

A Loving Parent

Why Being Tough is Not the Answer

By Dina Maaty

Childhood is a period where a continuum of behaviours and attitudes towards life are developed in line with experiences and human interaction. Parents are always communicating with children, hence forming a point of reference for them and shaping their understanding of the world around them. While it's instinctive for parents to be loving, some often choose to be tough, adopting an erroneous view which associates discipline with harshness.

In many cases, parents bring their background and childhood into their methods: "If we're raised in a harsh environment, it can be difficult not to recreate that when we become parents unless we're aware of our own experience, and understand why we want to do things differently," says Dr. Nancy Close, Associate Director of the Yale Program in Early Childhood Education.

Additionally, some parents apply tougher methods while dealing with their children because they fail to understand the reason their children are acting the way they do. Children test the limits set by adults, not to intentionally annoy or manipulate them, but rather in search for signs of reassurance that their parents will always be there to support them and help them develop their sense of self-control.

Real problems arise when parents favor a harsh approach over a rational, albeit firm, parenting style. "A parent crosses the line when they lose control by screaming, yelling, hitting, hurting, shaming, or humiliating their child," explains Dr. Nancy. The effects of such parenting run very deep; children model their attitude by identifying with their parents. As a result, they develop very low self-esteem.

"If parents are harsh and out of control in the presence of their children, they typically become frightened. In response,



child

guided by professionals. The expert highlights the importance of gradual, positive changes, and exploring the parents' strengths before delving into the negatives. She also stresses that shameful, tough moments exist in most parents' lives, but that such occurrences should not be ignored, but rather repaired.

they'll either withdraw and become inhibited or will imitate the harshness becoming very aggressive," points out Dr. Nancy. Children may become depressed, unbearably demanding, or lose interest in friends and school. "Parents need to be careful with their children at all stages of development," she adds.

A stage of particular interest to experts is the Toddler stage, where children begin to control

"Parents can work towards being sensitive, consistent, and predictable. They can set clear and consistent limits which are developmentally appropriate and are set in a kind, but firm manner. They can delight and enjoy moments with their children, support their exploration, and become a safe base for when they're overwhelmed," Dr. Nancy adds.

their bodies while expressing their feelings, slowly shifting to a more independent stage. The process of internalizing and acknowledging limits creates intense personality traits, which parents should navigate with extreme caution, seeking the help of family members and professionals when needed.

According to the Associate Director of the Yale Program in Early Childhood Education, many tough parents can become defensive when being

Attending parenting workshops, groups, reading, and speaking with professionals are all gateways for parents who are confused over the right way to handle their children's behaviour. "It's important to remember that our children watch us carefully and will emulate us. Thus, it's crucial that we model ways of interaction, solving problems in ways which we want to see our children use," says Dr. Nancy.

Source:

Dr. Nancy Close
Associate Director of the Yale Program in
Early Childhood Education
For more information on her workshops in
the UAE, please see page 78