

IT IS NOT EASY... BEING CHILDREN

GIJUBHAI

Translated by Mamata Pandya

Original Gujarati *Aa Te Shee Maathaaphod* Author Gijubhai

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Gijubhai was convinced that so long as there was a big difference between how children were treated at home and how they were treated at school, all his endeavours and experiments in child-centred education would not lead to any major changes. Hence, just as he wrote extensively for teachers to orient and capacity-build them to new methods and approaches, he also reached out to parents.

Besides having personal interactions with parents in the early days of the Balmandir, he also wrote articles and essays about the challenges that parents faced, and sharing thoughts and tips on how to handle children at home. These were published in the periodical *Dakshinamurti*, and also compiled and published as books. Two of his noteworthy books for parents are *Maa Baap Thavun Aakru Chhe (It Is Not Easy...Being Parents)* and *Aa Te Shee Maathaaphod (It Is Not Easy...Being Children)*.

Far from being theoretical and preachy, these books are characterised by their conversational style, and short anecdotes that reflect common and familiar situations that all parents (and children) face, almost every day. There is no moral, nor strict “how to handle” instructions; rather the message is subtly woven into the dialogues of the characters, and illustrative examples of how a situation was handled.

While translating both these books, I found that the first one reflected the dilemmas faced by parents. In this book, the

tables seem to have turned, and it is children who seem to be voicing their confusions about what they see and hear from their parents, and the mixed messages from these. Thus Gijubhai, with his usual mastery of communication, shares the children's perspective to parenting. Therefore, while the literal translation of the title *Aa Te Shee Maathaaphod* would be something like "What a wearisome botheration this is", I have chosen the title *It Is Not Easy...Being Children*.



THIS OR THAT?

1

Listen, do not go there. It is dark there.

Listen, do not take that path; it has a lot of thorns.

Listen, run from there; the dog will bite.

Listen let's run from here; there is trouble here.

Move, this chair is not for you; you don't know how to sit on it.

Don't pick that knife up; you will cut your hand.

Move aside; you will drop it.

Listen; don't touch that.

2

It's dark that side; take a light and go.

Look down when you walk; watch out for thorns.

Here, keep this stone with you, in case the dog comes.

Listen, do your work quietly over here, like this.

See, sit on the chair like this; this is the way to sit.

Look hold the knife like this; and if you want to cut the rope, do it like this. Come here, hold it like this; I am right here.

FATHER

Meera and Vinod were talking: "Father does not know how to do anything. He doesn't know how to sweep, to wash clothes, to clean utensils, to cook or sew, to make pickles, to clean the cobwebs, to pick the grain or chop vegetables."

"Father is always sitting and reading the newspapers or big books. When Kishorekaka and Nandlal visit, he sits and talks with them for hours together. That's all he does, sits and talks. If we talk just a little loudly he says "Hush, don't make a racket here." If we ever go to his room, he says. "Why did you come here, children? Run away." He knows how to reprimand and scold. If we don't want to go to school, he knows how to make us go, and also how to make us do our own lessons as soon as we come home. He also knows how to keep asking for something..."Bring water, bring tea, bring this or that..." And if there is any delay, he gets irritated with Mother and us. Father does not know anything except this. Maybe that is why Mother never asks him to do anything; she does everything herself.



MA BEATS US

Tell me; whose mother beats them?

Fifty hands go up at once.

Champak, why does your mother beat you?

Because I jump up on the chairs when I play.

Leela, why does your mother beat you?

Because I comb my hair with her comb.

Shivji, why does your father beat you?

Because I keep writing with his pen.

Radha, why do you get beaten?

Because I tell her that I want to eat right away.

Kirit, what about you?

Because I create a ruckus.

What kind of ruckus?

I don't know.

Shailesh, why do you get beaten?

Because I cry and insist that I want to go to the cinema with Ma.

Deviben, why are you beaten?

Because we quarrel all the time.

Why do you quarrel?

I don't know.

IF YOUR CHILD WERE TO TELL YOU...

Imagine if your child were to tell you:

...Father, I am writing here; please do not disturb me by talking so loud.

...Today my friends are coming to see me; I will eat later.

...The elders are not doing their work regularly; that is not good.

...I do not feel like going to school today; could you send a note to my teacher saying that I will not attend school?

...I don't like to see you with dirty clothes and shoes full of sand; this does not become an adult like yourself.

...Mother, don't tell lies; it is a sin to tell lies.

...Money is not to be wasted. It is not proper to keep on buying unnecessary books, clothes and other things.

...You don't know how to behave properly with us. You should read some books about how to behave with children.

...Father and mother, if you keep on fighting like this, we won't let you into the house, and stop your meals too.

...Father, you are not doing your job properly; we will have to keep a teacher to teach you how to work properly.

MOTHER AND CHILD

Mother: Stand still will you! Why are you so restless?

Child: I am feeling so cold, Ma; I can't stay still.

Mother: I just put those pyjamas on you; why have you taken them off?

Child: Ma, there was an ant inside; it was biting me.

Mother: Don't you dare come here; I will kill you.

Child: If that is what you want then why did you give me medicines when I fell ill?

Mother: Look, now you have dropped the dish and broken it.

Child: I did not drop the dish; it was greasy and it slipped.

Mother: What am I to do? You have torn this cloth to bits.

Child: Ma, I have not torn the whole cloth; only two pieces. I need them to bandage my foot.

Mother: Why are you tossing and turning like this? Don't you know how to sleep properly?

Child: Ma, those mosquitoes keep humming in my ear.

Mother: Are you going to come in and bathe or not?

Child: But you told me to come when you called; you did not call me till now.

Mother: This is a bad habit; drinking so much water with your meals.

Child: But this vegetable is too spicy; my mouth is burning.



COME MOTHER, LOOK FATHER...

1

"Ma you will come, won't you? To see the huts of grass that we have made?"

"Yes, yes. Why don't you help me put these utensils on the shelf so that I can come soon".

“Ma, come quick; look at Ranjan climbing on the *jaali*”.

“Ok, let’s go; I will finish sweeping after I get back”.

“Ma, will you come out with us this evening?”

“Yes, we will go; but first help me put all these things away; then I will clean the room, and get ready”.

“Ma, today we will all play together”.

“Help me clean up after dinner so that I can finish quickly and join you.”

2

“Father come, I will show you the hole I dug today”.

“I’ll just come, after I finish the few pages left in my book. You go ahead”. Father goes after he finished reading.

“Father, we have made a new *rangoli* today; come and look at it”.

“Just wait; I have two more letters to write”. Father goes after he finishes writing his letters.

“Come, come Father. Didi has brought some interesting things today”.

“I’ll finish these accounts and come and see them”. Father finished the accounts and then goes to see.

“Father will you come? Brother has organised a speech contest for us and you are to be the judge”.

“Alright, I will come in a few minutes after I send this telegram; as judge I can be a few minutes late, can’t I?”



I HAVE NOT THE TIME

1

“Ma, come here! Look what a pretty bead necklace I have made”.

“Child, move away. I have no time; I have to wash the vessels”.

“Look Ma, so many papayas on this tree; one is so big!”

Dear, you look. I don’t have time; I have yet to clean the courtyard”.

“Ma, will you come and see our new game?”

“I just have no time child; there is a heap of clothes to be washed”.

“Ma, Ma, come quickly; brother has made a lovely bungalow; it is worth seeing!”

“Beta, not now; all these clothes have to hung up to dry.”

“Ma just look at how Munni is laughing!”

I’m really busy, dear; there is the whole house to be dusted”.

2

“Father, look what a lovely cover this book has!”

“Go now, I am busy”. Father is lying down and reading a book.

“Father, look how tis coin shines! I scrubbed it with ash”.

‘Beta, later; I am doing something”. Father is writing a letter.

“Father look! The first flower on our marigold!”

“Not now; I am working”. Father is making notes from his law book.

“Father, come and see; we have tied a chain on the cat”.

“I don’t have the time, you play with your cat”. Father is busy in conversation with his friends.

“Father, come and see, we have collected all our things and put them on the table”.

“I will come and see it later.” Father is sitting and having tea with his friends.

“Father, wait! I will show you my new book.”

“Son, I have to leave at once; there is no time at all.” Father leaves to go out with his friends.



PUTTING DOWN....BUILDING UP

1

“Child, why don’t you comb your hair? How shabby you look.”

“Sushila, what have you started now? Put it aside! Don’t you have other things to do?”

“Just look at this! Clothes all over the place! Is this a house or a dhobi’s shop?”

“Why are you singing in the middle of the afternoon? I have a splitting headache!”

“Is this the way to comb your hair?”

“Why have you worn such a shabby shirt today?”

“How have you washed your hands? There’s all this mud sticking on them!”

“Why are you spilling and dropping so much while you eat!”

“Daughter don’t you know how to put a bindi? Look how high you have put it!”

“You have just finished sweeping? But look at all this dust sticking to my feet!”

“See now the rice is burnt! Why couldn’t you keep a proper eye on it?”

2

“Bindu, someone has cut your hair nicely! Why don’t you comb it so that it looks even nicer?”

“Daughter, why don’t you cut the vegetables first? Then you can go back to what you were doing.”

“Come, let’s pickup these clothes and put them away. They are just collecting dust, lying around like this”.

“Come here child; mornings and evenings are best for music. Afternoons are good for reading and writing. Why don’t you read something now?”

“You have oiled your hair nicely!”

“How nice! You have fixed the buttons on your shirt.”

“You have managed to get a lot of dirt off your hands.”

“You are learning how to eat neatly now; you have spilt much less today than you did yesterday.”

“Now you can put your bindi yourself; it will be put nicely from now on.”

“That was well swept! Next time you will be able to clean up all the dust.”

“It is good that you took the rice off the fire; it would have gotten completely burnt. Be more careful the next time.”



DEPENDENCE

“Father close these buttons for me.”

“Mother, I don’t know how to do this.”

“Didi, put my shoes on for me.”

“Ma, give me a bath.”

“Uncle, fit this chain for me.”

“Father, I can’t find my book; please find it for me.”

“Ma, wait for me. Come with me.”

“Brother make me a ball out of this hanky.”



SELF-RELIANCE

“Son, you can do up your buttons yourself.”

“Just try; I am sure you will be able to.”

“You know how to put them on. Let’s see you do it.”

Now you can bathe by yourself. I will take out the water for you; you have your bath.”

“Let us see how you can fix it yourself.”

“Why don’t you look on all your window sills; I am sure you will find it.”

“Come at your own speed; you can easily walk alone.”

“Try to make it yourself, just the way I showed you.”



WHY?

Mother tells me to go away. Why does she tell me to go away?
I had gone to tell her that I found a mirror. Can I not go and tell that?

Father scolded me. Why did he scold me? I had gone to show him my drawing made with my ink pen. Can I not go to show him these?

Mother gave me a slap. Why did she slap me? I was making soap bubbles. I was seeing lovely colours. Should I not see those colours?

Father called me a sinner. Why did he call me that? It was such a pretty butterfly. I had gone to show it to him. What is a sinner?

Mother called me a sissy. Why did she call me a sissy? I tried on the bangles; I wanted to see how they looked. They looked very nice. Why is it sissy to wear bangles?

Father called me stupid. Why did he call me stupid? I didn't sing because I did not want to. I don't like to be forced. Is someone who doesn't sing stupid?

Brother pushed me. Why did he push me? I just asked him if he wanted to play. I don't mind if he doesn't play. Why should he push me?

Mother told me to move from there. Why should I move? I was just standing there watching the ants. I was not going anywhere. Why did she tell me to move?



BUT I AM SAYING NO!

Ratu says: "Mother, Father says I can take that doll from the cupboard and play with it."

Mother says: "But I am saying no! This is no time to play."

Manu says: "Mother, Father says go and play on the sand heap"

Mother says: "But I am saying no! That is no place to play."

Ratu says: "Mother, father says to go to the tap and fill this, mug by mug."

Mother says: "But I am saying no! Is this the time to think of this? Is there no other work to be done?"

Manu says: "Mother, Father says I should go to Jashiben's place to play."

Mother says: "But I am saying no! This is not the time to go to anyone's place."



I WON'T TALK

I won't talk to mother.

Mother says: "I won't let you roll out the *puris*; you make them all out of shape".

So what if they are a little out of shape? I am still small.

Mother says: "I won't let you fill the water; you spill too much".
So what if a little water gets spilt? I am still small.

Mother says: "I won't let you cut the vegetables; you will hurt yourself with the knife".
Well I could get hurt sometime. I am still small.

Mother says: "I won't let you put soap; you won't know how to do it properly".
How will I learn unless I wash myself? I am still small.

I won't talk to Mother.

I won't talk to Father.

Father says: "I won't give you the book; you will tear it".
I say: "I promise not to tear it". Yet Father does not give me the book.

Father says: "I won't give you this pen; you will break it".
I say: "I promise to write carefully". Yet Father says no.

Father says: "I cannot give you the walking stick".
I say: "I promise to keep it just as you do". Yet he does not give it.

Father says: "Go away from here; you will make a mess".
I say: "I promise we will not". Yet Father sends us away.

I will not talk to Father.

WHOM TO HEED?

Father says: "Get up early; it's good for your brain".

Mother says: "Get up when you had completed your full sleep. Getting up early will spoil your day".

Father says: "Eat moderately; overeating will make you lazy".

Mother says: "Eat what you like; eat as much as you have appetite for".

Father says: "Make it a habit to go to the toilet first thing in the morning".

Mother says: "Go whenever you need to; don't stop yourself".

Father says: "Don't sleep in the afternoon; it is not a good habit".

Mother says: "Sleep if you are sleepy; don't sleep if you are not".



WHAT IF I DON'T ASK ANYONE?

I told mother: "Just look at how these caterpillars are walking".

Mother said: "Throw them out; don't touch caterpillars".

I told Father: "Look Father, how I wrote these 1s".

Father said: "These are all zeroes, not 1s, stupid".

I told Brother: "Look Brother, how I have arranged these flowers!"

Brother said: "These are arranged? What a lousy way of arranging!"

I asked Sister: "See how I have cleaned this *katori*! I scrubbed it really hard!"

Sister said: "It still has stains on it! You call this scrubbed?"

I told Aunt: "Look at my hair Aunty! I combed it myself!"

Aunty said: "So old and still can't comb your hair? Just look at yourself in the mirror!"

I told Bhurabhai: "Look Bhurabhai, at this design that I have cut in this paper!"

Bhurabhai said: "Everyone can do that. What's so special about what you have done?"

Everyone gives me answers like this. What if I do not ask anyone anything from now on?"



THEY TELL US...

Mother tells me: "Walk carefully or else you will fall down".
I do walk carefully and yet I fall down.

Father says: "Go to sleep; you have to get up early".
I try, but I can't fall asleep."

Mother says: "Go quickly and get that plate".
But I can't walk very fast.

Father says: "Talk properly. Why do you make mistakes?"
I try, but still mistakes happen.

Mother says: "Don't cry. You must not cry".
Still I can't stop crying.

Mother says: "Stay quiet when you are visiting someone".
Sometimes I can't stop myself from crying.

Father says: "Don't go into the courtyard without asking".
Yet I go into the courtyard.



HEY...FATHER'S COMING!

"Hey...Father's coming!"

"Good, then we can read together!"

"Today I want to show Father the shoes that I have arranged in a row. Father will say, "How neat it looks."

"Wait, I will bring from upstairs, the toys I made out of clay."

"Listen! Just roll up my sleeve; I'll get ink on it. I am cleaning father's inkpot and holder."

“Remember to show Father those pictures that we had marked in the book.”

“Hey...Father’s coming!”

“Run and get the books and start studying, or else we have had it”.

“Hey, quickly pick up those shoes from the way. If Father sees them he will give you a slap”.

“What! Father’s coming! Let me wash my hands or he will say “why are your hands so muddy?”

“Hey, straighten your dress! Wasn’t your ear pulled only yesterday?”

“Put away those books of Father’s. Didn’t Father warn us that if we ever touched the books...”



HELP?

What is it? The door is not opening? Here, I will open it for you.

What is it? You cannot tie your laces? Come here I will tie them for you.

What is it? You can’t get the towel off the hook? Wait, I will take it off for you.

What is it? You cannot put in the nail? Bring the hammer; I will put it in.

What is it? You can't put on your pyjamas? Come, I will put it on for you.

SELF HELP!

What is it? The door is not opening? Look, pull it like this; it will open.

What is it? You cannot tie your laces? Shall we try to tie them like this?

What is it? You can't get the towel off the hook? Use that stick to reach higher.

What is it? You cannot put in the nail? Look hold the hammer like this and bang on it.

What is it? You can't put on your pyjamas? Look sit down and try to put your legs in.



THEY THINK THAT...

Mother thinks that I do not understand anything yet. That is not true.

When mother had no fever, she told aunt "I cannot come out today. I have fever".

Father thinks that I am just a child. That is not true. When someone came to see him he told them "Yesterday I was out of town; good thing that you did not come". Father was home all day yesterday.

Mother thinks that I am so naïve. That is not true. When I was out Mother took some out of my share and gave to Didi, and she told me, "There was only this much".

Father thinks that I always tell the truth. But sometimes I make things up. I know how to fool Father.

Mother believes that it is always the neighbourhood boys who are at fault. How can she know that I often beat them up?

Father believes that I am clever and that I always stand first. Let him continue to think that. He doesn't need to know that I manage by copying from others.

Mother thinks that I am good and that everything is Didi's fault. But I know the truth don't I; it is I who pinches Didi on the sly!

Father thinks that the servant took the money. What will the servant take? The money bought the ice cream that I ate up.

Father and Mother may think so, but I am neither a child, or do I not understand. I am not a simpleton, nor am I so goody-goody. I am what I am. After all I am the child of my parents, am I not!



BUT I AM SAYING NO!

Ratu: "Mother, Father says we should take the doll from the cupboard and play".

Mother says: "But I am saying no! This is not the time to play, as soon as you wake up!"

Manu: "Mother, Father says we should go and play on the sand heap".

Mother says: "But I am saying no! In the sand! Is that a place to play?"

Ratu: "Mother, Father says why don't you go and fill the bucket at the tap, mug by mug?"

Mother says: "But I am saying no! Can you not think of anything else early in the morning?"

Ratu: "Mother, Father says we should go to Jashiben's and play".

Mother says: "But I am saying no! Is this the time to go to anyone's house?"



TWO WAYS

1

There you are! Finished playing? What did you play today?
Can you help me now?

Will you throw away the peels and I will cut the vegetables.
Then if you fold the clothes, we can go out together.

Do you have any homework for today? Finish it early, just after
dinner. Then we will keep everything ready for the morning.
Once you are done with your homework we will be relaxed.

2

There you are! Where have you been loafing! Out like this all
day, as if there is nothing else for you to do! Here throw out
these peels. And who is going to do the sweeping? Look how
the clothes are scattered all over! At least put them in one
place.

Just because you go to school, you think you can answer me
any way you like! Is this what we are educating you for? If you
want to go to school tomorrow, you had better finish all this
housework first.

I INSIST!

1

I am telling you! You must go to the temple every day.

You must wear the *churidar*, I like you in a *churidar*.

Is that the way to comb your hair? Comb it like I do.

So what if you find it hot? You must learn to eat some chillies.

That is not the way to sit; it looks bad.

Is this the way to wash hands? You need to wash up to your elbows.

You must learn to like *bajra rotlas*; I like them.

2

If you want to come to the temple, come with me.

Wear what you like, *churidar* or skirt.

You have combed your hair the way you like to, and I have combed as I like.

If you like this spicy food eat, if not, the dal has less chillies.

Look; why don't you sit like this? Then there will be more room for everyone.

See, wash your hands properly; like this.

If you do not like *bajra rotlas*, then eat the wheat ones; some may not like those.



MOTHER CAN I HELP YOU?

Mother shall I sweep the house?

No! What do you think we pay Bhikha for? Do you want to become a sweeper?

Look Mother! I washed my handkerchief!

And look, you have wet your shirt and your feet are muddy! All I seem to be doing is washing clothes!

Mother, they have put up a swing at Jeevi aunty's house. Can I go and swing?

You are going nowhere! If you a leg or arm, who will look after you? I already have more than enough to do.

Mother, shall I fold Didi's and my clothes?

Don't you have anything better to do? Put them down and go away.

Mother, look at these pieces of red and yellow glass that I found near the hedge.

Go throw them in that pit. If you bring them in the house someone will step on them and cut themselves. Then who will look after them?

Mother; will you put this thread in the needle?

What are you doing with needle and thread? Don't you have anything else to do? Put the needle away!

Mother, can I go and play with Viju in the shade behind the house?

Have you not found anyone else to play with? You know that Viju's mother is always fighting with me!

But Viju and I don't fight; we are friends.

Oh, no need for all that friends business. Do not play with him.

Mother, Father said that I could clean his ink stand. Shall I do that?

As if I do not have enough to do, no need for you to get your hands and face black with ink. It is easy for your father to talk.

Then Mother, can I play with my top?

Is this the time to play with your top? Look at the time? It is the middle of the afternoon! Why don't you do some work instead?

All you do is keep on asking, "Shall I do this? Shall I do that?"

Then what shall I do?

Whatever other children do!

But you do not let me do that. You keep on saying no!

How I can say yes to work that you are not supposed to do?

So what is the work that I can do?

Enough! Now stop harassing me! When your father comes he will tell you what to do.



WHO IS BETTER EDUCATED?

Puno sits in the sun in his flimsy clothes and tries to fend off the cold.

Umakant wraps himself in warm clothes and sits next to the heater.

Puno keeps a stone ready to drive off the dogs that come near. Umakant starts crying and runs to his mother when he sees a dog.

Puno can drink water that is poured from above with his cupped hands.

Umakant spills water when he drinks from the glass and wets his clothes.

Puno has half a *rotla* and buttermilk in the morning, and is hungry before lunch.

Umakant does not like milk; he drinks a cup of tea and is not hungry till afternoon.

Puno is an expert at playing seven tiles and no one can catch him when he runs.

Umakant does not like to play; he says he will fall down.

Puno goes looking for where the spiders have made their webs and can find where the mynas have laid their eggs; he can climb the tree and bring down the mangoes. He is not afraid to walk in the night in the light of the stars.

Umakant sits at home and reads about spiders and mynas; he is good at copying out the lessons about mango trees and stars; he has good handwriting.



YOU CAN, WHEN I TELL YOU

Mother was putting the masala in the vegetable.

Indu was eager to add the spices. She was old enough to learn how to.

She asked: Mother can I do that?

Mother said: You can when I tell you; you are too young now.

Indu was disappointed; she went away.

Mother had fever.

She thought, today I will tell Indu to make the vegetable.

She said: Indu will you make the vegetable?

Indu said: Mother I do not know how to.



TWO HOMES

1

The children were playing new games; they were engaged and laughing together.

They were helping each other and asking for each other's help. They were making up new things and feeling pleased with themselves.

They were respectful of each other; they were affectionate towards each other.

Mother was busy with her housework. From time to time she peeped in to see what the children were doing. She was engulfed with joy on hearing their laughter; her ears were ringing with their happy sounds. She would come and look, and return to her tasks with renewed energy.

Both the children and the mother savoured these special moments.

2

The children could not decide what to play; they were squabbling and quarrelling among themselves; they were pushing and shoving and pulling.

If any child tried to suggest something new, the rest disagreed and went back to fighting with each other.

They were growling and scowling at each other.

Mother was hassled with her housework. She was shouting at them: "Stop that fighting! Wait, I am coming to give you a tight slap."

Mother was angry; she was frowning; she was banging the utensils, and screaming at everyone. Whenever the quarrel intensified, she would come in and whack whoever was in her path.

Both the children and mother had such unhappy moments.



ORPHAN CHILD

An orphan child is one who is scolded and bullied by his father's servants.

An orphan child is one whose parents do not know where their child is, and what it is doing.

An orphan child is one who is hungry, but the cook is too lazy to get up and give it food.

An orphan child is one whose ayah or caretaker decide what it is to wear or not wear.

An orphan child is one who has to sing or dance to please its parent's friends.



WHAT ARE WE TO DO?

All the children were playing happily. Hasan was sitting to one side.

"Hasan, why are you sitting like this? Go and play with the other children."

Hasan did not look up. He continued to sit. When teacher touched him his body felt hot. When she put the thermometer, his temperature was 101 degrees.

Chandra was crying.

“Why are you crying?” Asked the teacher.

Chandra did not say anything, she kept on crying.

Someone get the thermometer; let us check her temperature.

Chandra had 102 degree fever.

Vinu was lying down; he was crying.

“Get up Vinu. I will show you some pictures”.

When teacher took Vinu’s hand to pull him up, Vinu started howling. When he picked him up he started screaming. He did not have fever. But when teacher checked he saw that he had a big boil on his thigh.

Radha was listening to the story when suddenly she started crying.

Teacher took her on her lap to quieten her when she felt that her clothes were soiled. Radha had loose motions and cramps in her stomach.

Teachers often have such experiences with young children.

When they talk to the parents about what happened to their child, parents often do not accept that this happened. “Oh, he had temperature? Maybe just mild fever.” “But he never has fever; it will go away.” “This is summer, must be a heat boil, it is common in this season.” “Must be because of the raw guava she ate; now it is out of her system.”

So between teacher and parents, what are we to do?

MOTHER HIT ME

“Champaben why so quiet? Why are you sulking?”

Champa was a cheerful child. She was affectionate and polite. Today she was subdued and kept to herself.

Teacher asked: “Tell me, what is wrong?”

Champa’s face turned red and eyes filled with tears.

Teacher put a hand on her head and gently drew her close.

“You can tell me. Why are you sad?”

“My mother hit me.”

“Why did she hit you?”

“It was not my fault, but she hit me.”

“But what happened?”

“I have a baby brother; I felt like picking him up and hugging him. As I was picking him up from the cradle, he started crying. Mother came running. Why are you making him cry? She shouted and gave me a slap.”

Teacher tried to comfort her. But who will tell the mother how hurt the child felt?



WHY YOU DON'T YOU DO AS TOLD?

“Chandu, bring some water”.

Chandu did not move. He looked ill at ease.

“Chandu, did you not hear? I told you to bring some water”.

Chandu continued to stand and stare.

“Chandu, why are you not going? Why are you standing like this?”

Chandu went into the house and came back.

“Chandu, you did not bring water. Why are you not doing as told?”

Chandu said: “Father, the small *matka* is broken, I cannot reach up where the other *matkas* are kept. Mother is in the bathroom.

“Ramu, go bring your toy for Balu”.

Ramu looked thoughtful

“Go bring it quickly. Balu is crying, the toy will make him stop”.

Ramu did not say anything. He kept standing.

“Ramu. Hurry will you. Can't you see that Balu is crying?”

Ramu went in the house and sat there.

Father called loudly: “Ramu, do you not understand. Hurry and bring the toy”.

Ramu did not come. Father was furious. “Ramu, for the last time. Are you bringing the toy or not?”

Ramu said: “But mother has told me not to give my toys to anyone”.



CHILDREN ARE THE SCAPEGOATS

Kamu's mother is busy chatting with the neighbour, while the vegetable is on the fire. The vegetable gets burnt. Kamu comes out and asks: "Mother will we buy mangoes today?" Mother said: "Stop asking for mangoes all day; look what you've done! The vegetable is burnt now". She pushes Kamu away. Kamu goes out crying.

Champa's sister-in-law has come for two days. The two cannot get along and keep bickering.

Champa got up early and had a bath and combed her hair.

"Look who is all tiptop early in the morning," her sister-in-law taunted her.

Champa's hand touches the hot oil while cooking and she gets a blister. Viju comes and says: "Mother please comb my hair. I like the way you tie my plait. Auntie cannot do it like you do."

Champa screams at her daughter: "Can't you see I am cooking. And see I have burnt myself! Is this the time for me to comb your hair? Your aunt thinks it is too early!"

Viju is crestfallen and goes away.

Father comes in and tells Mother: "Listen we have two guests today. I will go and buy the *shrikhand*. You make the *puris*."

Father goes.

Mother grumbles under her breath: "I have a throbbing headache since I woke up. And now he has invited guests. And I need to go out at two o'clock".

Mother is fuming as she starts sifting the flour for the dough.

Nandu comes in and says: "Mother can I help you sift the flour? I can do it".

Mother says: "Move away! Can't you see that I am in a hurry; and here you have come to add to my work! Your father thinks that all this happens by magic".

Nandu goes away with drooping shoulders.

Today Father's boss took him to task in the office. Father comes home in a bad mood. He paces the floor angrily.

Babu comes and says: "Father play that game with me".

Father says: "Go to your mother. I am busy".

Babu says: "But you are just walking up and down. Can't we play?"

Father is very angry: How dare you tell me what to do. Don't ever talk like that again. Just go now.

Babu is scared; she hurries into the house.

Ramniklal has just received an unpleasant letter from his friend. He is mad and is cursing his friend silently as he stomps around in the compound.

Raghu is playing there. He comes running and says: "Father it's time to go for our walk".

Father says: "Not today".

Raghu says: "Come Father. Sister and I are ready and waiting since a long time. The band will be playing in the garden today".

Father is irritated: "Call the children inside. They are bothering me".

Mother calls back: "I am busy. You take them out. They have been waiting for you".

Children say: "Let's go Father. Even Mother says so".

Father is mad: "I told you I do not want to go for a walk today; that is final. Who said that we must go out every day? Now go away".

The disappointed children slink away.

Father opens a magazine and reads a review of his new book. The critics have not been kind. Father is most upset. These critics have not bothered to understand, they just write what they feel like. He plans to write a rejoinder.

Lily comes and says: "Father please take down that picture book".

Father says: "Not now. I want to write".

Lily says: "Please Father. I want to see the pictures".

Father: "The book is not there. It must be somewhere else. I'll look later".

Lily: "But I can see it Father".

Father's mind was on the criticism and his rejoinder to it. "I told you. Not now. I have to write".

Lily: "Father, just get it down. Then you write".

Father: "Lily, are you going now or shall I call your mother?"

Lily: "But Father..."

Father: "Listen are you in the kitchen? This child is driving me mad. Call her. Lily, are you going now or shall I pick you up and put you out?"

Lily face crumples and falls. She gives her father an angry glare and walks away.



TEACHERS' OPINIONS

1

Class Teacher

Vijay is a clever boy. He always comes first. He is quiet and well behaved. He does not fight with anyone. He is well mannered and does what he is told. He will not do anything wrong for fear of being scolded.

Sports Teacher

Vijay is weak. He does not like to play. He stays away from friendly tussles and physical activities. He does what he has to out of fear, and cries at the slightest comment.

Which could be the right opinion?

2

Class Teacher

Ravi is not interested in studies. He is at the bottom of the class. He is aggressive, and obstreperous. There are at least a few complaints against him every day. It is difficult to get him to obey; he does what he feels like, and will bear the consequences.

Sports Teacher

Ravi is strong and energetic. The best player, he is clever, fearless, and follows orders. Good at resolving disputes and controlling mischievous teammates.

Which could be the right opinion?



SHOW US!

1

Father says: "Be careful when you walk; do not fall down".

Mother says: "Be careful that you don't stub your toe; and that you do not get hurt".

Aunty says: "Natu just does not know how to walk properly".

Didi says: "Natu is like that only. He always walks like that and then he falls".

After a while, Natu really begins to believe that he is like that only; "I do not know how to walk properly, and I keep falling and getting hurt".

Poor Natu. What if someone just showed him how to walk properly instead of finding fault always? What if someone says: "Look this is how you should walk!"

2

"Hey Jashi, hold it properly. Learn how to hold".

"Jashi, you are sure to drop the bowl. Hold it properly".

"Jashi, Jashi, your hand is shaking. You are going to drop the bowl".

“See now. It has fallen. Didn’t I tell you to hold it properly? Look it has broken into pieces”.

“Oh God. How many times must she be told? She will never learn how to hold it properly”.

Over time Jashi is convinced that “I cannot hold anything properly. When I carry something and walk, my hands shake. When I try to hold tightly it falls from my hands. Then everyone keeps saying hold properly. Instead of saying I do not know, why cannot someone show me how to hold properly?”

By hearing again and again “It is going to fall”, Jashi’s confidence is eroded. Instead of continuously making her afraid of breaking or spilling, what if someone quietly showed her “See, this is how you can hold it.” Surely Jashi will learn how to do it properly.

3

Mother: “He is never going to learn that. I have been saying that this boy will not study”.

Father: “He just does not pay attention to his studies. How will he learn if he does not focus?”

Didi: “How come I can understand and you can’t? If you sat down with your books you would understand too”.

Teacher has declared that he is a dud and stupid. He never says that he knows anything. Rather “Him? He is not going to study!”

The boy begins to believe this. He feels “I do not know anything.” He sits with his books but he cannot concentrate.

Everyone calls him a duffer, but no one shows him how to learn. Everyone calls him stupid, but no one shows him how to tackle his books. Everyone only keeps blaming him, and the boy finds himself becoming more stupid.

4

Everyone says that Bachu does not talk properly.

Uncle says: "This is very rude. Learn to talk politely".

Mother says: "He talks like the lower classes".

Father says: "No one in our house talks as roughly as you do.

Where did you learn to talk like this?"

Bhabhi says: "Don't talk to me. Has no one taught you how to talk with manners?"

Bachu is confused. He is not sure how he should talk.

Everyone seems to be constantly berating him. But nobody tells him that this is a polite way to talk. If they did, surely he would emulate them?



