



Harmonious Homes

Human Values Parenting

Guide 10: February 2024 Listening with Patience



Sri Sathya Sai Educare, SSSGC-USA

Listening with Patience

As discussed in Guide 9 - Knowing Your Child Well, Sathya Sai Baba reminds us that every child is born with natural abilities (gifts, talents and temperament) that are unique to them and are often visible from early childhood.

“The highly talented persons in different walks of life have not acquired their skills from somewhere outside. All these are but manifestations of their own innate potentialities. It is sheer ignorance to think that any person can be developed by some other person. Everything is in you alone. All that you do by way of your effort is to manifest or give an outer expression to what is already inherent in you. So, even in the spiritual field, all the sadhana that you need to do is to remove the obstruction, namely, the ignorance that is preventing the manifestation of the divinity already present in you.”

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Summer Showers, Ch. 13, 1990

During a conversation with a devotee in 2001, Swami explained that like anything in life, a child's natural gifts and talents cannot develop on their own. Rather, they must be discovered early by parents and carefully nurtured through encouragement, deliberate effort and discipline to help a child realize his or her full potential.

Swami then added,

“First you must know yourself, then you must observe and listen patiently to your child - patient listening. Only then you will know your child.”

“First develop patience, then listen patiently. Now you will understand your child well. Only then can you guide your child properly.”

“If you don't listen to your child, your child will not listen to you.”

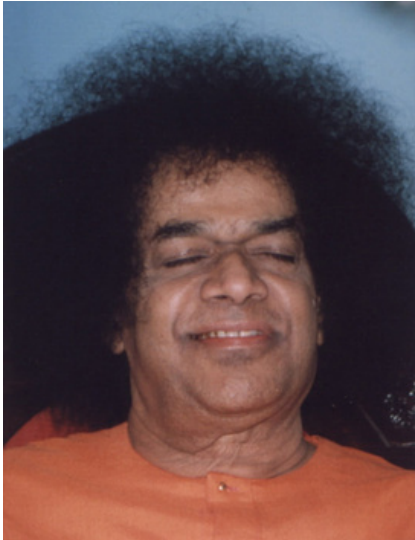
“Good understanding develops mutual love and respect.”

Sri Sathya Sai Baba's conversation with devotees on the significance of parenting, July 2001



Human Values Parenting

Swami places great emphasis on the quality of patience and patient listening. We can also understand this as active listening, with full attention to the other. As always, He is the greatest exemplar of these attributes.



“Well, let Me ask, how can the limited know the depth of the Unlimited? How can the ant delve into the mountain? It is beyond you to know how or why I create things in My Hand. Or consider this: you have no patience even to put up with the problems of a single family, though the responsibility is obviously yours. Imagine then what My patience must be, to listen to, tackle, and solve the problems of tens of thousands of families, with a love that is rare even among parents.”

-Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. 2, Ch. 23, 1961

“I know many are puzzled by my practice of listening to your 'korikas', (wants, wishes, desires), calling you individually and spending long hours with you to satisfy you and to speak to you on these 'earthly' demands. They say, no avathar has done this before; it is like catering to worldly things; people come with all kinds of worldly desires and everyone is welcomed with sympathy and love.”

-Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. 5, Ch. 1, 1965

“In every act, have tolerance, patience, and mutual help. In the family, cultivate patience and mutual respect; in the community, have dharma and justice; in the community of peoples, have the ideal of peace.”

-Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. 1, Ch. 25, 1960

One of Swami's students recalls how Swami has always been the embodiment of patient listening.

Swami's life is a great example for parents on the topic of listening with patience. One needs only to look at the way Swami interacted with His students or with devotees in the darshan lines.



Swami would glide beautifully through darshan and when He neared the students, one or two would sometimes get up on their knees to offer a letter, or to ask Swami a question. It was a sight to see how Swami would stop, look directly in the eyes of that student and intently listen to what he or she had to say. The loving gaze and the rapt attention that Swami gave the student transformed those few seconds or minutes into a life-long cherished moment. For the student it was as if the world melted away and only Swami and he existed - such was the loving attention that Swami gave when He interacted with anyone.

In discourses, Swami would elucidate general principles and expectations for everyone, but when He interacted with a student, whether he was a five year old primary school student or a 25 year old PhD scholar, Swami would have a one-to-one, heart-to-heart relationship, and importantly, a personalized conversation with that student. The guidance He provided was specific to that student. Underlying this whole interaction was Bhagawan's intense love for each student. It was simply put, quality time.

From a divine perspective, Swami knew the individual's past, present and future, but in a worldly sense, Swami taught us as parents how to engage with children. In many sessions with students, Swami would patiently listen to what a student had to say, would enquire deeply into that student's interest and capabilities, and would then prescribe and offer advice, encouragement, or corrective action based on that student's unique makeup and needs.



Truly, Swami would make whatever positive trait or capacity was latent in that student patent, encouraging the individual to grow and blossom. Whatever Swami said was infused with love and selflessness which fostered an unique, trusting relationship where students could ask Swami anything and know He would not judge them. Trust in Swami in turn led to acceptance of what He said.

This is a great lesson for parents for when we listen to a child and understand his or her unique characteristics and personality, offer selfless advice and encouragement with an undercurrent of love, a trusting relationship is formed where the child feels comfortable and secure with his parents and is then receptive to what they tell him.

Based on the above words of wisdom and actual examples from Swami, patience and active listening are two important virtues that every parent must develop and practice continuously. Parents may tend to “tell” rather than “listen”, but it is only by allowing a child to express themselves and their ideas will parents understand them and their unique set of talents and attributes as designed by God. It is the duty of parents to help their children discover and nurture their capabilities and channel them into positive expression that develops self-confidence, fulfillment and the ability to eventually contribute these abilities to society.

Practical Guidelines to know and nurture your child's talent

- Give them the priceless gift of attention, listen intently and hear and understand what your child wants to convey to you. Listen non-judgmentally with an open mind and then respond appropriately.
- Let your child take the lead when it comes to choosing her passions and talents. Your role is to be her coach and guide.
- Gently guide and help your child identify their passions and interests. Sometimes children struggle to understand what they truly like or have an aptitude for.
- Never ever compare the efforts or attributes of your child to the efforts and attributes of other children. Remember that every child has their own strengths and weakness which may not be the same as others.

Discussion Questions

1. Who most understood your feelings, needs, and desires as you were growing up? How did you feel about this person?
2. How did attention and your 'feeling understood' by others impact your motivation and behavior?

Scenarios

A middle school child comes home from school frustrated that she was teased in the school cafeteria. She is being picked on for being a bookworm and liking to share facts about science. The parent is busy getting dinner ready and is not focused on the conversation but is trying to expedite it. Finally, he/she cuts the conversation short and suggests that the next time the child wants to make friends she should not be bookish and instead try to blend and become part of the friends' conversation.

1. What do you think is the impact on the child in this scenario?
2. What is the advice you would give your child to boost their confidence ?
3. What would you do differently as a parent ?

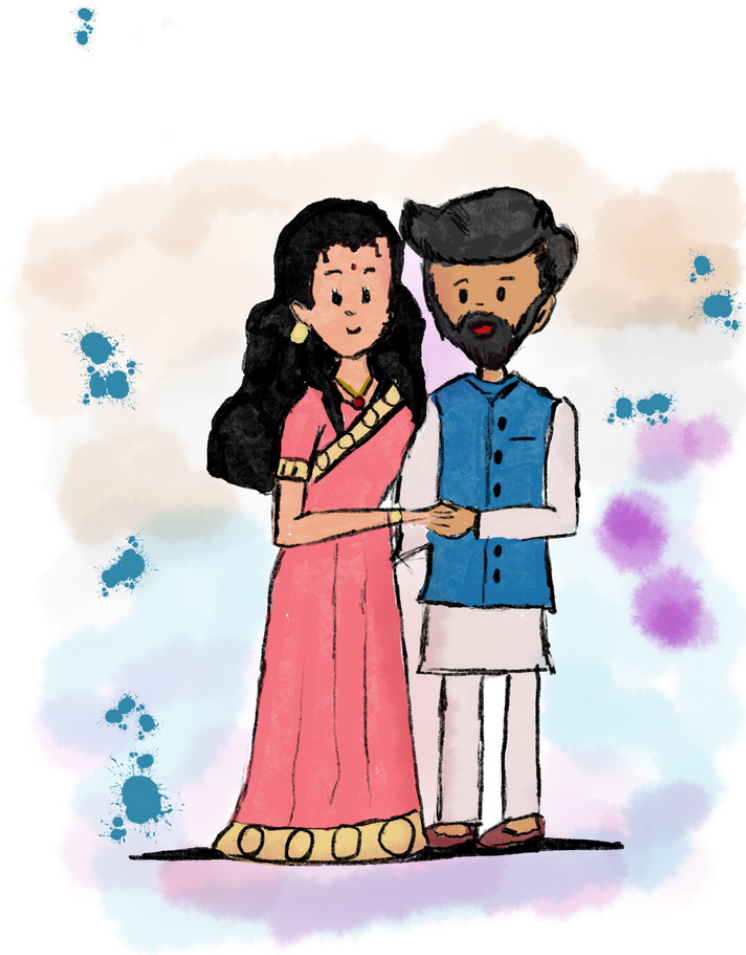
Families meet for a party. They share the recent happenings in each other's lives and share the clubs, SAT scores and activities of their high schoolers. Later at home, the parents prod their high schooler to find out if he/she is doing what the others are doing. They compare the child with his/her friends and highlight what the other students are doing better and how they are staying ahead.

1. What do you think is the impact on the child's morale in this scenario?
2. What do you think is prompting the parents' prodding?
3. What could you do differently as a parent ?
4. What is the advice you would give this parent and why ?



The parent is very strict with the teenage son, imposes a strict curfew and also dictates whom he can hang out with. The teenager is having a rough time articulating that he wants to attend the homecoming dance with his group of friends. He finally breaks his silence and shares his desire to do so but gets reprimanded for wanting to spend so much time out with friends. When the boy wants to explain the situation, the parent simply cuts him off and sends him off to his room to study.

1. What is the impact on the child's morale in this scenario?
2. Do you think this scenario strengthens the parent and child relationship?
3. What would you do differently as a parent?



References of pictures and Illustrations

- Page 2 - Image by storyset on Freepik
- Page 6 - Image by storyset on Freepik
- Page 7 - "Happy Couple" drawing by Pavithra Krishnan