for my parents and grandparents, it is good enough for me"*. As for me, I prefer the middle path where I balance love with discipline which I like to call the 'Papa Bear' approach.

The 'Papa Bear' Approach

I like that name because a bear is generally considered to be cuddly and affectionate while at the same time a gruff papa bear can also wield authority. A good example for children would be Smokey the Bear in the uniform of a forest ranger who says with authority: *"Remember. Only YOU Can Prevent Forest Fires"*!

Similarly, as parents we too can put on the mantle of authority when it is absolutely necessary. Using this two-pronged approach, it is not all that difficult to bring up children to be happy, responsible adults. All we need

is to use 'common sense' which only means to use our God given mind rationally and sensibly.

To use our mind rationally with respect to parenting means:

To observe carefully and reflect on the actions of other parents and the subsequent results of their actions.

Personally, I have been truly blessed in having kind, gentle and wise parents, but I have observed many relatives and friends who were otherwise.

So, everything I learnt about parenting was firstly from my parents and subsequently by my **personal observation of friends and family**. Even as a teenager I had this habit of observing and studying the methods used by many parents to bring up their own children.

Some believed in harsh punishment and strict discipline and thought that expressing any outward affection was wrong. Others went overboard with expressing too much affection to the point of obsessively adoring their children – both methods resulting in unhappy relationships at home.

Thus, this little e-book is based upon *common sense rules of parenting that I set up for myself, from a very young age by observation, **long before I became a parent myself.***

Over the years I have found that these common sense rules for happy parenting, can be summarized into just **seven principles**. This is what I share in this book.

NOTE: *Common sense does NOT mean to just follow the crowd and keep doing what has always been done, but to observe, question, analyze and come to sensible conclusions.*

These seven common sense rules have stood me in good stead all these years when my wife and I were bringing up three wonderful children. Now,

the children have all grown up to be responsible, loving adults who have started their own families.

Surprisingly I find that these rules seem to work even with my grandchildren, so they must be timeless. However, I will be the first to admit that **parenting is not an exact science** and I still have lots to learn.

My grandchildren have become my best teachers who show me that my parenting rules are not etched in stone. I still need to learn how to adapt each rule to each specific child!

In the interests of simplicity, I have divided this little book into seven chapters, each one devoted to just one rule. I hope that this makes it easy for readers, if they do decide to implement some of these happy parenting rules themselves.

I sincerely hope that this little book of real-life experiences will prove to be useful to other parents who are struggling with raising their own children.

Gopi Menon

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Chapter 1

Papa Bear's 1st Rule is: *Cherish Your Child as a Gift of God!*

*A child is a gift of God! Believe this. As Parents we should not only be **grateful for the gift** but also believe **that we have been given the ability** to bring the child up as well – since the child was entrusted to us!*

A child is truly a gift from god. Believe this with all your heart and soul. Why do I say that a child is truly a Gift from God? Because you see many couples remaining childless and yearning for the blessing of a child. Many of them try all sorts of fertility treatments; some go to various places of worship to pray for a child and many carry out penances in the hope of getting a child.

But not everyone is so blessed. Some may get a child who is unhealthy or even disabled. Thus, if you are blessed with a healthy child – remember that that child is truly a special gift from God.

If we think of our child as a gift from God, something very significant happens to us. Our attitude changes as follows:

- We become *truly grateful*, and every time we look at the child, and observe its actions, we wonder in amazement at this miracle of life.
- When *we begin to look upon the child in wonder*, we will treat it as a treasure and so we are unlikely to be harsh or cruel to the child.
- This will lead to us *respecting the child as an individual* (as described in Papa Bear's 2nd Rule), which will lead to happier relationships between parent and child.
- Also, you become confident that *you, as a parent, have also been given the ability to care for the child and bring it up in the best way*

possible - because it is **you** that has been entrusted with that responsibility!

- So be not worried that you may not know what to do for your child – you DO know best (provided that you use your God-given common sense and intuition to make the best choices).

True Story:

Several decades ago, I remember a mother (let's call her Angie) who had two sons while her sister in law (say Beth) had no children even though she had been married for years.

Now Angie became pregnant for a third time and she very generously told Beth (without asking her own husband Sam) - that if the third child also turned out to be a boy, that she could have him!

Angie's thinking was that she and Sam were already finding it a struggle to bring up two sons on their income. Since Beth was in a much better position financially, Angie would be doing a good deed for her sis-in-law as well as helping her child at the same time!

When the child was born a boy, Angie told her husband Sam about her promise to her sister in law. But Sam was adamant – he told Angie that since god had entrusted them with this boy, they would look after it – no matter what!

(He too believed in what I am saying in this chapter – that a child is a gift from God and we need not fear, because God would also show us the way to bring up the child, if we had faith.)

So, the upshot was that the third child remained with Angie and Sam.

As for Beth and her husband Robert, they adopted two children, but her autocratic nature and need for control was so great that both the

children became estranged and ran away from home while still in their teens.

Beth had a sort of Jekyll and Hyde complex about parenting. She was extremely kind and considerate when she was baby-sitting other children and so those kids and their parents really loved her!

However, when it came to her own children, her ego took over. When she was childless, she had often told her sisters that they did not know how to bring up their own kids and that she would do a better job, if ever she had her own. So, when she finally adopted two children, she wanted to prove her point that she was better at parenting.

She was always worried about what others would say and wanted to bring up her own children as model kids. So, whenever the kids did not fall into her definition of 'good kid' she often flew into a rage and punished the kids harshly.

It was no wonder really that the elder girl ran away from home at an early age, and was easily seduced by those who promised her love. She became pregnant in her early teens and finally landed up in a home for troubled teens.

The younger boy began lying to avoid the harsh punishment and by his early teens had graduated into forging checks and so on. Finally, he was jailed at the young age of nineteen. In spite of these tragic outcomes, Beth insisted that her parenting methods were not the problem – she believed the kids she adopted had 'bad genes'.

As for Angie and Sam they were very glad that they had not given up their son to Beth. They shudder to think what would have happened to their son under Beth's authoritative control, because he was a very independent boy who hated control.

He might have rebelled and even have turned violent if he had been brought up by Beth! Instead now the boy had grown up stable, mature and very successful and has started his own happy family.

The moral of the story is that if parents think of their child as a gift from God, and have faith in their own God-given ability to care for the child, then everything will turn out all right in spite of any struggles along the way.

So that is Papa Bear's Rule#1:

Cherish Your Child as a Gift from God!

NOTE: Throughout this little book you will find other examples (by observation as well as from personal experience) of how I learned and applied these Happy Parenting Rules – basic principles that can be applied to many parenting situations.

Chapter 2

Papa Bear's 2nd Rule: *Treat each Child as an Individual Human Being and NOT as 'Just a Child'!*

- *Treat each child as a human being not as 'just a child'! Think of them as adults - only smaller in size. Their feelings are just as important to them as yours are to you! To you the loss of your favorite jewelry may be traumatic; for the child, the loss of a ball or toy may be just as traumatic! We cannot presume to know what is more important!*
- *Empathize, don't patronize!*

What I have observed time and again is that most of the problems faced by parents arise out of one single fact: *their failure to appreciate and treat each child as an individual.*

Because of this, they are unable to communicate with their son or daughter. They think of him or her as 'just a child'! They do not give the child's feelings the consideration they would give to an adult.

They are unable to empathize with their child's feelings. For example, as mentioned above, you as a parent may consider the loss of your favorite jewelry or your car as traumatic – but you fail to realize that the loss of a ball or a favorite toy is just as traumatic to the child.

And who is to gauge what is more important? To the mother the jewelry means a large sum of money which she can ill afford to lose. To the father the loss of the car is a big issue. Both parents may lose sleep over their loss and worry incessantly.

However, when you look at it from the point of view of the child, the loss of his favorite toy or the death of her pet cat, is a big issue too. The child too may cry incessantly, and lose his/her appetite as well as lose their sleep over the loss of their favorite toy.

It is of no use to tell the child: *"Don't cry. It is only a toy. We can get you another one. It is just a small thing and not really important!"*

If the father were to only think of how he himself would feel if he lost his car, then he could guess at how the child would feel and act accordingly.

So, when we are dealing with a child, we must always put ourselves in his/her place and then think what would be a good solution to their problem.

Most parents make the mistake of glossing over the problems of the child, because it does not feel important for them. Often, they tend to just follow some rules that may have worked for their own parents – without realizing that each child is unique and needs to be considered so.

Recently I heard a young father complain that his one-year old baby was *'refusing to sleep, that it was stubborn'*. How silly is that? As if a child is purposely avoiding sleep just to spite the parents!

If an adult is unable to sleep, he can say with impunity: *"I just can't get to sleep!"* and we accept it as a normal statement. No one would make a comment like: *"You are just refusing to sleep!"*

Instead we would give the adult excuses such as *"You must be having insomnia problems, too much tension at work and so on."* Then we may suggest solutions like 'warm milk, meditation, reading a book, or in the worst case, sleeping tablets'!

But if a child is unable to sleep, we dare to say *"The baby is refusing to sleep!"* Let me ask you this. How does it benefit the baby to keep awake when it is sleepy and wants to rest? Why would the baby be crying, if it was feeling good about keeping awake?

Of course, the baby wants to sleep – but it is NOT able to! So, we should look for solutions to the baby's sleep problems – e.g. make the sleep

environment more conducive; standardize the pre-bedtime routine; avoid getting them excited when bedtime is near, play soothing music or whatever else will help *the baby sleep easily!*

Do anything, but please don't blame the baby for 'refusing' to sleep!

I believe that when it comes to babies (who cannot express their problems except by crying), we should always try to find a solution and not add to the problem. If we cannot find a solution, it is better to just let it be, rather than shouting at the baby or giving it a smack just because we are frustrated with its incessant crying!

We should learn to treat children as individual human beings and give them the same consideration we would give adults.

As any parent with several children will know, each child is different. Even though all the kids are brought up in the same home, fed the same food, showered the same love and so on, each child still exhibits very individual traits. Because each child is unique!

Thus, I have never found it strange to treat each of my three sons according to their individual wants and needs – although many friends and relatives have advised me against doing so, saying I was 'spoiling' them!

The true incident below is an example of applying Papa Bear's 2nd Rule: *"Treat each child as an individual human being, not as just a child!"*

True Story #1:

Once in the course of my job, when I was transferred to another town, I managed to find a small 3-roomed house for rent. At that time our three sons (let us call them Abi, Ram and Arun) were aged 13, 11 & 6 years respectively.

Now I was left with making the decision on how to share out the rooms! For my wife it was an easy decision: "We'll take one room, the eldest gets one room and the two younger ones share the third room!"

However, I had to make a decision based on the above-mentioned Papa Bear's Rule #2. You see, my eldest son Abi was always an extrovert - more 'matured' and less 'self-centered' even as a child. My third child Arun was also very outgoing. So, Abi and Arun could get along with each other more easily than with Ram.

However, my second son Ram was an introvert and found it difficult to make friends easily. Also, Ram needed his own space very badly because he could only study when there were no distractions. In addition, he needed to concentrate exclusively on his subjects when he was studying, because he was very competitive and wanted to get the best results.

Abi, on the other hand was more easy-going and could get good results even without much concentrated study. Plus, he could get along with Arun as well.

Knowing this, I decided on giving Ram one room for himself and let Abi and Arun share the other room (unlike my wife's idea that the eldest should be given a separate room).

Fortunately, Abi was understanding and not adamant about having his own room and Arun the youngest was happy with the arrangement – he had his big brother to look after him!

On an earlier occasion, I had given Abi a radio cassette player – because he was very much into listening to music; to Arun I had given a chopper bike which he wanted badly. To each according to his own!

So, my plan when dealing with my children was to always think of their individual concerns and not simply give in to the traditional expectations of other people!

True Story 2:

Talking about the problem of a child hating school, I would like to end this chapter with another personal story about our second son's entry to school. My second son Ram, the introvert, always had to have his own way. Once he had decided on something it was difficult to get him to change his mind, by reasoning or persuasion or by threats.

I remember when he was just about 2 years old and I wanted to reprimand him about something – he would glare at me in such a way that he seemed to be thinking "Just because you are bigger than me, you think you can bully me and order me around! Just wait until I grow up!" That was the impression I got looking into his eyes!

(Note: Ironically, he has now grown up into a strapping adult, six foot two inches in height while I am just five foot eight inches tall!)

*Now, **I have never believed in using fear to discipline my children,** and realized at once that I had to use a different approach for this boy. He had to feel that it was his own idea, and not my idea forced upon him.*

When Ram was 5 years old, we wanted to send him to kindergarten, just as his elder brother Abi had gone without any complaints. However, this boy insisted he was NOT going to kindergarten. I did not want to force him to go – not only because it would be unpleasant for all of us but it would have to be repeated each day! So, I had an idea – to use reverse psychology.

On the Saturday just prior to his being admitted to kindergarten on a Monday, I noticed Ram playing about under the dining table with his Matchbox cars. We were staying in Government Quarters then, and it so happened that there were several laborers cutting grass and sweeping the drains in the house compound.

*So, I started talking to my wife Leela (pretending I was unaware the boy was under the table): "Leela, I think we should **not** send Ram to*

kindergarten to join his elder brother, Abi. Since Abi is going to school and getting good results, he will end up getting a good professional job."

"Now, if we send Ram too, then who is going to carry out the jobs of drain sweeper or grass cutter that these laborers are doing now? We need people to do these jobs too. So, since Ram does not want to go to school, it is very good – he can do the job of these laborers when he grows up! So, remember on Monday don't send him to school, even if he changes his mind!"

The end result of that little bit of reverse psychology was that on Monday, Ram made no fuss about waking up or getting dressed and was ready to go to kindergarten without any persuasion from his mother or me. Instead he was insisting he wanted to go to school.

And the funny thing is, throughout his school days, Ram never missed a class. Even when he was a little unwell, he insisted on going to school. And he was always top of his class all through his Primary, Secondary as well as his College days. Furthermore, he seems to love studying, to the extent that now, even after getting his Masters, and working as a Mechanical Engineer, he is still continuing to study for his MBA, etc.

Does that mean that reverse psychology will work for every child? Not necessarily! For example, if Abi had not wanted to go to school and I had given him the option to quit – he might have gladly taken the option. So again – to each his own. What works for one may not work for another.

So that is **Papa Bear's Rule #2:**

"Treat each child as an individual human being in his or her own right – not just as another child!"

Chapter 3

Papa Bear's 3rd Rule: NEVER Discipline a Child When YOU are ANGRY!

1. *Never punish a child out of anger – be like an impartial Judge - only mete out token punishment (with compassion and love). Immediately after the scolding or token punishment, at once provide an expression of your love – e.g. give the child a treat!*
2. *Always differentiate between the child and his/her action - never label them as such and such (naughty boy, bad girl etc.). There are NO bad boys or girls – **only undesirable actions that need to be understood and corrected.** Always tell the child: "You are a good boy/girl. Only that particular action you did was wrong and should not be repeated!"*

I believe that this third rule is perhaps the most important when dealing with child discipline. Almost all the parents, I have observed, seem to break this rule regularly. They are unaware that being angry when punishing a child is counter-productive.

In fact, they think it is normal: "*Of course I punish only when I am angry. Why would I punish a child if I am happy?*" seems to be their thought process! I hope by the end of this chapter, these parents will begin to think a little differently – which is why this is one of the longer chapters. First, let me talk about anger.

What is anger?

One of the definitions I like is that given by best-selling author Phil Laut: '*Anger is intention contaminated by the idea of helplessness!*'

A good example would be when we want our child to behave in public. If the child keeps misbehaving, we feel helpless and frustrated. This brings on the anger because our intention is thwarted. The main reason for our anger is our feeling of helplessness, our inability to cope with the situation. If we felt in control then we would not get angry.

To take another example, let's say a martial arts master meets a robber on the street. Do you think the master is likely to feel helpless and hence angry? No, because he knows that he can easily handle the robber. He does not feel helpless so he keeps calm and does what needs to be done to solve the problem.

Similarly, parents get angry with their kids when they feel helpless and frustrated and take it out on their children by venting their anger. So, *the way to avoid anger is to feel confident*; and the way to be confident when dealing with children is explained later on in this chapter in a reference to the 'Dog Whisperer'.

True Story:

One day when I was still in my teens, on coming back home from school, I observed that an Aunt of mine was caning her six-year-old son repeatedly. While caning the boy, she kept telling him "Don't make a sound! Don't make a sound!"

I felt that was downright silly of my Aunt – to cane a child and expect him not to cry. Till today, I don't know what she was caning him for, but if she was really interested in getting the child to change a particular behavior, then she was clearly going about it the wrong way. She did not specify to the child what he was to do or not to do – she just kept caning him while asking him to keep quiet.

*I realized then that she was only venting her anger on her son under the pretext of disciplining him. At that moment, **I made a vow to myself** that when I became an adult and a father, **I would NEVER punish my child when I was angry!***

If I were to punish a child while I am angry, I am only expressing my anger. I am not really administering discipline. And how can I be fair and just while administering discipline, when I myself am not in control of my own emotions?

Personally, except for perhaps for just a couple of lapses over all these years, I have kept to that vow when dealing with my own children.

My personal method of dealing with a child when he does something that is not right or acceptable; especially something which could cause hurt or injury to others is best illustrated by a personal example below.

True Story:

Several years ago, my wife was babysitting a five-year old boy and his two-month old baby sister, whose parents were both away working. This boy had been brought up by his doting grandparents from birth and so he was a little self-willed.

I had just begun working from home, so I was able to sleep late. One morning, around 7.30 am, I heard my wife calling out to the boy (let's call him Arvind) again and again.

I came downstairs and saw the following scene: My wife was locked out of the house, while Arvind was seated on a sofa near the window, smiling to himself (as though he had done something great)!

My wife had gone out carrying the baby and Arvind had locked the main door. So, there was my wife, pleading with the boy to unlock the door and there he was, just sitting on the couch with a smug smile!

Initially I could not help smiling to myself – Arvind looked so cute sitting there smiling, but I realized at once that this was a dangerous situation. Imagine if I were not around when this happened – what could my wife do with the baby in her arms, locked out of the house? Worse, imagine if the baby was inside while my wife was outside!

*So, I immediately **put on a great show of being extremely angry!** I scowled at Arvind and told him in a loud voice: "Arvind, you are never again to lock the main door when Auntie is outside. Now get up and unlock the door at once! In shock at my loud voice and demeanor, he quickly did so! I took a small ruler, asked him to show me his palm and gave it a light tap – just to let him know that what he had done was not acceptable.*

The boy was so scared at my sudden show of anger that he began crying. Then I did what my wife never expected me to do (and never agreed with). I took Arvind to the neighborhood grocers and bought him an ice-cream stick.

My wife could not understand that there was method in my seeming 'madness'! She said: "*What is the use of giving the child a treat immediately after a reprimand? It dilutes the value of the reprimand and the child will only be confused!*"

I asked her: "***Is punishment the true purpose of discipline?*** *I do not want the child to be afraid of punishment and to do things only out of fear. I want him to learn that that particular behavior of his was unacceptable.*"

I believed in always *letting the child know that he may have committed a **bad action**, but that did not make him a **bad boy!*** That distinction is vital.

Most parents do the opposite: *they call the child 'bad boy' or 'bad girl'* when what they actually want to convey is only that the particular action was unacceptable.

So, after buying Arvind an ice-cream stick, I explained to the boy: that he was a good boy and we loved him, but what he had done was dangerous both for him and his baby sister and that was why I had scolded him. I explained I did not hate him or think that he was bad. Only I wanted him to know not to do such a thing in the future.

Because I had gone from 'angry' to nice and also proved my affection for him by getting him a treat, Arvind accepted what I had to say. And in all the years when he and his sister were in my wife's care, he never again locked anyone outside!

This does not mean that Arvind turned into an angel overnight. Not at all. Later on, after he had left our care, Arvind's father still had some complaints about his behavior at home and at school. And he would bring

his son to me as a last resort, because he found that Arvind would listen to me and heed my advice.

Analysis:

Now why would Arvind listen to me but not his own parents or to my wife? I believe that there are two reasons for that.

- **Firstly**, because **he senses that I value him as a person** and do not place labels on him as others do. Labels such as *"You are a naughty boy; you are a bad boy; you are good-for-nothing and so on."*

I always ensure that the boy knows how much I appreciate and value him as an individual and *point out the difference between a 'bad action' and being a 'bad person'*.

Most parents do not do this. The moment a child does something which is not acceptable, they immediately label him/her as 'bad', 'stupid', 'brainless' and other even worse terms! This will only spoil their self-image and they will eventually 'live up to the negative expectation' (self-fulfilling prophecy).

- **Secondly**, I believe it is ***your own self confidence and belief that you can resolve the problem, no matter what, that will make a child listen to you.*** When you have this confidence, you give out a strong aura and the child naturally listens to you.

But if you feel helpless and diffident as some parents do and think: *"I don't know how to control this child's temper? He's incorrigible, etc."* then your aura is weakened accordingly and transmits that message to the child.

I had confirmation of this point when I was watching an episode of 'Dog Whisperer' where Cesar Milano demonstrates what it means to be in control. The dogs (however badly behaved) accept him as the leader and he is able to get them to behave.

I know children are not dogs but they too like to know who is boss in the house – not by intimidation or fear but by your own innate self-confidence.

As an example of what I am saying about self-confidence, I notice that my wife and the other grandma still get bullied by our grandchildren. Both grandmas are so very loving to the grandchildren and look after their every need (from bathing, to feeding, to reading to them) but when the kids throw tantrums, they always tend to feel helpless.

The toddlers can instinctively sense this helplessness and will take advantage of it! They even try to hit their grandmas if they do not get their way. But so far none of them have ever tried to bully me with their tantrums even though I have never used corporal punishment on them.

I just have to use a different tone of voice to get them to listen. This doesn't mean that they fear me – on the contrary they seem happy and excited to have me around as their favorite playmate.

Nowadays, my grandchildren don't try to get what they want from me by throwing tantrums. Instead they are experts in coaxing and persuasion. To give an example:

Recently my grandchildren had come by for a day visit. I happened to be watching TV when my four-year-old granddaughter approached me with a winsome smile. She said: "*Grandpa, I think you are addicted to TV.*" When I protested that I was not she said: "*Grandpa, let's make a deal. Switch off the TV now while we are here. When we go back in the evening, then you can start watching TV again.*" Now, how do you say no to such an invitation given in such a cute way?

This is how they get their way with me nowadays – not by tantrums because they know from experience that tantrums don't work with me. Not

for lack of trying though. The four-year-old had initially tried screaming and throwing things as she used to do to get her way from her grandmas.

When I refused to give in, she has threatened not to speak to me and told me she does not love me. I just kept calm and told her that even if she did not love me, I still loved her and would continue to do so.

Then she avoided me for almost an hour before finally coming to sit next to me. I talked to her normally as though nothing had happened and did not bring up the incident again. Now she has come up with this new tactic of coaxing and persuasion!

Summary of Rules for Disciplining a Child.

If you do have to reprimand or punish a child, remember the following rules:

- **Never punish when you are angry:** Because if you punish a child while you are angry, you are merely venting your anger or frustration. And how can you be fair and just while administering discipline, when you yourself are not in control of your own emotions?

You can *pretend* to be angry to get the message across if that is the only way. But generally, be calm and remember that the child does not know better and *you are always in control of the situation.*

- **Any reprimand must be given immediately:** Time is of the essence. We are not helping the child if we do what some mothers do, saying "*Wait till your father gets home!*"

Because by the time father gets home, the child would have forgotten about the incident and even if he is reprimanded at that time, he may not be able to associate the incident with the reprimand. Hence, he may repeat the action at another time – not because he wants to disobey you, but because he has forgotten.

- Let the child know that only that **particular action of his was 'bad or wrong'** and **that he himself is a 'good' child**: I believe that *it is vital for a child to be confident that we love him no matter what!*

In order to demonstrate this, immediately after the reprimand, give the child a token of your love and affection. This can be as simple as giving him a piece of chocolate, ice-cream or other treat, while emphasizing your affection for him and pointing out why he was reprimanded.

This will enable the child to easily **know what an unacceptable action is** without undermining his self-esteem!

This same principle can be applied whenever we have to correct a child – whether in his studies, or his relationship skills, or his behavior with his peers.

- Never call a child 'stupid' or 'naughty' or 'bad' or 'good-for-nothing' just because of certain actions of his/hers. When involved in correcting a child's behavior, always distinguish between the child as a person and his actions!
- **Never make unflattering comparisons with their siblings or other children.** Never criticize a child by comparing him/her with another, saying things like:
 - “Look at your brother. See how good his school results are. Why can't you be like him?”
 - “See how well behaved your sister is. Why can't you be like her?”

He/she cannot be like the sister or brother because each child is a unique and different divine being. Such comparisons only cause the child to lose self-esteem and often creates jealousy – which is not conducive to creating a happy family.

- **Don't use fear of corporal punishment to control a child's behavior.**

Some parents still believe in the age-old saying “spare the rod and spoil the child” thus advocating corporal punishment. Personally, I believe that,

(except in very, very rare cases, when physical punishment may be an option), taking the time to understand and talk to the child may be all that is necessary.

I could never understand parents caning a child for getting bad grades at school! If a child is having difficulty learning a subject and is not able to ask for help, it is up to the parent to understand the situation and give appropriate help without waiting to be asked.

Adding fear of physical punishment to their existing problem with studying, is like adding insult to injury, and only makes the child hate school even more!

So that is Papa Bear's Rule#3:

"Never Discipline a Child When YOU are Angry!"

Chapter 4

Papa Bear's 4th Rule: *Always Treat the Child as Top Priority!*

- *Always treat the child as the top priority – not your family, colleagues, friends, and so on. Don't be a victim of the 'Parental Pride Syndrome' where you try to make the child perform for your friends and family just to assuage your 'parental pride'*

Most parents bring up their children always worrying about '*What will the people say?*' They insist on their children getting good results at school (not so much for the child's future) but because it gives them 'bragging rights' when talking to other parents.

Sometimes **they overlook what the child really wants or dreams of**, thinking that they as parents always know best! Unknowingly, what they really want is to bask in the 'reflected glory' of their child's achievements!

That is NOT the best way to bring up a child – **think instead about what is truly good for the child!** Don't worry about the criticism from so-called well-meaning adults who are only being self-indulgent and judgmental.

A couple of examples will clarify what I mean.

True Story #1:

Years ago, when my sons were just about 5 and 3 years of age, I was a tennis enthusiast and used to go regularly to the sports club. On some occasions I took along my sons, so as to give my wife a break from having to look after 2 active boys all day long.

On one occasion, my younger son Ram began to cry that he wanted to go home – it must have been boring for a 3-year-old to just sit and watch while the grown-ups played!

He was a very persistent child and I, knowing his character, decided to take the child home and then come back to continue the game. This meant breaking up

the game and my partners criticized me: "Are you the father controlling your child or is he controlling you?"

But that did not prevent me from doing what was right for the child! I knew him better than my friends did.

On one occasion we had left Ram with his Grandma for a couple of hours, while we attended a wedding dinner. When we came back, we found that the boy had been crying non-stop and had held his breath until he was blue. Grandma said: "Never again. I just didn't know what to do to stop him crying! Don't ever leave your son alone with me again!"

So, **thinking of the child's best interests** (not that of my friends or my own), **I broke off the game and sent my son back home!**

I used to get a lot of criticism from friends and relatives who said I was too lenient with the children, that I was spoiling them and so on! However, the years have proved otherwise. All my three sons have grown up to be loving, caring and responsible adults with loving families of their own.

They are also very loving and caring to us, their parents. Two of my sons, one working in USA, and the other in UAE, make it a point to call and speak to us every week; while the other son, who lives in Malaysia rings up every day without fail.

Nowadays, some of those same friends and relatives who used to pass judgment on my way of bringing up children; give comments like: *"You are so lucky! Your kids must really love you to want to call you regularly. I seldom get calls from my children!"*

While I believe that we are truly blessed, *it is not entirely due to luck that our sons are so caring.* It is partly because when they were small, *we treated them and their feelings with respect!* We considered the children as top priority when compared with the jaundiced views of our friends. Many times, we have avoided going to parties or other functions if we thought that our children would be bored or unhappy and opted to stay home with our children instead.

True Story #2

The second story is based on an experience I had several years ago. I have this habit of writing articles about anything that moves me, expecting to send them to a newspaper or magazine - which I never get around to!

So, the article on 'Parental Pride Syndrome' which I share below was written years and years ago. However, I feel that this is an appropriate time and place to share the article with you.

Parental Pride Syndrome

Some decades ago, when I was traveling on a bus, I observed a scene which saddened me a little. I happened to be sitting in a seat across the aisle from one occupied by a father, a mother and their son, about three years of age.

The bus conductor, in an affable mood, was asking the boy his name. The boy was silent. The conductor then joked that he would have to get off the bus if he did not say his name. The toddler was still silent. The conductor then went back to his usual place beside the driver, having quite forgotten the incident.

But (and this is what surprised me) the father started to berate (scold) the boy, saying things like "Why can't you tell him your name? Don't you know your own name? You're stupid and so on."

The boy kept silent but tears brimmed up in his eyes. Finally, in exasperation the father cuffed the poor boy on his head to which the mother protested: "Leave him alone, can't you!"

How often are we as parents guilty of similar crimes against our own children? We often reprimand and even punish our children just to satisfy our own pride and vanity.

This particular father wanted the bus conductor to know what a smart son he had! When the son would not perform, thereby denying him that satisfaction, he got angry. It did not occur to the father that **the toddler had rights too** - *that he was entitled to sit quietly in the bus minding his own business!*

Suppose a stranger had walked up to the father and asked him the selfsame question: "*What's your name?*" The father or any other adult **would have reacted with irritation** and told the stranger **to mind his own business**, and he would have been well **within his rights to do so!**

But just because the victim is a small boy, he does not have the right to his own counsel or privacy! If the parent snaps his finger, the child is supposed to sing and dance for relatives and strangers, to have his head patted, or have his cheeks pulled.

The child is nothing more than a performing seal to such parents! The child must perform just so that the parents can enjoy the vicarious pleasure (reflected glory) of their achievements. Such parents seldom treat their children as human beings.

If only parents would remember that **a child too is a person, only smaller in size!** *The child too has his own soul, his own feelings and his own individuality.*

But we as parents often do not respect this. We make statements like:

- "*Children should be seen and not heard*".
- "*Do it because I say so (not necessarily because it is right)*".
- "*Don't talk back*".
- "*Don't question me. I'm your Father/ Mother*" and so on. As though becoming a Father or Mother entitled us to play God?

This is what I call **Parental Pride Syndrome (PPS)** and is one of the most devastating of maladies to strike any parent.

It is PPS that makes a mother boast about how smart her son or daughter is to friends and relatives. It is PPS that makes a father beat his child in order 'to improve his grades'.

It is this PPS that forces children in Primary school to attend hours of tuition, piano classes, gym sessions and tennis coaching – even if the child is NOT keen on any of those things. All under the pretext of "*It is all for the child's own good!*"

In order to avoid hours of nagging and even threat of corporal punishment, these poor kids have to endure all this, against their will, just to satisfy the vanity of their parents.

*(**NOTE:** I just realized when editing this book: this is exactly what the 'tiger mother' has been doing. And remember I wrote this article decades ago, so in a sense I was predicting such behavior from a parent suffering from PPS.)*

Such crimes against their children do not go unpunished. The rift between the parent and the child keeps growing. We speak of the '*generation gap*' but it is of the parents' own making. They treat their own child as they would NOT treat their worst enemy, yet they expect respect, affection and even LOVE from their little ones!

What a pitiful bunch these parents with PPS are. For any parent unfortunate enough to be afflicted by this illness, try this remedy, paraphrased from the 'Golden Rule'.

"Do unto your children as you would them do unto you – if you were in their shoes and they in yours".

NOTE: I would **not** recommend the Golden Rule in its original form "Do unto others as you would them do unto you!"

This form of the Golden Rule is what people normally apply in error. For example, if I enjoyed smoking or alcohol, I would offer cigarettes or drinks to others and insist that they take them (because that is what I would want them to do for me)!

But if the other was a non-smoker or teetotaler, would I be doing the right thing? According to the original Golden Rule, I should be considered generous and kind to do so.

Similarly, many parents feel that they are in fact truly applying the Golden Rule in their treatment of their children. They say: "*I always wanted to be a Doctor*

(or Lawyer, Teacher, Engineer Singer, Actor etc.), therefore I'm giving my child the chance I never had." "What is wrong with that?"

Nothing – provided that the child too wants to be a Doctor, or Lawyer etc.

However, if he wants to be a writer or an artist or a musician, you would be doing him a grave disservice by forcing him to go to Medical or Engineering School!

It should not be what we, as parents want, but what the child genuinely wants!

A caring, empathic parent will help a child to achieve the child's dream, not the parent's dream. This is why the above variation of the Golden Rule is recommended.

So that is Papa Bear's Rule #4:

Always treat your child (and his/her feelings) as top priority!

Chapter 5

Papa Bear's 5th Rule: *Always look out for Opportunities to create Family Moments of Sharing*

1. Have picnics, outings, and holidays together,
2. Read books, tell stories, watch TV together, etc.
3. Really *listen* when the child is speaking to you.

- **Taking the children on outings together:**

Finding the time to create family moments of sharing is an extremely vital part of parenting! For example, taking the children out for picnics, outings and holidays is one of the best things we can do for the whole family. These experiences are what the children will remember even when they are adults!

The other day when a son visited us with his children, my wife and I took out our old albums to share. When the grandchildren saw their father and his brothers out on a lake, in a boat wearing life-jackets, they wanted to know where that place was. We told them that it was in Mimaland (short for Malaysia In Miniature Land), they asked where it was. Unfortunately, the place which was a popular resort more than 30 years ago had closed down.

But the thing I want to emphasize is that even though Mimaland does not exist now, the memories the children had when they went there for an outing is always there, especially if there are photos to record the occasion.

Nowadays, keeping photo records is not a problem at all with every handphone being able to instantly take selfies and other photos digitally! In those days we had to take the photograph, send the film to the photo shop to be developed and print out the photos, which could take days. Even so, having those old print photos to look at now is a blessing indeed.

In those days we could not afford vacations overseas, but spending time together, even if it is only a picnic in the nearby park or a beach would still mean a lot to not only the children but also the parents!

Another way to be close to the children is to make time to attend their school functions – sports days, school concerts etc. Such times can never be replaced by giving them gifts or money instead! Trying to do so will only alienate the kids.

- **Other Moments of Sharing:**

Reading books to the children (not just at bedtime) is another great opportunity to spend quality, family time. Children naturally love stories and it is easy to get them interested in reading on their own, if we regularly read to them while answering their queries and discussing the scenes, the moral of the story etc. This is all the more important in the modern world when the internet and YouTube have so much hold over the kids these days.

Playing Board Games is another good way to keep the children engaged, excited and happy. Many of the present-day kids may not even have enjoyed games like Snakes & Ladders, Monopoly, Scrabble, Cluedo, etc. Re-introducing these games to our kids may help them break free of their internet addiction and help them to communicate with each other or just plain talk.

Watching TV together:

Instead of just turning on the Kids TV channel and letting them watch by themselves all the time, occasionally join them. Listen to their excited conversation, their comments etc. and really take an interest in the conversation.

The Discovery and National Geographic channels are also great to watch with the children. We will be often amazed at their knowledge of animals, places and so on. I still enjoy watching TV with my grandchildren – it's fun family time.

- **Really Listen to Your Children:**

Kids naturally want to be heard. They love to be the center of attention. Unfortunately, most parent don't make the time to really listen to them. They

just brush off the kids because they are preoccupied with their own problems at work or at home.

I have seen very often toddlers tugging at their mother's skirt or their dad's pants to get their attention, only to be told "Later, later" or "I'm busy now", "Go and play with your brother/sister", "Stop bothering me now" etc.

Instead, if the parents had just given a few moments of full attention their kids' problems would have been cleared up easily. I understand that sometimes the kids can be very demanding, but giving them full attention and really listening to their concerns for a few seconds would help resolve their little gripes. The parents could then resume their work easily, and not have to get irritated or worked up!

The above are only a few suggestions on how to create family moments of sharing. You the reader will be able to come up with many such occasions if only you put your mind to it.

So that is Papa Bear's Rule #5:

Always Look Out for Opportunities to create more Family Moments of Sharing.

Chapter 6

Papa Bear's 6th Rule: *The Art of Saying 'No' to Children*

1. **Don't be too quick to say NO first** and then **give in** after much persuasion! *Instead always say – 'let me think about it'; and once you make a proper decision, stick to it firmly!*
2. **Do not just forbid – explain first.** *Remember forbidden fruits taste sweeter!*

It is sometimes necessary to say 'NO' to our children, especially when their personal safety or their physical wellbeing is concerned.

But we should not be raising our voices and shouting 'NO!' at every little thing. That would not be effective in getting the kids to do what is acceptable or safe. You see there is an art of saying 'no' to children which is described below.

1. DON'T BE TOO QUICK TO SAY 'NO' FIRST

Often, I notice this trend among parents, especially mothers: They are very quick to say 'no' to their child, whatever the request; then after persistent pleas from the child they finally give in and say yes!

What are we teaching the children by doing this? We are teaching the child that Mum does not mean what she says; *that it is necessary to keep pestering Mum in order to get what they want!*

Is this the lesson we want the child to learn? Of course not!

So, this is what I normally do when any of my children come up with a new request. I tell them *"Let me think about it!"*

Then, after having studied the particular case and listened to the child's arguments, I make my decision. Once I make the decision (whether it is 'Yes or No or Later') the child knows that it is final and will not waste any time throwing tantrums or pestering me.

They know that because I have made a firm decision after much thought, there is no use talking about it again or bringing up the topic again. However, they also know that I have given them the chance to have their say and I too have explained my own views on why I can or cannot accede to their request.

This phrase "*Let me think about it!*" has been of real help to me countless times. It gives me time to study the issue; it lets the child know that I am thinking about his request and not just discarding it with a hasty no!

(An amusing anecdote: Recently, my son told me that he had tried to use this method with his 10-year-old son. But after some time, the son had come back to his father saying: "*Okay, Dad, you have had time to think about it. So, when can I get it?*")

Then my son had to explain: "*When I say let me think about it, doesn't mean that I am going to get it for you after some thinking. It means that after some thinking, I will **decide whether I can get you the stuff you asked for or not!***"

The boy answered: "*Oh! I thought that you just needed some time to think first and then give me what I want!*")

Thus, you can see that even simple statements can be misunderstood by a child. So here are some pointers to make this phrase "*Let me think about it!*" work:

- First let the child know that **you may or may not** accede to their request but **you will only decide** after some thinking
- Second, **you must give serious consideration to their request**, not just use this phrase to brush them off, hoping that they would have forgotten later!
- Third, **you must take the time to really study their request**; listen to them, explain your own reasons, and only then decide.

- And Finally, **you must be firm in your decision.** This you can do if you have been in the ***habit of keeping your word*** to them.

On Keeping Your Word:

I found that '*keeping our word*' to be an important point when dealing with children (or even adults) – **we must keep our promises, no matter how small!** If we say we will take them to a certain show, we must do our utmost to do so. If we say we will get them something when we get back from work, then we must get it!

I remember that I used to be a stickler for this. On occasions, I have returned home after work and when I reach home, I find the children waiting excitedly for the promised item (whether it is a piece of chocolate, or ice-cream or anything else). **I had forgotten, so I immediately reversed the car went out again to return with the promised item!**

My wife used to say: "*Never mind. You can get it tomorrow.*" But to me that was not right! I had promised something and *the kids had been looking forward to it, so it was not acceptable to disappoint them* – even if it meant some inconvenience for me!

So, when we make a habit of keeping our word, it becomes easy for us to be firm in our decisions – **the children are used to us keeping our word**; so, they know that pleading, throwing tantrums etc. would not work! This makes life much easier for the whole family. But you have to put up with some personal inconveniences in order to achieve this.

Note: *Remember that punctuality is also a form of keeping our word!*

2. DON'T JUST FORBID OUTRIGHT.

Instead of just saying 'no' or 'forbidding' a child from doing something, always give an explanation why it is forbidden! Also, it is good to remember the adage that '*Forbidden fruits taste sweeter*' because of the 'mystery' – if the mystery is removed, the urge is also reduced.

Example:

Just think about the following scenario. Along the street which you traverse daily there is a fence made up of wooden boards about 7 feet high. There are a couple of knot-holes in this fence. All the while you have not even noticed these knot-holes.

*Today however, you notice that someone has written the words '**Do Not Peep**' under one of these knot-holes. Now what happens?*

Don't you feel tempted to just take a peep? You still do not bother about the other knot-hole with no writing. Even if someone had written 'Please Peep!' under that hole, it would not attract you as much as the 'Do Not Peep' knothole!

You may manage to avoid peeping for a couple of days, but sooner or later you will succumb to the temptation of the 'forbidden' and peep through that hole! That is human nature!

Forbidden fruits do taste sweeter! Perhaps that is why the Ten Commandments are broken so often – most of them start off with 'thou shall not' or don't!

Knowing this quirk of human nature, what can we do, when we really have to get our children to avoid certain things that may be harmful to them?

Instead of forbidding, explain to them the consequences - if at all possible. Of course, **it takes more patience and time**, to do this **rather than to just say NO**, but the results will be more favorable.

When the child decides not to do certain things on his/her own, it is more effective than if they avoided some things only out of fear of the parent!

For example, when my sons were toddlers, I taught them about the danger of hot objects as follows. If a toddler saw a cup of hot coffee and wanted to hold it, I would tell him "*No, No, Hot! Hot!*" in a grave tone of voice.

While doing so and with the cup just within reach of his fingertips, *I would allow him to just slightly touch the cup* repeating the word "Hot, Hot" again. He would immediately pull away his fingers when he felt the heat. After a couple of times of this when I say "Hot" he understands and does not insist on holding the cup.

So, the way I forbid the child from doing something unsafe is to demonstrate (if at all possible) and explain while saying 'no'. I am rather surprised that this works even now with the children of today, but with a slight change. Recently my one-year old granddaughter taught me the truth of this. Story below:

Saying 'No' to My Grandchild

Example 1:

Several years ago, when my son and his wife both went off to work, they used to leave their one-year old child (let's call her Anya) with us, the grandparents, during the day.

Because of the mosquito problem at home, we are forced to switch on an electric mosquito repellent in the living room. The child is attracted to the red light on the repellent but since it may be hot, and because it is connected to the electric socket, we don't want the child to touch it.

I had noticed that my son does what most parents would do: He raises his voice and in a warning tone says "*No! No!*" But this only makes the child more eager to explore and touch the thing!

So, what I did was this. I kept repeating to the child in a **loving tone** while wagging my forefinger in the classic movement signifying 'no'. At the same time, I repeat (without raising my voice) "*No, no, no. Hot, hot. Ooh! Pain!*"

Then I physically move her away, again gently wagging my finger and saying '*No, no, no, Ooh, pain!*' After a few times she stopped going up to the gadget.

In the evening when the parents came back after work, *I saw her pointing out the mosquito repellent to them while shaking her little finger in the classic 'no, no, no' movement! She was telling them that it was forbidden!*

Anya looks so cute when she wags her finger. She now does this whenever she comes across anything that she knows is forbidden, such as an electrical outlet with an appliance plugged in.

The best part is, she never goes and touches the mosquito repellent or other electrical gadgets (such as a fan) which are plugged into the socket outlet, while in our home.

I just could not believe it! It is truly possible to communicate with a one-year old child by love and explanation rather than by raising our voice or being angry. On the other hand, I have noticed that when her parents were around, she kept trying to do whatever they had forbidden her to do! They kept telling 'No' in a raised voice but she kept on doing it.

CAUTION: *I agree that this method may not work for all kids – some may need the high-handed approach; but generally, I believe that most children will react positively to love and explanation than to threats and anger!*

The only problem with this method is having to *come up with **creative ways to demonstrate the danger*** to the child!

Example 2:

In my son's home, there is a high-quality TV cabinet that is made of hardwood. It has drawers that roll out easily but are so heavy that when the drawer closes, it could potentially crush a baby's finger if caught in it.

Now the baby Anya always liked to play with the drawers by pulling on the knobs as the drawers slid out easily! But since I was aware of the potential danger of having her fingers crushed when the heavy drawer closed, I had to devise a way to let her know the danger and prevent her from playing with it.

So, this is what I did. While holding on to Anya, I opened the drawer and slammed it shut. Being made of heavy hardwood it made a loud noise when it closed. At the same time, I said "*ooh, pain*" to indicate that it was dangerous (she already knew what '*ooh, pain*' meant). I opened and slammed the drawer a couple of times each time saying "*ooh, pain*".

Then I asked her to put her fingers on the edge of the open drawer while pretending to close it – she immediately pulled her hand away! Later I asked her "*Do you want to play with this?*" while pointing to the drawer and she pulled away. Now she does not play with the cabinet drawers at all.

Later that evening, when her mother got home, I saw Anya pointing to the TV cabinet drawer and wagging her forefinger in the classic 'no, no' sign! Anya had accepted the fact that the drawer was another of those 'forbidden' things like electrical sockets!

Thinking back to the past, I remember that my sons too had learnt to avoid the dangerous items in a similar fashion. The only difference being that as children, they never tried to teach others that a particular item was forbidden.

Anya, on the other hand, makes it a point to tell those around her what items are forbidden by going around wagging her finger at them! This only proves my earlier point that each child is an individual and must be treated as an individual!

So that is Papa Bear's RULE #6:

Learn the Art of Saying NO to a Child!

Chapter 7

Papa Bear's 7th Rule: *Learn the Art of Talking to an Older Child or Teenager!*

When it comes to talking to an older child, especially a teenager, it is necessary to respect them and trust that they will act responsibly, when faced with any situation! I do this as follows:

- 1. Stop forbidding them anything!** *Tell them "It is your choice, but **you must accept responsibility for your choices!**"*
- 2. Always 'persuade rather than command'!** *Let them feel it is in their own interest to do something.*

If we have been following the Papa Bear's rules of parenting from the time the child was an infant, then they would not be afraid of you as a parent. Also, when he or she becomes a teenager the 'generation gap' between the two of you will be more surmountable. They will be willing to confide their problems with you and not just with their peers. If you wish them to continue this healthy relationship, then you need to do something quite counter-intuitive as described below:

Stop Forbidding Them Anything!

When my boys grew older and I could reason with them the pros and cons of any particular action, I stopped forbidding them anything. Instead I would tell them: *"It is your choice. It is your responsibility. But you have to accept the consequences!"*

For example, although I personally do not smoke and seldom touch alcohol, I never forbade them from smoking or drinking alcohol. Regarding smoking for example, all I told them was:

"If you want to smoke, it is up to you. You well know the consequences of smoking (such as lung cancer, hypertension and so on). So, if you decide

to smoke, do it, but accept responsibility for your choice! Don't try to lay the blame on others by saying things like 'my friends forced me to start and now I cannot stop', 'the peer pressure was too strong' etc.!"

Then I tell them a true story about me and the peer pressure I faced while in college. Peer pressure need not be an excuse for anything, *if you have good self-esteem and respect yourself*. It is when we lack self-esteem and want to 'fit-in' to be 'part of the in-crowd' that peer-pressure becomes a force.

The story is given below.

True Story.

*My parents were vegetarians, so that right from birth I had always been a vegetarian – we never even ate eggs! So, when I entered a residential college at the age of 17, **I was the only vegetarian among 400 students** who stayed in the college hostels.*

Since I was the only vegetarian, I stood out like a sore thumb whenever I went to the mess-hall during meal times! Many of the students teased me about being vegetarian and I was under a lot of 'peer pressure' to conform and follow the crowd! But having never eaten non-vegetarian food and being quite happy with remaining a vegetarian, I did not let their teasing bother me!

Fortunately for me, because I was the only vegetarian, my food was better prepared than the mass-cooked food the others got! It was so much more appetizing than the food the non-vegetarians received.

*So that over time, more and more of my fellow students chose to have the vegetarian diet, until by the time I finished college (in about 3 years), there were **170 students** who had **changed over to the vegetarian diet!***

*The moral of the story is that **you need not be affected by peer pressure, as long as your own self-esteem is intact** and you are confident about yourself.*

In fact, if a single person could exert 'individual pressure' on almost half the student population, then there is no excuse for anyone to go around blaming

'peer pressure' for doing anything against their own convictions – whether it is smoking, drinking or being in fashion!

*However, there is a postscript to the story above, which further proves the point that **'everything we do is our own choice'!***

P.S: *Later on, when I started work, I was posted to the East Coast of Malaysia where I could not find vegetarian food easily. Then I **chose** (that word again) to start eating non-vegetarian food for my convenience. Nowadays I can live just as easily as a vegetarian or a non-vegetarian, depending on the circumstances and my moods!*

By telling my sons that story, I wanted them to feel good about themselves; that they did not have to conform to what others were doing. I told them that they could earn more respect by being true to themselves and their own convictions rather than being swayed by the opinions of the others around them!

Thus, if they wanted to smoke or to drink, it was their own choice and they must accept responsibility for their choice. I would not forbid them since they were already intelligent enough to think for themselves, and I trusted them to make the right choices.

I am glad to report that until today, not one of my three sons smoke, while one drinks occasionally. My youngest son Arun seems to have learned the lesson about 'peer pressure' or the lack of it very well indeed!

When Arun was in college, he was sharing his hostel room with another boy who experimented with drugs, but Arun himself never even smoked. He did not condemn the other boy either, but accepted that it was that boy's choice; just as he too made his own choices, without being influenced by the other!

So, when talking to an older child or teenager, I have always made it a point to *'never forbid'* but *'ask them to accept full responsibility for their choices'*. It seems that my approach has been successful so far – or perhaps I am just lucky to be blessed with sensible children!

Analysis: In the story above, why was I able to overcome the peer pressure to conform and instead reverse the normal trend of 'following the crowd'?

*I was not affected by peer pressure mainly because I had been brought up by my parents to have high self-esteem and a lot of faith in myself. Therefore, I did not feel the need to 'fit in'. Indeed, I was even **a little proud of the fact that I was different!** So, peer pressure was never a problem for me.*

Thus, if we were to *bring up our children with love and give them good self-esteem and faith in themselves*, then 'peer pressure' should not be a significant factor in making their choices.

NOTE: *This matter of raising a child's self-esteem is a separate topic by itself and involves their learning to have faith in the Creator, faith in the World and faith in their own powers of the Mind. Some of these topics are discussed in my book called Daily Happy Living.*

Persuade, rather than Command!

Another method to use with teenagers (or even adults) when we want them to do something, is to lead not force; cajole not browbeat; persuade not compel. This will be illustrated in the story below which is another article I wrote long ago but never got around to publishing.

The Case of the Recalcitrant Calf

Your first response could be: "What the heck does recalcitrant mean?" Not to worry – the meaning will become clear when you read the story!

This story involves the famous writer (Emerson I believe), who was holidaying at his farmhouse in the country. One fine day the great man found that a calf had wandered into his living room.

He first tried to shoo it away, but the calf had other ideas. He then called his son to help. The son tugged at the head while Emerson pushed at the rear, but the calf would not budge! They tried in vain for several minutes to get the calf outside and had just about given up.

Just then their milkmaid happened to pass by carrying a pail of milk and they hailed her. She observed the situation calmly for a moment. She then dipped her thumb into the pail of milk, walked up to the calf and placed her thumb in its mouth. The calf quietly followed her, busily sucking on her thumb. The maid and the hitherto recalcitrant calf made their exit.

Emerson was left nonplussed. For all his intellect and wit and wisdom, a mere chit of a girl had succeeded in doing what he and his son had failed to do.

The moral of the story: A calf, or even people, can be `led but not driven'! You do not need a PhD to persuade others to do what you want, but you do need common sense.

To lead someone, we need to know what that person wants or needs. The same thing applies to parents and equally to children.

Now back to the `big' word. By now I'm sure you know that recalcitrant means stubborn (or intractable, refractory or intransigent). Then why did I use the uncommon word instead of the common?

I did so simply because the uncommon tends to be remembered better. For example: How many of you know the story of `The Son who Wastes Money'? But I'm sure all of you remember the story of `The Prodigal Son'.

---End of Article---

The old adage says:

"One man can lead a horse to the water, but twenty men cannot make it drink!"

Unlike horses however, we may be able to force our children to do something against their will. But that is not what we want. We want them to do the right thing out of their own choice.

In order for that to happen, whenever we want our children to do something, we should always **try to find reasons** why they would be happy to do it; why they would choose to do it; what is the benefit to them by doing it; and so on. Then, they won't need to be forced or driven to do those things.

Forcing someone to do something against his/her will is difficult. Of course, some people can be intimidated by fear or threat of violence and coerced into doing what we want, but that is obviously not the result we are seeking.

So that is Papa Bear's Rule #7:

Learn the Art of Talking to an Older Child or Teenager!

Conclusion

Well, we have now come to the end of this little book 'Papa Bear's Rules of Happy Parenting' that shows parents and would-be parents the 7 Common-Sense Rules.

What would have stood out from the personal examples and true stories are the following points:

1. That a child is to be treated as an individual with his/her own feelings, just as we would treat an adult!
2. We should empathize with their feelings, their hopes and aspirations and not try to impose our own wishes, dreams and aspirations on them!
3. When disciplining a child, make sure you are not doing so in anger! Be like a judge, but a compassionate one and reprimand them with love.
4. Always look for opportunities to create 'family moments of togetherness' – whether by listening to them attentively, or watching TV with them and going on picnics and outings together.
5. When the child is older, trust him/her to make the right choices in life. Know that if you have brought them up with love and compassion, they would also grow up to be loving and compassionate adults.
6. Never fear that you may not have the means or the knowledge to bring up your child. *God never entrusts anyone with a responsibility without also giving him/her the ability to carry out the responsibility successfully.* Of course, we may face struggles along the way, but always remain steadfast and confident!

It is my earnest hope and belief that this little book will help the readers get a different perspective to child rearing and help them solve some of the problems they may face when bringing up their own children.

With the utmost respect!

Gopi Menon