

Conscientious Parenting for the Moral Development of a Child

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Abstract

Families play an essential role in society. Parents are responsible for the growth and healthy development of faith and morality in their children. It is necessary to understand some of the pre-existing childhood concepts in India when dealing with children as these concepts have strong local, cultural and religious meanings and impact Indian Catholic's understandings of family and marriage. The Church calls for conscious parenting that includes faith. A high level of morality and positive behaviors in parents can result in children having higher levels of moral internalization and positive behavioral outcomes. The growth of the child requires a daily commitment to conscientious parenting. It is a journey of trust, and the more parents trust, the less anxiety they will have about their children's future and thus enable their child's healthy development.

Keywords: Parenting, Conscientious, Moral Development

Introduction

Families play an essential role in society. They are the domestic Church. Parents are responsible for the growth and development of faith and morality in the family, which reflects in the community. The contexts in which children live and grow could be divergent and complex. Some reasons are different languages, religions, cultures, economies, and geographies. India is one such country that is highly

divergent and complex. Therefore, based on these factors, children's status, roles, and issues are different. It is essential to understand some of the pre-existing childhood concepts in India when dealing with children, as these concepts have strong local, cultural, and religious meanings (Phillips, 2015). These meanings impact Indian Catholics' understandings concerning family and marriage. To ensure success in marriage and to have a happy family, the Catholic Church has developed a comprehensive view of marriage and family for Catholics all over the world (Coelho, 2013).

In India, traditional systems survived for centuries without significant changes. However, with the advent of the British, industrialization, modernization, and the recent globalization trends, the structural features and functional implications of the family started changing (Savarimuthu, 2009). This is seen particularly in today's emerging new middle class (Patole, 2018). Faith and morality, which were very important in the cultures and religions of India, also began to change. A conscientious parent looks to the overall development of their child. It implies not applying the same parenting methods to different children, as each child grows differently. Love for the difference is expected, and love, in general, is the most important motivating factor.

Characteristics of a Conscientious Parent

The role models of children at home and socially are their parents. Parents or caregivers who play this vital role need to display integrity and love in all their activities, especially in interpersonal and social activities with their children. Role models are essential for growing children. The display of a lack of morals in parents or caregivers can create vulnerability, and intimacy deficits in a growing child, resulting in distorted beliefs regarding self, others, and relationships. Therefore, the teaching and demonstration of the proper morality should focus right from the early years of a child's development. Children and the young need to understand moral values to embrace them with more profound knowledge and love of God (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 7). Good parenting in which love is shown is essential to prevent maladaptive coping strategies at challenging moments in life.

Children look for integrity in their parents. Integrity is the "firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values" (Merriam-Webster, 2020). It is also known as uprightness of character. An upright person knows how to choose between what is right and what is wrong.

Integrity or uprightness of character is looked for in all walks of life, at home and workplace. Parents model uprightness for their children. A lack of uprightness of character tarnishes the image of the person. The catechism teaches Catholic children about what is right and wrong. Their understandings will continue till death.

Therefore children and young people must be helped, with the aid of the latest advances in psychology and the arts and science of teaching, to develop harmoniously their physical, moral, and intellectual endowments so that they may gradually acquire a mature sense of responsibility in striving endlessly to form their own lives properly and in pursuing true freedom as they surmount the vicissitudes of life with courage and constancy (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 7).

Many parents believe that they are selfless in bringing up their children. They should set aside their beliefs about raising their children as they please and instead look for the best information available to help them with this challenging task. Parenting is most effective when parents concentrate on themselves rather than only their children to get the best results (Tsabary, 1972). All family members should be involved to have meaningful outcomes for the entire family (Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006).

Most societies and communities in the world have strictures sanctioned by religion and culture, and failure to abide can result in exclusion. India's socio-cultural parenting practices include parental authority, respect, and caring; children's obligation to parents and families; development stage and gender-based obligations, attitudes, and behaviors. These socio-cultural practices sometimes override legal commitments and also apply to Indian Catholics. Since the emergence of human rights and child rights, some of these traditional practices have become understood as wrong and demand counter-cultural responses. These deviant practices include female infanticide, child sexual abuse, joint families, forced marriages, dowry, child labor, and child trafficking (Phillips, 2015).

The Duties and Rights of Parents

Parents have the primary and inalienable right and duty to educate their children and to educate them to choose according to their conscience (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 20). Parents teach their children integrity and use their skills in the service of others (*Gaudete Et Exsultate*, 130). This happens through small gestures. Parents talk with their children

about their hopes and dreams with patience and love (*Gaudete Et Exsultate*, 16). When hard times come, parents adapt so that the child knows that they are loved. This brings joy, deep security, serene hope, and spiritual fulfillment to the child (*Gaudete Et Exsultate*, 125). The father and the mother are important influences on a child. The quality of their relationship largely influences their relationship with their child.

A father who has a good relationship with the mother of their children is more likely to be involved and spend time with their children and have children who are psychologically and emotionally healthier. Similarly, a mother who feels affirmed by her children's father and who enjoys the benefits of a happy relationship is more likely to be a better mother. Indeed, the quality of the relationship affects the parenting behavior of both parents. They are more responsive, affectionate, and confident with their infants, more self-controlled in dealing with defiant toddlers, and better confidants for teenagers seeking advice and emotional support (Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006).

Love is undoubtedly the bonding element in families. If something negative affected the parents in the past, demonstrable love between the parents would assure the children and help create a strong connection. This is the reason why selfless, parental love defies boundaries, why children are loyal to their parents, and that there is a willingness on the part of parents to sacrifice themselves for their children and vice versa (Tsabary, 1972).

Obedient children are considered good children. They are deemed well-mannered, obedient, and studious, can sit still and pay attention. Very often, a child's "goodness" is measured by how the child's behavior fits into the life of an adult. Parents and society naturally gravitate to those children who don't challenge their ingrained beliefs (Tsabary, 1972). In contrast, "bad" children are considered hyperactive, distracted, loud, and often defiant. Parents often react when their child's behavior fails to honor their agenda or disrupts their sense of order. Just as respect, caring, and kindness are passed on through the generation, child maltreatment and domestic abuse can be passed on from one generation to the next (Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006). Child sexual abuse (CSA) is one such deviancy and mostly happens in families, as is borne out in most research.

Role of Parents

In India, if there are more children, the family is considered happy and prosperous. The preference for the boy child has given rise to many deviant practices in villages, towns, and cities of India. In recent years, there has been a focus on individualism that disregards traditional values on marriage and family, where married couples of those cohabiting consider children as liabilities. Also, many parents in India, including Christians, have opted to have a single child. Such practices have reconfigured traditional kinship structures (Phillips, 2015). With the emerging new middle class where there is less structure, it is crucial for family development and critical for the wellbeing of the society that morals, values, and the parents' integrity remain intact as it is a fundamental and vital component of Indian culture (Patole, 2018).

Parents need to be nurturers. Parents respond to the child's needs for emotional security, such as providing warmth and sensitivity within the relationship by being nurturers. This is broken when there is any abuse. A nurturing parent sets boundaries and guides the child by modeling positive behaviors without physical or psychological coercion. It also addresses recognizing the child's need to be respected and acknowledged and fosters the potential for mutual understanding and influence to develop. Parents need to adjust to the changing developmental tasks of children as they grow older (Devi, 2014). Parents should refrain from abusive behaviors and see that their child is safe.

Child Abuse in Families

In families, it is crucial to ensure sensitivity to cultural practices while at the same time observing the needs of children within a child-protection framework. Parental culpability is an issue in child abuse and CSA. Inappropriate standards of care may be due to ignorance, religious beliefs, poverty, mental illness, and availability of and access to resources; as such, poor childcare may occur by default or omission (Sanderson, 2006). In India, this often happens because of power dynamics, dependencies, and the non-functionality of governmental resources to adequately address this issue. The powerlessness inherent in abuse and CSA is due to the abuse of power and control.

This can result in the adult survivor experiencing a sense of powerlessness in all areas of his life and may not access inner resources of power for fear of abusing it or resembling the abuser. In contrast, some survivors overcompensate for their sense of

powerlessness by believing themselves to be all-powerful and invincible. This is frequently a reaction to disintegration anxiety (Sanderson, 2006).

There might be fear of intimacy and an inability to trust survivors. This can manifest in difficulties in social relationships and relationships with the survivor's children or parents. A history of CSA can impact a survivor's parenting ability. Many survivors fear becoming a parent if they cannot protect their children from CSA or become too enmeshed. Some adult survivors become overprotective of their children, especially children of the same sex as themselves, by seeing them through the eyes of an abuser. They cannot allow the children to separate or equip them with appropriate knowledge, social skills, or safety strategies (Sanderson, 2006).

Role of Parents in Moral Education

The family is the first school of social virtues in society. In Christian families enriched by the grace and office of the sacrament of matrimony, children should learn to know God according to the faith they received in Baptism. This is how they experience family, society, and the Church. The Christian family is vital for the progress of God's people. Children are gradually led to a companionship with their fellowmen and with the people of God through their families (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 12).

The Holy Family – Joseph, Mary, and Joseph are the first family for all Christians to emulate. Simeon and Anna met Mary and Joseph and acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah (cf. Lk 2:22-38). Simeon praised God that he had finally “seen” salvation when he lifted Jesus in his arms. Anna spoke to everyone about the Baby. This is a beautiful image of two older people and two young parents, brought together by Jesus. Families share many beautiful moments: meals, rest, housework, leisure, prayer, trips, pilgrimages, and times of mutual support. This has to be necessitated through the authentic love that comes from Jesus. He brings together and unites peoples through the generations, thus helping overcome self-absorption, solitude, and sadness. He is the Bread of life that sustains his followers on their journey by illuminating their paths (Francis, 2014).

Just like Mary and Joseph did for Jesus, parents in the family have the primary duty of imparting education to the child. Parents entrust a share in the work of education to others, like those in civil society, but they are the primary and principal educators (*Gravissimum Educationis*,

11). This role is so essential that it can be supplied where it is lacking with difficulty. Abuse often leaves a child wondering about their losses. Abuse is carried through every stage of development. Parents should create a family atmosphere animated by love and respect for God and man, in which a well-rounded child's growth is fostered. Therefore, there cannot be any abuse.

The Church's Role

The Church understands the need to care for all its children's moral and religious education. She provides this through witnessing the lives of those who teach – laity and clergy and religious (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 23).

The Church reminds parents of the duty that is theirs to arrange and even demand that their children be able to enjoy these aids and advance in their Christian formation to a degree that is abreast of their development in secular subjects. Therefore the Church esteems highly those civil authorities and societies which, bearing in mind the pluralism of contemporary society and respecting religious freedom, assist families so that the education of their children can be imparted in all schools according to the individual moral and religious principles of the families (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 24).

There is, therefore, an invitation to Christian families to value the gifts of marriage and the family. Through difficulties, the Christian family is encouraged to persevere in a love strengthened by the virtues of generosity, commitment, fidelity. The Church encourages all Christians to be signs of closeness, patience, and mercy, wherever family life remains imperfect or lacks peace and joy (*Amoris Lætitia*, 5).

Child Sexual Abuse: Awareness and Prevention

Children involved with their parents from birth are more likely to be emotionally secure and confident to explore their surroundings. As they grow older, they have better social connections with peers. These children are also less likely to get in trouble at home, school, or the neighborhood (Rosenberg & Bradford, 2006). The physical and psychological abuse of preschoolers and school-aged children is associated with depression, low self-esteem, antisocial behavior, juvenile delinquency, and adult criminal behavior. Sexual abuse is associated with depression, substance abuse, eating disorders, suicidal behavior, and promiscuity. Neglect is related to the failure to thrive

and is also linked to attachment disorders, aggression, and difficulty dealing with others (Rosenberg & Bradford, 2006). If the child has been sexually abused, there is guilt, embarrassment, and shame. Abuse compromises the child's belief that the world is safe as it has not been safe for that child (Moffatt, 2003). Children are sexually abused, innocence, dignity, and control.

Sexual abuse treatment must address these losses; therefore, a therapist must provide a way for these children to regain their dignity and control and also to empower them as they face future discouragements and setbacks that are a natural part of life. Second, the child must be allowed to mourn his losses. Innocence, for example, can never be recovered. Grieving involves acknowledging the loss and learning how to cope with and overcome it. Third, the child must find a way to conquer the perpetrator. Finally, the child must regain control of his environment. This involves teaching the child to use his available skills or teaching the child new skills that are needed for recovery. Stories of survival and good decisions that one has made and books or videos about trauma and recovery are all tools that can empower a child, leading to the achievement of the goals of therapy (Moffatt, 2003).

Resiliency is crucial in children. Victims of abuse who are older children are more likely to recover than children abused when they are very young. The quicker an intervention occurs, including removing the child from the dysfunctional home and reestablishing healthy relationships elsewhere, the better the prognosis. Also, children who have strong relationships outside the family are more likely to cope with their abuse healthily. The most immediate settings containing the developing child and the cultural beliefs and values that influence the child need to be addressed. Parents are an integral part of the prevention process. Primary prevention efforts can prevent the sexual victimization of the most vulnerable members of society. This helps to achieve the overall objective of eliminating this serious public health problem. Therefore, they should be part of this process (Wurtele & Kenny, 2012). Where there is child sexual abuse, change can be envisioned when the social conscience is awakened to cruel events. Change in mindsets and laws that work allow children to blossom and experience the joys of childhood (Karthiga, Tamilselvi, & Ravikumar, 2014).

Developmental Programs and Interventions

Adults in a family, Church, or religious institution influence the lives of children in the contemporary context, whether in India or any part of the world. For Christians, the Church is also an important agent to help children. In India, the caretakers of children are parents, family, and the community. Vulnerable children need help for their development and need more protection and care. Therefore, the family, Church, and State should all be involved in child welfare and protection. A child's natural environment is the family, but if the family is at risk, then interventions need to be made not only for the child but also for the family (Phillips, 2015). For prevention, developmental and early intervention programs that are known to reduce general crime rates are equally effective in reducing sexual crime (Smallbone & Wortley, 2001).

In families and communities, interventions in multiple spheres may help mitigate risks for antisocial behavior (Ling, Umbach, & Raine, 2019). For offenders, treatments should be designed to address the issues associated with behavioral, psychophysiological differences, those that can target symptoms. Studies of mindfulness have suggested its utility in improving autonomic functioning and emotion regulation, which may help individuals with reactive aggression and hyperarousal. Emotional intelligence training programs have shown some promise in reducing aggression and increasing empathy among adolescents, increasing emotional intelligence among adults, and can help in working with disruptive children and improving parenting skills.

Early adversity and childhood maltreatment have been significant risks in developing neurobiological and behavioral problems. Nutrition research has supported several areas to target concerning healthy neurodevelopment, and they show some promise in reducing antisocial and criminal behavior (Ling, Umbach, & Raine, 2019). A healthy social environment is crucial for normative brain development and function. Knowing the social context could help buffer biological risks, and it is suggested that changing an individual's environment could mitigate biological criminogenic risk. Social interventions for individuals at higher biological risk for antisocial behavior aim to provide an enriched environment. This is beneficial for all.

Risk management models teach offenders or potential offenders skills to avoid high-risk situations. The focus of treatment for offenders should be to equip them with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities

to achieve needs of intimacy, and sexuality, in an acceptable manner (Simonsa, Wurteleb, & Durhamb, 2008). Primary prevention efforts are aimed at the general population to stop childhood sexual abuse before it occurs. Regardless of risk status, services should be offered to everyone. Primary prevention includes modifying conditions in the environment that promote or support the sexual victimization of children (Wurtele & Kenny, 2012).

Most child-focused personal safety programs share common goals, including (a) helping children recognize unsafe situations or potential abusers; (b) teaching children to refuse inappropriate requests by saying no verbally; (c) encouraging children to resist by removing themselves from the potential perpetrator physically; (d) encouraging children to report previous or ongoing abuse to a trusted authority figure; and (e) helping children understand that the secret or inappropriate touching is never the child's fault—it's always the abuser's responsibility (Wurtele & Kenny, 2012).

For Christians, children have dignity because they reflect the image of God. It is about empowering children and parents with their rights in society and community. Is it about restoring the corrupted image of God and reconciling children to God's abundant life (Phillips, 2015)?

Conclusion

In India, the institution of family is taking on different forms due to alterations in its emerging socio-cultural fabric. These are more manifest in the urbanized and educated sections and are also in small ways in rural areas. Proper attentiveness needs to be given to these changes, impacting faith and religion. If not, there might occur dislocations of systems, ultimately leading to structural disintegration (Savarimuthu, 2009). The Church encourages the striving to excel in the pursuit of knowledge to preserve and enhance its beneficent influence upon today's world. This is important for the healthy development of people of faiths. It calls for conscious parenting concerning the faith. Therefore, parents need to mirror a high level of morality and positive behaviors. This results in higher levels of moral internalization and positive behavioral outcomes for children. It is the essence of the profound journey of parenting (Tsabary, 1972). Conscientious parenting is a daily commitment to the process of growth in a child. It is a journey of trust, and the more parents trust, the less anxiety they will have about their children's future and thus enable their child's healthy development.

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