

Building Blocks The Four Constructs

Giving Praise

Building Blocks: The Four Constructs (*The Parenting Puzzle*, page 18).

The Nurturing Programme is based on four ideas called the Four Constructs. These provide the building blocks for positive, constructive relationships and positive parenting.

The four constructs are:

- Self-awareness and self-esteem
- Appropriate expectations
- Empathy
- Positive discipline

Self-awareness and self-esteem, (*The Parenting Puzzle*, page 18)

The art of self awareness is to know ourselves well - what we do and do not like, what our needs are, how we feel. If we are sensitive towards ourselves, then it is easier to look after our needs. Nurturing ourselves by meeting our own needs helps to boost our self-esteem and makes it easier for us to nurture others and boost their self-esteem. Understanding the effects of what happened to us when we were children helps us in our relationships with our children, too.

Hadrat 'Umar (ra) narrated:

“Take account of yourself before you are taken account of.”

Shadad Bin Aws (ra) narrated:

“The one who is wise is the one who checks himself.”

(Mishkat, Tirmidhi)

In Surah Rehman (55:23) Quran says :

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ

Then which of the favours of your Lord will ye deny?

In Surah Al-Tin (95:4) Quran says:

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ

We have created man in the most noble mould.

In Surah Al-Isra [17:70] the Quran says:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَىٰ
كَثِيرٍ مِّمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا

Verily we have honored the Children of Adam. We carry them on the land and the sea, and have made provision of good things for them, and have preferred them above many of those whom we created with a marked preferment.

That is, Allah (swt) has given human beings the highest potential. So we need to develop and use our ability.

Also, when I am self aware and know my own weaknesses and my strengths, I can turn to Allah (swt) to help me when I am stressed or going through some kind of hardship or trial. As I am more aware of my own needs and feelings, this then also helps me to understand and have empathy with my own children and others. Nurturing myself and boosting my own needs makes it easier for me to nurture others and boost their self-esteem.

The Prophet (saw) emphasises that we need to take care of ourselves first after God. Only then can we be of joy and service to others. Discussion on this point was beneficial as many parents were not aware of this injunction and often felt guilty taking care of themselves. This knowledge helped to assuage any guilty feelings.

Appropriate Expectations

Children grow up in different ways: physically, intellectually, socially and emotionally. We need to match our expectations to what they can actually do. They learn all the thousands of skills at different rates. What one child finds easy another child of the same age might find hard. If we expect too much or too little of them, children tend to become rebellious, frustrated and angry, or give up in despair. It is helpful to them if we recognise each small step in their learning.

(*The Parenting Puzzle*, page 19)

The Prophet (saw) said: “Observe the qualities and skills your child has and help your child to develop them and become confident.”

In the Quran Allah has clearly mentioned that he does not over-burden a person with more than they can bear.

In Surah Baqarah [2:286] the Quran mentions:

لَا يَكْفُفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا

On no soul does Allah place a burden greater than it can bear.

Aisha (ra) narrated “Whenever the Prophet (saw) was given a choice between two things he chose whatever was easier unless it was sinful in which case he was more careful than any one to avoid it.”

(Bukhari, Muslim) (Book In the Prophet's Garden, Page 6).

Empathy

Empathy means tuning in to someone else's feelings; understanding their emotional point of view. It is the cornerstone of the Nurturing Programme. We don't have to agree with what the other person thinks – just be sensitive to the way they feel, and to accept it. An empathic response to children's moods makes our relationship with them happier and closer. Children who are treated with empathy and respect will learn to be empathic and respectful towards other people.

(*The Parenting Puzzle*, page 20)

If anyone talked to the Prophet (saw), the Prophet (saw) used to turn around, give eye contact and attention by listening attentively to what was being said. The Prophet (saw) would never interrupt until the person had finished saying what he had to say. If the Prophet (saw) had something to say Aisha (ra) narrated that: “The speech of Allah's messenger was very simple and clear, whoever heard him could understand him (clearly).”

(Book Husn-e-ikhlaak page 30. In The Prophet's Garden)

(Abu Dawood)

And Anas (ra) also narrated that: “Whenever the Prophet (saw) spoke an important sentence he used to repeat it thrice, until the people could understand it, and whenever he entered upon people he would greet them with a greeting thrice”. (Book Husn-e-akhlaak, page 30)

In Surah Luqman [31:22] the Quran says:

وَمَنْ يُسْلِمْ وَجْهَهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ عَاقِبَةُ الْأُمُورِ

Whosoever surrenders his purpose to Allah while doing good, he verily has grasped the firm hand-hold. Unto Allah belongs the sequel of all things.

We need to know and be self-aware of why we are doing things.

In Surah Luqman [31:19] the Quran says:

وَأَقْصِدْ فِي مَشْيِكَ وَاغْضُضْ مِنْ صَوْتِكَ إِنَّ أَنْكَرَ الْأَصْوَاتِ لَصَوْتُ الْحَمِيرِ

Be modest in thy bearing and subdue thy voice. Lo! the harshest of all voices is the voice of the ass.

The Prophet (saw) always made time to listen to people when they came to talk to him. He would sit face to face with them and always made eye contact. He mirrored and reflected what the person said. He would never speak over his shoulder. If he was walking and someone was talking he would turn around and face the person. If someone did not understand what he said, he would repeat it three times.

Positive discipline

There is no doubt that children need to learn what behaviour is OK and what is not. Positive discipline focuses on praise, rewards, giving choices, negotiating and responsibility.

There are also fair penalties for poor behaviour. It makes life more enjoyable for children, and helps to build self-esteem in the family.

Negative discipline uses punishment and fear; it is stressful or everyone.

(The Parenting Puzzle, page 20)

The Prophet (saw) never used fear, punishment, hitting or shouting at anyone. He smiled a lot and his teeth showed when he smiled. He talked very politely. He would compliment people and make them aware of rewards for good behaviour and actions. He never forced anyone, he always gave choices and allowed everyone to make their own mind up. He gave responsibilities according to one's capabilities. All this helped to build self-esteem in families and societies.

In Surah Al-'Imran [3:159] the Quran says:

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لنتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنَّهُمْ
وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ

And by mercy of Allah, you (Muhammad)saw) dealt with them gently and had you been severe and harsh hearted, they would have broken away from about you, so pan over (their fault) and ask Allah's forgiveness for them.

Giving Praise

Praise is the magic ingredient in relationships. It is a powerful way of encouraging and supporting other people, of showing that we are pleased, enthusiastic or grateful. It helps children and adults including ourselves, to feel good.

With children, praise works wonders. They need to know when we like what they are doing; it is not enough just to tell them when we do not like the way they behave. They respond better to compliments than to criticism, nagging or shouting. The glow of pleasure and pride they feel when their efforts are noticed helps them to remember what is wanted, and to try again another time.

(The Parenting Puzzle, page 22)

Giving praise effectively *(The Parenting Puzzle, pages 22 and 23)*

From Usama: Allah's Messenger (saw) said: when someone has had good done to him and says to the doer, "May Allah reward you." He has given the utmost in praise." (Tirmidhi)

Praise for being and Praise for doing (*The Parenting Puzzle*, page 24)

See praise pitfalls on page 28

Praising Ourselves

Many people think the idea of praising themselves is strange – though we are usually quite good at criticising ourselves!

(*The Parenting Puzzle*, page 30)

We all need to praise ourselves.

Allah loves to be praised.

Verily Allah (swt) is happy upon a man or woman who after eating, thanks Allah (swt) and says: Al hamdu lillah (praise be to Allah).

So it is no sin if you praise yourself (Musnad Ahmad).

The beloved Prophet (saw) also said: “If you love someone ‘unconditionally’ tell them. **See Praise for Being, page 24** If you don’t tell them they won’t ever know as it stays in your heart”. He emphasised the importance of the words.

He used to smile and say (MashAllah) which means “by Glory of Allah” when he wanted to praise anyone.

Discussions within Muslim parenting groups revealed that some parents had strong feelings about being criticised. The discussions provoked some painful childhood memories and reinforced the idea that most of us prefer praise and encouragement.

When we look at how the Prophet (saw) praised and encouraged we realise that he was very aware of not hurting or wounding someone by words of criticism. He never blamed anyone or asked someone to do his tasks for him; he did his own tasks himself. If somebody did do something for him, he would always thank them.

He said: “Thank Allah and Thank the Creation. One who does not thank the creation is not thankful to Allah”. He also said: “Speak in a pleasant manner as Allah does not love harshness.”

The Prophet (saw) used to say Mashallah (praise be to Allah) when he praised someone.

The Prophet (saw) used to give children all his attention. He was very close to them, he used to go down to the children's level and shared their pleasures with them. He was very popular with them and was always crowded by them. He used to play games and run races with them. Children also used to climb on his back and he played horse for them. He would use eye contact and have a pleasant and warm tone of voice. His teeth used to show as he smiled at them. He used to give encouragement and patted children on the head. He has also encouraged us to behave in this way, especially towards orphans. The beloved Prophet (saw) said "Whoever pats an orphan on the head will get the reward of however many hairs there are on the orphan's head." He also said: "Show mercy and compassion to your younger ones".

The Prophet (saw) also had an adopted son. He never told him "why didn't you do things this way or why not that way?".

Helping children to praise

If children hear us giving praise, they will copy us and will learn how to say what they like in other people.

(The Parenting Puzzle, page 29)

From Abu Huraira: Allah's Messenger (saw) said: "He who does not thank people does not thank Allah." (Ahmad, Tirmidhi)

From al-Miqdam b. Madikarib: The Prophet said: "When a man loves his brother he should tell him that he loves him".

(Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi)

In Surah Baqarah [2:263] the Quran says:

Kind words and the covering of faults are better than charity followed by injury. God is free of all wants, and He is most-forgiving.

قَوْلٌ مَّعْرُوفٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ صَدَقَةٍ يَتْبَعُهَا إِذَىٰ وَاللَّهُ غَنِيٌّ حَلِيمٌ