

## Chapter 59: Theft and Kleptomania

Several times it happens that a child spreads its hand to take something that is not his. He forcibly tries to take the eatables, fruits or toys of some other child. Stealthily takes away something from the pocket of the father or from the mother's purse. He takes sweets and other goodies from the pantry without the knowledge of his mother.

Picks up things stealthily from the shops visited by the family. Takes pencils, rubber etc of his siblings and school-mates without informing them. Several children do this sort of things in their childhood. Seldom a person can be found who has never done such things in his childhood. Some parents are very upset finding their children doing such things and start imagining of a bleak future for the child. They feel that their child might turn into a thief or burglar when he grows up. With these pangs of remorse they keep worrying themselves.

First of all such parents should give their attention to the fact that they need not worry too much and feel sorry for the small aberration in the child. Lifting insignificantly small things by the child is not the sign that the child will turn into a thief in the future. They should know the child has not yet reached the stage to appreciate the rights of ownership of others, or to differentiate between what belongs to others and what is his own.

The child has subtly strong feelings and jumps to grab whatever attracts his attention. The child will not be naughty by nature but this attitude comes to him from outside influences. These are all passing phenomena in his early life.

When he grows up, he might not do such things. There must be many pious, upright persons who might have done some unintentional stealing in their childhood. But the purpose of telling all this is not that the parents totally ignore reacting to the acts of theft of their children. I only wish to dispel their fears that the children might turn into thieves. Instead of lamenting over such incidents, they should discreetly try to correct the child.

A child of two to three years in particular is not able to distinguish between what belongs to him and what is not his. Whatever comes in his reach, he tries to take. Whatever is attractive to him, he wants to

have.

At this stage shouting at the child and beating him will not be of any use. The best attitude for the parents will be to practically stop the child from doing such a thing if it happens in their presence. If the child tries to snatch something from another child, they should softly intervene. And despite all this, if the child takes the thing from the other child, the parents should restore it to the real owner as soon as they can.

The things that they don't want the child to handle, they should take care to keep them out of his reach. When the children reach a certain level of intelligence, they will start understanding about ownership of things. Now they will not try to grab others things. However, some children do continue the habit of stealing even after attaining the idea about ownership of things.

In such a situation the parents should not remain silent spectators. They should not be complacent now, thinking that the child will automatically give up the habit. He might turn into a thief, or at least a kleptomaniac, who picks up things of others just for the heck of it, not knowing what he is doing. It is not right to ignore even if the child steals something belonging to his own parents

Some parents are so protective of their children that if someone reports that the child has stolen their things, they start wrongly defending their child. and blaming the other person of false accusation.

Such ignorant parents, with their negative attitude, unknowingly encourage the child to blatantly continue his stealing activity. The child will learn to steal and deny having done it.

Therefore the parents should not be unconcerned when they face such a situation. They should make efforts to stop the child from stealing and lying about it. There will be the risk of the bad habit taking root in his nature and making reform very difficult.

'Ali has said:

"Giving up habits is very difficult."<sup>1</sup>

At the first instance the parents should try to remove the causes of the child wanting to steal. If the child needs pencil, paper or eraser; the parents should fulfill this need. If they neglect this need of the child, it is likely that he will pick the things from his class-mates. He may even take money from the father's pocket to buy the things.

If the child wants a ball to play and the parents refuse to buy one for him, he might forcibly take the ball of a friend forcibly. Or even he might steal a ball from the neighborhood grocer. The parents must take care to fulfill the child's needs to the extent possible.

If certain things he wants are beyond their means, they should make the child understand by telling him the facts affectionately. For example, they can tell him that they don't have so much money that they

immediately buy for him the colour pencil box required urgently.

He may borrow the box today from his friend to do his immediate task and they shall get him one later. Tough attitude with the child might encourage him to steal. If the parents are keeping eatables locked in the pantry, the child will plan somehow to search the key and take out the goodies for eating. This thing can happen in the near impossible situation when the parents want to eat the things themselves and deny to the child.

When the parents hide away their money the child might get inclined to search for it. It is better the parents don't hide their cash from the children very much. They must take the children into their confidence and should not give them a feeling that things are being hidden from them. They should teach the child that life is spent with some discipline. There are times for eating and they should not always keep munching things. Money is for buying necessities and should not be squandered carelessly.

Films of crime, theft and robbery should not be shown to the children. Story books and radio programs on such subjects should also be avoided. There are many instances that youth caught for crimes have confessed that they got the inspiration from movies for such acts.

The most important thing is that the parents and other members of the family try that the environment of their house is one of honesty and probity where others' ownership of things is respected. No one takes money from the parents' pockets and the things are not appropriated without the knowledge of the owner. Even the husband should not rummage the wardrobe of the wife without her knowledge. The parents also should respect the right of ownership of the children and should not handle their things without their consent.

The parents should not insult the child over his minor misdemeanors. They should not shout at him calling him names like cheat and thief. They should not threaten him that he would go to jail for his act of stealing. With such insults they cannot reform the child. He might, to the contrary, become stubborn and continue with his stealing. Or, perhaps in a revengeful mood he might commit bigger thefts.

The best method to save the situation for the parents would be to treat the child with discretion, love and softness. They should explain the grave consequences of stealing. They should convince him to return the stolen things to the owner and never repeat the act again.

But even after these attempts of reforming the child fail, then the only alternative will be to talk to him with a strong and forthright manner. Finally if the child proves totally incorrigible, they can reluctantly have recourse to physical punishment.

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