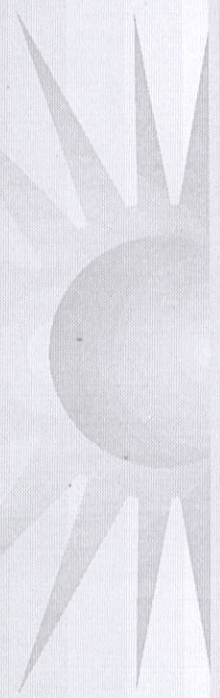


# A HANDBOOK ON GOOD PARENTING



Compiled By  
Anantanand Rambachan & Geeta Balkissoon-Rambachan

## Foreword

In 2000, we facilitated the publication and distribution of a handbook on domestic violence and at that time we promised a second handbook to deal with good parenting. Both these handbooks are intended to be family companions and the contents are to be read, studied and implemented.

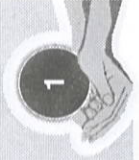
A tremendous amount of research effort and thought went into the compilation of this publication on good parenting and once again we are eternally grateful to the compilers - the husband and wife team of Professor Anantanand Rambachan and Dr. Geeta Balkissoon-Rambachan.

Good parenting requires a certain level of skill and expertise and it is unfortunate that there are courses of learning in every imaginable field except on how to be a good parent.

We trust that this effort will go some way in filling the void.

Once again we must acknowledge the design assistance provided by Annie Ramjattan and her team at Graphic A.I.R. Designs of Port of Spain and the generosity of the Jagmohan family of Spacy's Creative of San Fernando in the printing of this handbook.

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## Introduction

Child rearing is one of the most important tasks which anyone performs. There is another remarkable fact to consider. Most jobs require us to demonstrate some competence or ability. In order to be a parent, we are not required to have any special skills, competence or knowledge. We are not even required to think about it beforehand. We do not have to attend any classes or take a test to show our ability. Most of us learn to be parents through on-the-job training.

Our purpose in this handbook is to share with you some principles and methods which we believe can help us all to be good parents today. Many, if not most of us approach our jobs as parents in what we would call an impulsive manner. By this, we mean that we do not think ahead of the principles, methods or values by which we will be guided by in our roles as parents. We respond to each challenge as it comes up, sometimes appropriately, sometimes inappropriately, sometimes consistently, sometimes inconsistently.

We believe, however, that we can all be better parents, enjoy parenting more and raise happier children if we approach our task as parents more thoughtfully and with clarity about our principles and methods.

Our children are our gift to the world. By helping them to be truthful and caring human beings and by helping them to achieve their worth and potential, we enrich the future. Through our children and theirs, long into the unforeseeable future, our contribution to the world continues. On the other hand, when a child fails to be all that he or she could be, the world suffers. The world is denied the special contribution of that child. Parenting is a unique and sacred responsibility.

We are not and we do not claim to be perfect parents. We have made mistakes, we will make mistakes and we continue to learn each day. There is much that we can learn from each other's experiences. The values which we want to share with you are those by which we strive to live and raise our family of three children.

Prof. Anantanand Rambachan  
Dr. Geeta Balkissoon-Rambachan  
July 1st, 2001



## Our Children Are God's Gift To Us

Our children are God's gifts to us. Whenever you look at a gift, it reminds you of the gift-giver. The value of a gift comes from the value which we have for the gift-giver. If we value God, we must also value God's gifts and our children are among the most precious. Our children remind us of God, since they are an expression of divine love. If we see and understand our children as God's gifts to us, we can never take them for granted. Their meaning for us is enhanced immeasurably.

## We Need Our Children As Much As They Need Us

When we give a gift to someone, we try to choose a gift which will serve some good purpose. A useful gift is always purposefully chosen. We have just spoken about the fact that our children are God's gifts to us. An important question, therefore, must be considered at this time. What is the purpose of our children in our lives? Why are particular children given to us?

The purpose of life is to grow in wisdom and love. It is to become God-like in our thoughts and actions. Each life provides a precious opportunity for such growth. We are given the gift of a particular child because we need this child or children for our growth in wisdom and love. At the same time, a particular child is given to us by God because the child needs us for its own growth in wisdom and love. In other words, we are brought together by God as parents and children because we need each other and we need to learn from each other. Our children are our teachers even as we teach them.

A child who lacks confidence and faith in himself may need to learn from us how to believe in himself. A fearful child will need to learn to be courageous.

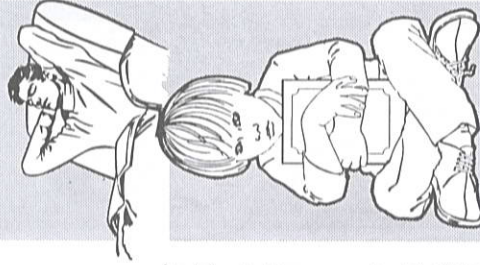
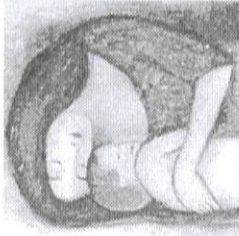
Similarly, a parent who is impatient and uncaring as a human being may need a particular child to learn the virtues of patience and caring. After you give someone a gift, the uses to which the gift are put depend almost entirely on the person. Our children are the gift of God, but whether we grow together as parents and children depend entirely on us. If we properly fulfill our roles as parents, we create happiness for ourselves in the present and in the future. If we do not, we sow the seeds of unhappiness for ourselves and our children in the present and future. The choice is ours.

## Know Your Child

If our role as parents is to help our children fulfill their potential and become wise and virtuous human beings, it is necessary that we know and understand our children. It is only by understanding and knowing them that we can help them to become all that they could be.

A parent who raises a child without ever trying to know his or her child is like a farmer who tries to grow a particular vegetable, but does not know anything about the vegetable he grows. He does not understand the kind of soil it needs, whether it requires sunshine or not, the diseases to which it is susceptible, and the kind of fertilizer which will support its growth. Such a farmer will never produce a good crop and a parent who tries to raise a child without knowing the child will not raise a good child.

To be good parents we need to know the mental and emotional strengths and weaknesses of our children, their unique abilities and interests and gifts. The task of a parent is like that of a farmer tending a field of different crops. To help each plant grow, the farmer must be aware of the special needs and requirements of each one.





Understanding comes as a result of patience, careful listening, spending time with your child, and love. One of the most helpful ways of getting to know each other is by setting aside time each week for a family centred activity. This should be a time in which you participate in a common activity, talk with and listen to each other. It may take the following forms: sharing a common meal, prayer, exercise, learning new things together.

While an activity in which the entire family strengthens the entire family as a whole, it is important for parents to have one on one bonding times with each child. Nothing communicates the value you place on a child more than giving our time to the child. One way of doing this is to have your child choose an activity in which both of you participate. Whether it is family time or individual time, choose activities which are not passive in nature. Looking at TV with your child, for example, does not encourage interaction. Building a kite or trying a new recipe in the kitchen are much better. An activity which promotes conversation between parent and child brings about better understanding.



### Talk With Your Child

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of talking with and learning to listen attentively to your child. Today, there are many forces working against communication between parents and children. Among these are longer hours of work, different work schedules for parents, and television viewing. Many parents think of themselves only as the material providers for their children and leave parenting to their spouses or to other agencies like the school.

In many cases, conversation between parent and child is limited to ordering him or her to do some work or errand or to scolding and disciplining. Such conversations are



usually one-way and the child feels that the parent has no time or is not interested in listening.

It is important, however, that families understand the value of communication with their children and find time for it. We need to listen to the hopes and dreams of our children, to know of their fears and struggles, their joys and disappointments. The belief that children are only to be seen and not heard is wrong. We need also to share our own deepest values and hopes with them. Ask them about the school day and share interesting experiences from your work. Encourage them to talk about their friends. If we do this often, we will encourage communication in our homes and we will create an atmosphere in which our children will feel comfortable about sharing themselves with us and turning to us in times of difficulty and confusion.



Many parents often express surprise and shock when their children make certain choices, sometimes tragic ones. We suspect that in many of these cases, there is a breakdown of communication between parent and child and there are changes in the child's life which the parent has missed or not understood. We do not have to agree with the choices our children make or give our approval to everything they may want to do. We must let them know, however, that they will always find in us a loving and attentive parent to whom they can turn in times of crisis. Good communication between parent and child does not happen overnight. We have to recognize its importance and work at it. We cannot wait for a crisis to occur in our families before we try to communicate with our children. It may be too late.





If you give unconditional love to your child, you will receive unconditional love. If your love is conditional, your child will love you conditionally. A relationship which shares unconditional love is one which will endure and survive challenges and difficulties, conflicts and disagreements. A relationship of conditional love, on the other hand, will not endure disagreements and differences. Unconditional love keeps the doors of communication open.

Learning to love our children unconditionally is one of the most important lessons of life which we must all learn. We must love unconditionally because we are loved unconditionally by God who gave our children to us as gifts.

### **Be A Good Role Model For Your Child Through Your Words and Actions**

Earlier on, we said that parents and children are brought together by God because we need each other and we are to learn from each other. We teach our children even as they teach us. We cannot overemphasize the importance of our role as teachers of our children. At birth, we are the most significant human beings in their lives and they learn from us what it means to be human.

The lessons which our children learn from us are imparted to them in many ways. We teach them through our advice and the words of wisdom which we impart to them. Our most important lessons to them, however, are conveyed by their observation of our actions. More than what we say, is how we live our lives. When our actions contradict our words, we send the wrong message to our children. Our message is that it is acceptable to say one thing and to do another. When this happens, our words no longer reach the hearts of our children. They lose faith in what we say and think of moral values as a game which adults play among themselves.



The old proverb, "Actions speak louder than words," is true in good parenting as it is in everything else. It is not that we can be or that our children expect us to be perfect parents. There are many times when we will all fail to live up to our own ideals. When we are aware that we have failed to live up to our own ideals and when our children witness our lapses, we should not ignore the matter. If we do, we send the message to them that we do not take the values which we teach seriously. We need to acknowledge our failures and errors, accept responsibility for these and resolve to continue trying. When we admit our failures, we teach our children many invaluable lessons. They learn to take responsibility and not to always blame others for their actions. They learn the value of truth and honesty and they learn that they ought not to be discouraged by their own failures. Their love and respect for us will only grow.

The greatest thing that you can do for your children is to love your spouse. The strength of your relationship in the marriage creates a sense of security in the entire family. This is because the most significant relationship in the family is that between husband and wife. The quality of that relationship truly governs the quality of family life.

### **Develop a Family Mission Statement**

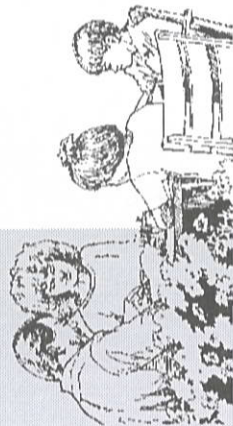
At the beginning of our discussion, we mentioned that most of us do not think about the purpose of our families or about the kind of family we wish to create. In parenting we are reactive rather than proactive. One of the most important steps which you can take in order to be proactive parents is think deeply about the purpose and goals of your marriage and family. We each need to ask and answer this question: What kind of family do we want to be?





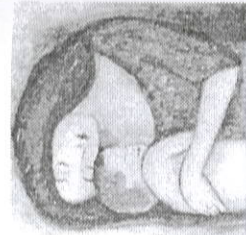
Ideally, adults should begin to think about this before marriage and one of the important steps which should be taken before marriage is a discussion and sharing of notes between the marriage partners about each other's goals and vision. It is never too late, however, to begin doing this. If you are married and without children, you should set aside time with your spouse to talk about your goals and vision for your family. If you have children, they must also be involved in the discussion.

Each member of the family should be asked to describe the family he or she would like. Family members should put their goals in writing. If there are young members in the family who are unable to write, their views must also be solicited. Each member must be given an opportunity to share his or her vision with the others and to discuss his views. If children are excluded or if their views are not treated with respect, they will not be committed. This process may take weeks or longer.



After each one has had an opportunity to present his thoughts and to listen respectfully to the others, a member of the family or some members may take the responsibility to draft a statement reflecting the hopes and dreams of the family. This will again be discussed and rewritten, if necessary until all are satisfied with it, feel a sense of ownership about it, and can commit themselves to it. The very process of discussing family goals and preparing a written statement about it opens up the channels of communication, promotes understanding, and strengthens family relationships.

Your family mission statement does not have to be a lengthy document. It may be just a few sentences summing up your hopes, values and beliefs. Once you have created a family mission statement, it becomes the



constitution of your family and can unite and hold your family together. It should be displayed prominently in your home as a reminder of what your family is all about. You should revisit it at regular periods, at the beginning or end of the year for example, and rededicate yourselves to it.

The benefits of a family mission statement are many:

- (I) You can hold your children accountable to the values and standards to which they have agreed and insist upon responsibility. These are the standards which they have set for themselves.
- (II) A family mission statement strengthens family bonds. The family is not a biological unit, but is also united by shared values and common goals.
- (III) It provides a framework of values which can be used for resolving family disputes.
- (IV) It is a compass for telling us when we are moving in the right direction or not.

If we do not define and agree about our family values, principles and goals, we become like a flight crew without a destination or a flight plan. We do not know where we are going until we get there and we follow the strongest wind currents without knowing where they will lead us. Developing a family mission statement is one of the most important steps which we can take in building a strong and happy family.

### Know Your Limits As a Parent

The fact that we must be honest about our failures with our children brings us to a wider point about parenting. We must be aware of our own limits as parents. Children have minds and natures of their own.

The way in which we raise our children is not the cause





of every single thing the child does. We do have a significant influence on our children, but, as our children grow up, we are also competing with the influence of their peers, their teachers, and their cultural heroes. A child reared well is capable of making a bad choice and a child reared badly is capable of making good choices and of great accomplishments.

Does this mean that it makes no difference in the way we raise our children? While one cannot guarantee anything absolutely because there are always exceptions, the weight of the evidence is there to show that the influence of parents on children is a significant one and that good parents raise good kids. In parenting, as in all things, it is our responsibility to put forth our best effort, understanding that the outcomes cannot be guaranteed. The reward of good parenting is the satisfaction that comes from knowing that you did your best with the precious gift of God.



## Summary

In our discussion, we covered what we consider to be some of the necessary principles and methods of good parenting. Let us review briefly:

### (i) Our Children Are Our Gift To The World:

Through our children and theirs our contribution to the world continues.

### (ii) Our children Are God's Gift To Us:

They are precious and invaluable because of this fact. If we value God, we must also value God's gifts

### (iii) We Need Our Children As Much As They Need Us:

We are brought together by God as parents and children because we need to learn from each other and to grow in love.

### (iv) Know Your Child:

It is only by understanding our children that we can help them to achieve their full potential.

### (v) Talk With Your Child:

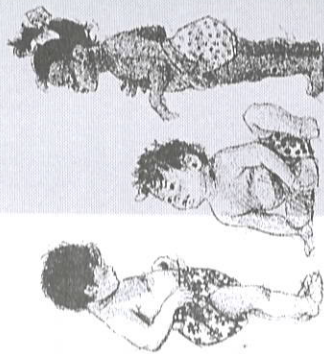
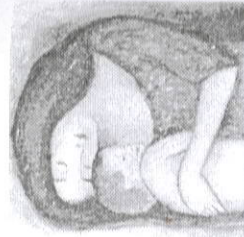
We cannot wait for a crisis in our family before we learn to communicate with our children. It may be too late.

### (vi) Nurture and Develop your Child's Unique Gifts:

Help your child build on his or her particular strengths.

### (vii) Let Your Child Know That Your Love is Unconditional:

Never threaten to withdraw your love. Let your child know that he or she is always loved.







**(viii) Be a Good Role Model For Your Child Through Your Words and Actions:**

Do not give contradictory information to your child by saying one thing and doing another. Be consistent.

**(ix) Develop a Family Mission Statement:**

Without it your family is like a ship tossed around in a stormy ocean.

**(x) Know Your Limits As A Parent:**

Put forth your best efforts, knowing that you cannot guarantee the outcomes

**(xi) Have Fun With Your Children:**

We have heard it said again and again and it is still true - they grow up quickly! Cherish the moments you are privileged to share with them.





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