



# Harmonious Homes



Human Values Parenting



*Guide 11, part B: January 2025*

**Guiding Children with  
LOVE and DISCIPLINE**

*Practical Considerations*



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## Introduction

In Module II, Part A, we discussed the ways in which love and discipline are intertwined and the principles of how to discipline children. In Part B, we explore the practical aspects of guiding children with love and discipline. As always, Swami's life is verily His message, and the way Swami engaged with devotees and students with regard to discipline is a lesson for us as parents. His approach, simple and tailored to



the individual, was always infused with love. Swami so beautifully gives the analogy of a hand; it has five fingers and we value each finger equally. Although they are not equal in length and each serves a different purpose, all need to work together to hold an object. In the same way, when the need for disciplining a child arises, we have to understand the nature of each child and to what they respond well. For example, some may need a firm yet loving approach, while others may just need to be told once.

*“The stone should not be too heavy, lest it snap the gourd in two! Avoid extremes, at all times, in all cases. Disciplinary rules have to be well thought out and adapted to the age-group they wish to correct. The atmosphere must be so charged that obedience to discipline comes automatically with a full heart. Such discipline will shape good leaders for the nation...”*

*Regulate the food habits of the children; food determines, to a large extent, health and intelligence, emotion and impulse. Set limits to the quality and quantity of food, as well as to the number of times it is consumed and the timings. Recreation too has to be moral and elevating, in the company of the righteous and God-fearing...*

*The minds of children and of youth too are apt to grow crooked, under the influence of the sensuous films, the hollow hypocritical atmosphere created by the elders, the lure of glitter and glamor and of a false sense of adventure and fame. So, schools have to attach the stone of discipline and make them grow straight and true.”*

- **Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. 10, ch. 5, 1970**

It is critical for parents to implement discipline in such a way that children learn to introspect, understand the boundaries themselves (self-discipline), and engage in good conduct through self-discipline. This is what Swami teaches, and expects.







The following are some of the ways Swami taught discipline to devotees and specifically to His students and together, they form a “how-to” guide for parents. He:

1. **Set expectations of rules and discipline and communicated them, explaining the benefits, and not deviating without a good reason.**  
Expectations would vary by age group, and would be clearly communicated and enforced with love by the hostel warden, teachers, and very importantly, by the older students who would guide their younger sisters/brothers.  
Discipline with love!
2. **Corrected behavior one-to-one** - Receiving rebukes or “akshintalu” (the blessed yellow rice) directly from Swami was certainly a blessing! But, it was also painful - not because of what Swami said, but because the devotee or student felt she/he had let Swami down. Just like a parent, everything Swami did was infused with love, and so no one wanted to disappoint Swami. Love for a parent is a powerful motivating factor to not repeat mistakes.
3. **Used His silence to encourage introspection and result in changed behavior.** Whenever there was a need to send an important message to a devotee, a student or to the larger group, Swami would stop speaking with them, and in the case of students, He would not visit the hostel or college. This triggered the process of introspection in the devotee or student and ended in “paschathapam” (repentance or remorse), and ultimately a lasting change in the behavior of the individual. When that sense of remorse happened, Swami would reward the individual with His love, darshan/sparshan/sambhashan (vision/touch/speech).



**4. Provided generalized guidance** - It was amazing to see how Swami would convey messages to individuals by not calling them out specifically, but by mentioning in a discourse or in a group gathering the bad tendency that needed to be corrected. Again, this led to introspection and a lasting change.

**5. Provided indirect guidance, through others** - Swami would, in certain instances and for certain individuals, send a reprimanding message to a student through other elder devotees or teachers. This way, Swami would convey His “displeasure” without overtly embarrassing the student in public.

**6. Took time to engage and listen -**

Swami took the time to sit and engage with everyone - to come down to their level - physically and through other interactions. This is a great lesson for parents to do the same with their children as young children and adolescents will be more receptive through this loving approach.



These are all methods through which parents can discipline their children with love. However, parents must use their discrimination to understand when certain approaches should be used and with which age group.

Some additional key points from Swami's teachings on disciplining children:

1. **Lead by example:** Parents should model the behavior they wish to see in their children.
2. **Use firmness and love:** Swami advises that discipline should be firm but loving. Parents should not pamper their children excessively, which can lead to irresponsible behavior (see Module 11, Part A).
3. **Maintain a spiritual perspective:** Swami encouraged parents to see their children as divine souls entrusted to their care. This perspective helps in nurturing the child's moral and spiritual development and ensures that parents infuse discipline with love.
4. **Maintain a balanced approach:** Discipline should be balanced with understanding and compassion. Parents should listen to their children and understand their needs and concerns while guiding them on the right path.
5. **Embody and teach human values:** Swami stressed the importance of teaching children human values from a young age. This helps in building their character and preparing them to lead a righteous life.



### **Additional Tips for Parents:**

#### **Unity -**

Parents must ensure that they are both on the same page in their communication of, and expectations from a child for a particular discipline, so that the child does not receive mixed messages. Children are often able to detect and exploit differences between parents - and learn to play one against the other!



*“In some houses, parents quarrel in front of their children, which is an unhealthy practice. If there is any difference of opinion between parents, they should resolve it in the absence of their children. Children cannot concentrate on their studies if they are disturbed by family problems. So, parents should never discuss them in front of their children. They should instead teach them all good things and show them good ways of life.”*

- **Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 31, ch. 34, 1998**

### **Consistency -**

When a discipline has been established, consistency in “enforcing” and supporting that discipline is essential. Unless there is an important extenuating circumstance, the same message should be conveyed to the child at all times. If there is an exception, the reason must be clearly explained. For example, if parents are emphasizing the importance of punctuality, then punctuality must be as important for school or a Narayana seva project as for a birthday party or sports event that the child may be keen on.

### **Consequences -**

The child must understand and experience consistent consequences if they fail to adhere to the disciplines expected and communicated by the parents. The experience of consequence is fundamental to the development of self-restraint and self-discipline.



## **Scenarios for Discussion:**

### **Scenario 1**

Your child's classroom teacher emails you about a recess scuffle between your child and another child in which the other child pushes your child. The teacher explains steps taken at school and asks you to also have a conversation with your child at home. What do you do?

1. Would you speak to your child at home, and if so, how?
2. How would you balance listening to your child's perspective with listening to the teacher's explanation?

### **Scenario 2**

Your teenager seems addicted to playing games on the phone in his spare time. You are working with him to set time limits and boundaries and especially to be device-free during meal times. This evening, you, your husband, and son are starting dinner when you hear an alert on your work phone indicating that a new email has arrived. You immediately grab your phone and read the new email.

1. What message are you sending to your son?
2. How can you lead by example in this situation?

### **Scenario 3**

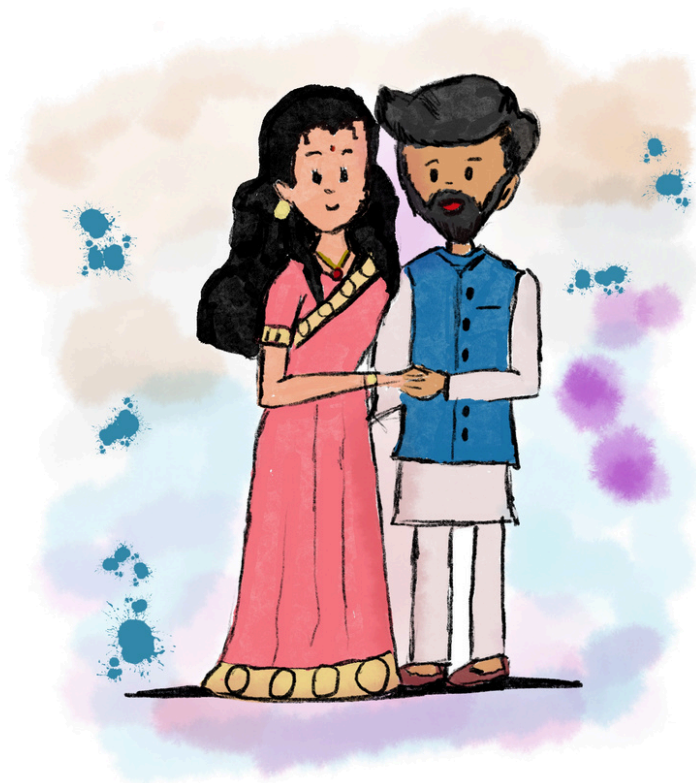
You have a set curfew for your teenager on which you have both agreed. As a new driver, your teenager goes out to play basketball with some friends and loses track of time. You have tried calling and are unable to reach him/her. Finally, he/she gets home past curfew.

1. How should you react when he/she returns home?
2. How would you address this situation with him/her the next morning?

### **Scenario 4**

You've had a tough time at work and come home feeling very frustrated. Your middle schooler has to study for a hard test and comes to you asking for help. Not realizing what she is asking and still thinking about work, you snap at the child and visibly hurt her feelings.

1. What should you do to set this right with the child?
2. How would you model good behavior in this situation?



### References of Pictures and Illustrations

- Page 8 - Drawing by Pavithra Krishnan