

6 R's of Discipling in Early Years

The first 5 years of a child's life are very important to set the foundation of the parent-child relationship. Chankya Pandit says - "*lalanam*", pamper the child for the first 5 years.

What is this *lalanam*? It can be compared to the shaping of a pot. When the clay is wet, the potter shapes the pot. He is gentle but firm, molding it to the desired form he wants. If he is too hard, the pot crumbles.

Restraint

The point here is restraint. The potter must show great restraint and self-control when shaping the pot. Similarly, in the early years, the parents have to show great restraint when disciplining the child. The more love and tolerance is shown to the child, the more one invests in the relationship with the child, the more one can withdraw afterwards.

So in the early years, self-restraint and tolerance are the basis from which the child is disciplined.

Restriction

Still the potter has to give shape. He has to define the outlines of the child's character. For this, he needs to impose restrictions or boundaries.

Young children need boundaries so that they can navigate safely through the world. Boundaries make them feel safe and loved, not controlled.

These boundaries can range from No running on the roads to no climbing on the furniture. They can include no shouting in the house, to sitting in one place while eating.

Everything that a child needs to manage himself must be introduced and implemented. Everything a child needs to navigate the world without harming others and without a sense of self-entitlement must be told.

This is "*lalanam*" - the parenting in the pampering. A child's age is actually no excuse for misbehavior.

Redirection

Now the question arises, how can we do this? Just as a potter spins the pot, we also have to put a positive spin to all discipline of young children.

One way to do this is positive redirection - If your child is scribbling on the wall - tell her, "Scribbling only on paper" and give them a paper. If they are screaming in the house say "screaming only in the park" and so on.

Introduce the boundaries in a positive manner instead of negative one. Instead of don'ts tell them positive alternate dos. This makes the child feel as if all their desires are being fulfilled but at the same time teaches them what is appropriate and what is not.

Repetition

The potter's wheel goes round and round and round and so must your disciplining strategy.

Young children lack self-control. Even if they want to, they sometimes can't behave appropriately. Sometimes, in the flow of things, they forget what is expected of them.

It is our duty to constantly remind them of appropriate behavior. Repeat the rules 1000 times if needed. You have to repeat it till it becomes natural for the child.

Due to inattention or carelessness if you let some behavior slide, even once...the child gets the message that it is ok. If he gets that message, the past 900 times that you have repeated something go to waste. The child has learned that it is ok, and he will repeat the misbehavior again. Then you have to start from scratch again.

Also, if you don't enforce the limit consistently, young children get confused. They can't understand why some behavior is ok at this time and not at other times. Then they resist the parent's correction.

For e.g. if you are introducing a boundary to your child - "eat only from their own plate." You go to a friend's house. She is ok if your child eats from her plate. You let him. The child gets confused. He resists future implementation of the limit and snatches from another child's plate later on in kinder.

Routine

Young children need routines to help them make sense of their day. Even little babies behave better if there is some structure in their day.

Observe your child's body clock and rhythms and make sure that their food, sleep and outdoor play needs are met consistently at the same time in the day. Don't stretch your child by unplanned shopping trips in the middle of the afternoon.

Just like the potter's wheel, maintain a steady and simple rhythm in your child's life.

Recreation

Young children are playful and will do everything if we make a game of it. As adults we have forgotten the art of play. We don't have to take every misbehavior of the child as a personal attack on our ego or a personal reflection of our parenting.

Just make a game of everything. Play a game of chase to get your kids to the dining table. Play a game of "Krishna says"(Simon says) to get them into bed. Fly them out of the house as little Hanumans. Enjoy the love and laughter that young children bring to your house!