



# Harmonious Homes

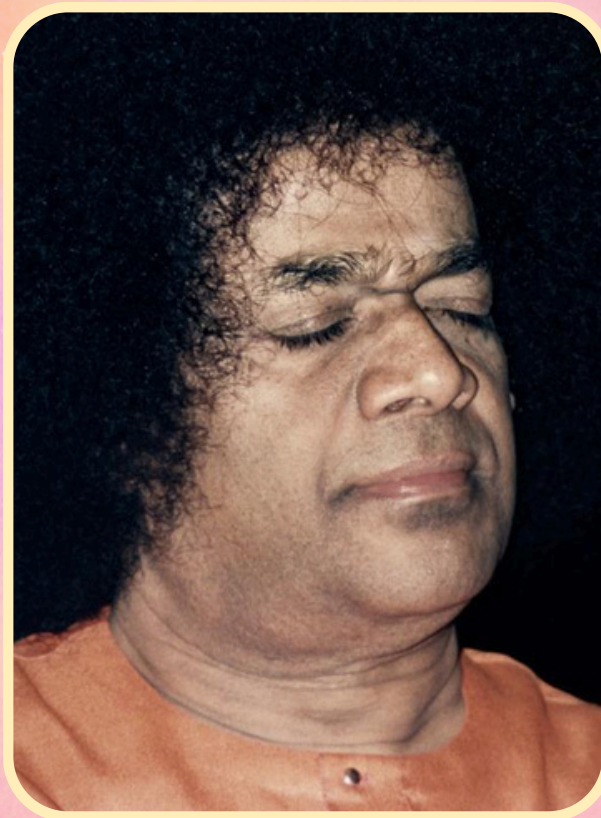


Human Values Parenting



*Guide II, part A: November 2024*

**Guiding Children with  
LOVE and DISCIPLINE**



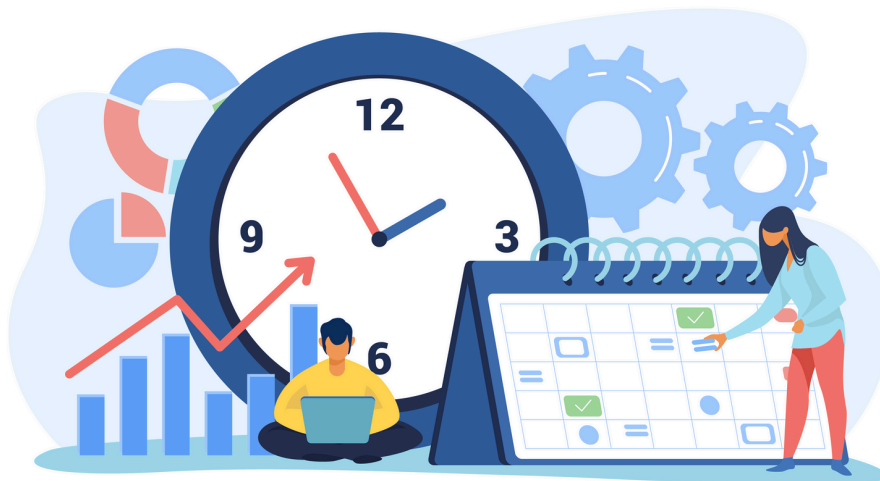
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## Introduction

Love and discipline. Although these words may, at first glance, seem contradictory, Swami teaches us that they are like two sides of a coin. He reminds us that the natural world, human societies and the human body itself need to be disciplined and stay within certain limits to function well. For example, we expect the sun to rise and set at particular times, rivers to stay within their banks, or normal human body temperatures to stay around 98.6F. Any disturbance in this functioning results in disharmony, disaster or illness.

Similarly, Swami teaches us that discipline is absolutely necessary for children to learn self-restraint, responsibility, and self-confidence and that establishing and maintaining discipline is one of the most important duties of parents. He shows us that disciplining a child constructively is really an act of love.



*“One may ask, are rules and discipline necessary even in a spiritual path? Yes, it is very essential. So long as the plant is tender, it is necessary to protect it by putting a fence around it. The same tender plant when it grows big, the animals and cattle are not going to attack this big tree. In the same manner, so long as our spiritual nature is still in the tender stage it becomes necessary to have a fence around it. Without discipline, man will not be a man. So we have to accept discipline as our primary spiritual practice.”*

**- 3rd Seva Dal Conference, November 15, 1975**

*“In fact, it is the rules and the restrictions that give charm to the game of life. In the game of football, if any player can do anything with the ball and there is neither foul nor out, neither offside nor goal, neither throw nor penalty, then it will be a meaningless game incapable of giving Ananda (joy).”*

**- SSS Vol. 2; p.219, 1965**



Children are born with certain basic instincts that make them react in an instinctive manner. Good behavior is learned and parents must model and teach it. Loving your child means setting rules and limits. After all, that is what they will face when they enter the adult world and they should be prepared. But most children naturally resent rules and limits and may try to push against them. This is where love, learning and discipline intertwine.

*“Parents today tend to lavish too much affection on their children. But such affection alone is not enough. There should be control also over the children. There should be both "love" and "law". Only when both love and restraint are present will the love prove beneficial. For all the evil habits of children, who are naturally innocent and uninformed, the parents are primarily responsible. They do not make any efforts to teach proper ways of behavior to the children. They pamper the children by giving them money freely. They want their boys to become high officers, to earn large incomes, acquire wealth and lead a life of comfort and ease. But they do not consider for a moment how they should make the children realize the need to develop good qualities. It is up to parents to teach the children to cultivate right attitudes and moral qualities.”*

**- SSS Vol 17-3, 1984**

*“Children learn through their mistakes and misbehaviors. It is the natural way they learn. It is the duty of parents to help their children learn through the consequences of their mistakes and misbehaviors... Parents must guide their children with love to discover about themselves, teach them how to discriminate right from wrong, and help them grow into a fine human being. This is the important task of every parent, teacher, and elders.”*

**- Conversation with a Devotee**

*“Putlibai, the mother of Mahatma Gandhi, spent her life in the contemplation of God. She used to observe a vow wherein she would not partake of food unless she heard the singing of cuckoo. One day it so happened that the song of cuckoo was not heard. Gandhi, who was a small boy then, could not bear to see his mother fasting for a long time. He went behind the house and mimicked the singing of cuckoo. Putlibai felt very sad as she knew that her son was uttering a lie. She cried, ‘O God! What sin have I committed that I gave birth to a son who speaks untruth?’”*

**- SSS Vol 33-18, 2000**

*“Realizing that he had caused immense grief to his mother by uttering a lie, Gandhi took a vow that he would never indulge in falsehood thenceforth. So, it is imperative that the mother gives training in moral values to her children right from their childhood. She should not overlook the mistakes of her children. She should punish her children whenever they stray away from the right path and reward them for their good deeds. It is because of the feelings of the mother that the children become good or bad.”*

**- SSS Vol 33-18, 2000**

## **How Should Children Be Disciplined?**



Most parents tend to discipline their children in the same way they were disciplined by their parents. This sometimes involves angry responses from parents, including yelling and/or ignoring when their children continuously misbehave.

However, effective parenting requires guiding and redirecting your child with love, not fear. Swami emphasizes: it is the duty of every parent to encourage their children to practice self-discipline and self-control not by angry intimidation or punishment but through LOVE.

*“Discipline involves only correcting your child. You must remember that your child is not bad, only the behavior is bad...”*

*Discipline your child through teaching and punishments... focus only on good behavior, not bad behavior...*

**[Focus on]** *correcting their children’s misbehaviors, not through angry intimidations or harsh punishments, but through a set of established basic rules supported by positive discipline methods and appropriate expressions of love.*

**[Teach them]** *when you follow instructions and do what is right – you will earn respect and goodwill from others. When you do good to others, you will get goodness in return from them. When you do bad, be ready to accept bad as it will come back to you.”*

**- Conversation with a Devotee**

Disciplining with love takes thoughtfulness. It requires parents to praise and encourage good behavior, and to find solutions that are reasonable, respectful, related, and helpful to a child in helping them understand the consequences of their misbehavior. It is the toughest part of parenting, and requires a tremendous level of patience, self-discipline, and hard work on the part of every parent. As a parent, how you react to tense moments can teach your child self-control, patience and unconditional love, or it can teach your child aggression, reaction with anger, and lack of self-control. By disciplining children with love, we are teaching our children how we want them to behave and showing them that we love them simultaneously. The art of self-discipline is the core of character building – how can we deny our children this?

*“Parents have the primary responsibility to mold the character of children. Too much freedom should not be given out of excessive affection. Children should be taught to exercise self-restraint and discipline in their daily life. If parents are negligent in bringing up their children in their most tender years, it will not be easy to correct them later on. If students are disciplined and well behaved, the country will be safe and sound.”*

**- Music Academy, Chennai, January 20, 1986**

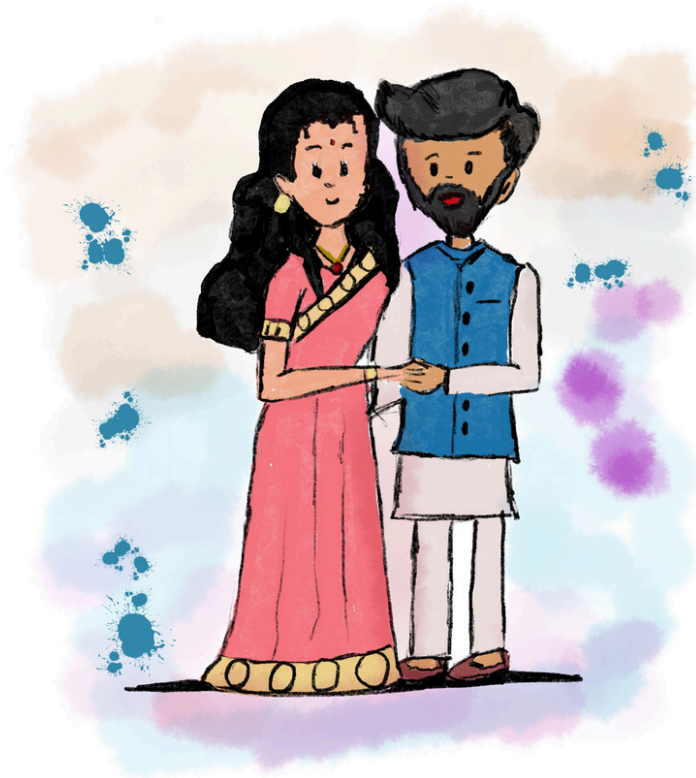


### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What examples of discipline have you experienced in your own life/childhood? How do you establish discipline with your children?
2. Now guided by Swami's teachings, would you convey or enforce discipline for your children differently? If so, how?

**Scenarios for Discussion:**

3. For extra credit in English, your 5th grade child is supposed to write a poem on a subject of her choosing and you are keen on her earning the extra credit. When you ask for the 3rd time, your child says she has written and turned in the poem. At the end of the month, the teacher displays the poems received on the bulletin board in class. Your child's poem is not displayed and when asked, the teacher says your daughter did not turn in a poem. What do you do next?
4. SSSE classes and Center meetings are scheduled on Sunday afternoons at the same time as televised NFL games. This week, your 16 year old son not only has SSSE class but is scheduled to sing in the SSSE bhajan hour at the Center. His favorite team has made it into the playoff game scheduled for that afternoon and all his friends are gathering to watch the game. Your son begs and pleads with you to tell his SSSE guru that he cannot come today and to tell the devotional coordinator that he cannot sing. He insists that his friends won't like him anymore if he doesn't watch the game with them. What do you do?



### References of Pictures and Illustrations

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