

Chapter 45: Stubbornness

Every child will have a degree of stubbornness in its nature that becomes evident from the age of two years. A stubborn child generally insists to get things done his way. Whenever he finds some resistance from others, he will have recourse to crying and shouting. It will roll on the ground and hit its head against the walls.

The child may even refuse to have food. It will throw the crockery and sometimes even become aggressive and hit the other members of the family. This habit of stubbornness, if it persists, is also noticed in grown up youth.

Generally the parents complain about this aberration in their children and keep searching a solution to the problem. It is the common experience that the parents have access to one of the two methods, mentioned here, to overcome the problem:

Firstly: Some parents are of opinion that a tough attitude should be taken, if the child is stubborn, by refusing to accede to his demands. These parents say that the child has become very assertive and they need to be firm in denying its wishes. They try to correct the child by being strict and go to the extent of punishing and beating him.

They try to impose their own wishes on the child. The behavior of such parents is tantamount to tit-for-tat attitude. This approach is not desirable even if they have momentarily quietened the child by being strict. To the contrary they cause grave harm to the psyche of the child with their strict attitude.

Two years is the age of the onset of self-determination and confidence in a child. The obstinate behavior of the child is the assertion of its nature of independence. At this tender age the child is not capable of controlling its wishes and imagining the consequences of fulfilling them.

It makes up its mind and wants the things done accordingly. If the parents deny him his wishes, they would be hurting the child's psyche. Such children might grow into calm individuals but they will be devoid of the trait of confidence and determination.

When a child notices that nobody is concerned about its wishes and are preventing him by force from

having his way, then he will become dejected and disappointed. This condition of unrest and frustration becomes a part of his nature. There can also be the possibility of his becoming rebellious as he grows up and indulges in extreme acts like tyranny and murder as an expression of his extreme feelings of hurt.

Secondly: Some experts on the subject of upbringing believe that, to the extent possible, the child's wishes should be satisfied. He must be allowed to do what he wishes to. They feel that the child should be given a degree of independence. They believe that as the child grows up, it will stop being stubborn. But this method of handling the children too has its own flaws.

There are certain acts that can be harmful to the child and others around him, if he is allowed to do them. The elders closing their eyes to such acts of the child is not being wise. Imagine a three-year-old trying to scale a ladder unhindered. The possibility of his falling and maiming himself for life will always be there. The child might try to light the oven unattended and consequently cause a big fire. The child may get into its head to bodily harm other children around him. The elders always have to prevent the child from doing such things.

The child who is free to do what he likes, and finds acceptance for these acts, with unruly behavior will in stages become a selfish and dictatorial individual. He expects that people will accept his point of view without complaint. He has not met with any denial of his wishes in the childhood and expects the same attitude from others when he has grown up. But in practice this is not the case. People can differ with his points of view. After facing many such denials he gets frustrated and becomes reclusive. He will consider himself a defeated person and thinks that others are unreasonable.

Islam considers stubbornness as a negative trait in an individual as several traditions can be quoted in this regard:

For instance, 'Ali, The Commander of the Faithful, says:

"Stubbornness is the cause of evil."¹

"Brazenness (or stubbornness) causes harm to the human intelligence."²

"Stubbornness is the cause of conflict and enmity."³

"Stubbornness harms a person the most in this world and Hereafter."⁴

The best attitude is one of moderation. The parents who adopt this way of upbringing their children don't consider the stubbornness of the child as an aberration and are aware that it is the expression of his individuality. Instead of curbing this instinct, they use it for the training and upbringing of the child.

They carefully consider and analyze the demands and acts of the child. They give freedom to the child for his acts that are harmless and thus encourage the growth of its mental capabilities. They become his

friends and give him a helping hand in the performance of his actions.

Such children strengthen their determination to perform acts and give expression to their individualities. These children consider the parents as their friends and not persons who unnecessarily impede their actions.

But such parents assert constraint on the harmful acts of the children and don't mince words in advising the child to refrain from such acts. They clearly explain the reasons for stopping the child from such acts and divert its mind to some other useful activity.

Because the child has a good feeling towards the parents, who don't put too many restrictions on him, agrees to refrain from the act which they ask him not to do. But if sometimes the child persists with his demand for doing an undesirable act, the parents have to put their foot down and prevent him from doing it. The child will then cool down after some time.

The child should be trained to realize that in life one cannot always be stubborn; the parents must exercise restraint while handling the children and should not take recourse to beating them. The child should not get the idea that the parents are tyrannical such children can turn rebellious with passage of time.

At the end of this discussion, it is in place to mention the following points for the consideration of the mentors:

1. As far as possible give freedom for action to the children. Don't interfere too much with their actions. Don't perpetually keep on telling them not to do things. When the child tries to climb over a chair or a shrub, you ask him not to do it. He tries to peel a fruit; you stop him from doing it lest he cut his fingers. He wants to light the water-heater, you prevent him from doing it, fearing he might burn his hand. He tries to pour decoction in a teacup, you stop him saying he might break the expensive China. He plays inside the house, you say he is making too much of noise. He stirs out into the lane, you fear he might be run over by a bicycle. Then, what would you expect the little child to do. He too has human feelings. When you interfere too much with his acts, he might develop stubbornness. One reason for the trait of stubbornness in the children is excessive interference of the parents in their actions.
2. When a child becomes querulous, then try to find the reason for this and find a solution. The child will then calm down. If he is hungry, feed him. If he is tired, help him to sleep. If the child is disturbed with the environment, like a noisy television near him, or noisy visitors around, set the environment right for him.
3. Don't insult or upbraid the child that can make him more stubborn. 'Ali says: "Reprimand gives wind to the fire of stubbornness."⁵
4. Sometimes the siblings commit excesses on a child and he finds no supporter. He will then become

rebellious and stubborn. In such cases the parents must intervene.

5. If your child behaves stubbornly and you are unable to fathom the reason for this; then introspect whether his behavior is because of your own failing.

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1. Ghirar al-hukm, p. 16
 2. Ghirar al-hukm, p. 17
 3. Ghirar al-hukm, p. 18
 4. Ghirar al-hukm, p. 104
 5. Tuhaf al-uqul, p. 80

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