

An Educare Approach to Children's Self-Discipline

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How do people acquire attitudes, beliefs and behaviours?

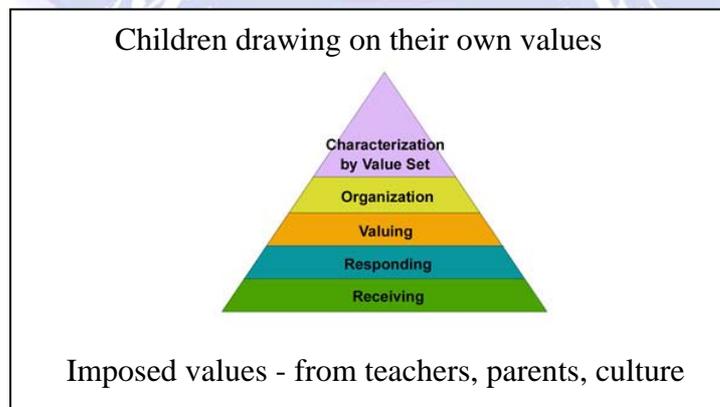
Krathwohl's Taxonomy of the Affective Domain gives us an idea of how people acquire affective characteristics, that is attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. This acquisition starts with *Receiving*, which involves the learner becoming aware of or sensitive to the existence of certain ideas and being willing to tolerate them. At this stage the main stimulus comes from the external, through others talking about and modeling, while the learner listens and accepts.

The second level is *Responding*, at which the learner becomes committed in some small way to the ideas. Again this suggests that there is some external imposing of the values, as the learner begins to comply with, follow, acclaim or volunteer.

The third level is *Valuing*, which is being willing to be perceived by others as valuing certain ideas. At this level the motivation is starting to move towards becoming internal, as the learner becomes more proficient, relinquishes old behaviours, supports and debates. This experience of reflecting and debating about the issues is particularly important in the process of internalizing.

The fourth level is *Organization*, which is being able to relate the value to those already held and bring it into a harmonious and internally consistent philosophy. Here it is important for the learners to have opportunities to discuss and to develop own theories about what the values mean to them in their own lives.

The ultimate goal of the taxonomy is *Characterization*, being able to act consistently in accordance with the values that the learner has internalized. At this stage the learner will avoid/resist behaviour that goes against the value even under peer pressure, apply the value to solve problems or resolve conflicts, and can clearly be seen to be applying the value consistently in daily life. Learners at this stage are being true to themselves and who they really are - living by what they really believe to be right.



Telling them about and modeling appropriate values and behaviours

At the outset it is most important to talk to children about the kinds of behaviour that are important in people of good character. Most important is for you to model these behaviours consistently and persistently so your children see that they are things you sincerely value, and talk to them about the decisions and choices you have had to make in your own life and how your values helped you to make the right ones or recover from wrong ones.

Very often simply letting your children see you doing whatever you need to do for your own spiritual growth is enough to enable them to receive and respond to good behaviours.

Accepting them as they are

As an experienced Educare teacher Elizabeth, my co-author of this article, has discovered the importance of accepting children as they are. On many occasions she has found a significant turning point for difficult or troubled children to be when she has said or done something to let them see that she loves and accepts them as they are, even with their faults, rather than judging them for not being something that she would like them to be.

The message she conveys is, 'I am happy to have this relationship with you, whoever you are' – rather than imposing the condition '...only if you are who I think you should be'. If children are treated with respect and see that you are genuinely interested in them they are likely to respond better.

A longitudinal study was conducted by researchers at Johns Hopkins University on some adolescent boys in the Bronx in New York who were in danger of becoming criminals. Years later the researchers discovered that some of these adolescents had developed into good citizens, unlike their counterparts who had indeed grown up to become criminals. Further investigation found that all of this former group had been taught by one particular teacher, who had shown them that she loved and accepted them in spite of their shortcomings, and thus inspired them to want to do better.

Sai Baba tells us that a child is like a diamond, at first just a dull piece of stone, a hard pebble, only when it is cut by a skilful artisan does it become a multi-faceted flame of fire. Accepting children as they are enables them to begin to polish their own inner diamonds. Unconditional love has to be there all the time regardless of what they do.

Turning a blind eye sometimes

While Educare is about encouraging children to develop good characters, it is also about encouraging self-confidence and being themselves. Sometimes this means that we may need to turn a blind eye to minor naughtiness that is a part of being a child. It is important to keep trying hard to be positive about developments in children's behaviour. Sometimes this means letting some things go instead of being too tough about the small things – even if it appears that your children might be a bit naughtier than your friend's children who are controlled externally.

It is natural for children to be naughty. Even in Sathya Sai schools around the world, the children can sometimes be very naughty. But the difference is that children with an Educare

foundation have a firmly established understanding of what is fair, honest behaviour that will not harm either themselves or others.

On one occasion I was trying to teach a maths game to a class of Grade 4 children in the Sathya Sai School in Thailand. The children were taking advantage of the fact that I was unable to speak any Thai and were testing me with their mischief. Eventually, using my best 'discipline strategies' I signaled to them that I was not happy with their behaviour, and made a great show of packing away the game since they were not prepared to play it properly. Instantly the whole class crowded around me with looks of genuine concern on their faces that their behaviour may have hurt me, and said to me lovingly, 'Teacher, please smile again'. This is what is different about children brought up in an Educare environment – they may be mischievous sometimes but they know to stop when their consciences tell them they have gone too far.

Crossing the line

While it is important to turn an occasional blind eye to the small things, it is also sometimes important to let children know when they have 'crossed the line'. Then it is important to ask them what's going on, why this has happened and what they need to work on to get themselves back on track.

Don't worry if the child's transformation is slow or minimal

Often we don't see very much change in children, and sometimes they can cause us despair by regressing in their behaviour. Rather than holding an ideal vision of a perfectly behaved child it is important to show appreciation of the small changes they make. In fact, very often children brought up in an Educare environment will move away from it when they reach adolescence and the need to find their own way.

But the important thing to remember is that the Educare background sows the seeds that will enable them to go through life with an understanding of what is appropriate behaviour, that will enable them to make the right decisions about their own behaviour.

Give them a chance to question, discuss and debate

As we have seen from Krathwohl's model above, a significant step in moving from externally imposed to internally driven behaviours is the process of questioning, discussing and debating about these behaviours. It is most important that we give them the opportunities to do this, and that we do our best to give them serious answers based on our own spiritual understandings.

Know when to 'step back'

Part of the process of raising a child with self-discipline is to develop a sense of when to take a step back and to let them make their own decisions in full knowledge that they will have to face the positive or negative consequences of these decisions. The choice about how to behave is ultimately theirs, and this is truly self-discipline



Perhaps now you might find it useful to return to the questions above and use these ideas to develop for yourself an action plan for helping your child to develop into a self-disciplined individual.

	Please ✓ the ones you want for your children	Please write here what you plan to do to help your children to achieve this.
I want my children to be obedient to everything I say.		
I want my children to be able to examine choices in their own consciences and act according to who they really are.		
I want my children to have perfect behaviour all the time.		
I want my children to be happy, even if they sometimes make mistakes.		
I want my children to engage in some childhood naughtiness sometimes as long as they turn out to be nice people.		
I want to accept my children unconditionally as they are, and to let them know that I accept them.		
I want my children to meet the goals and expectations that I have for them.		