

PARENTING EFFECTIVELY BY LAILA KHONDKAR

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Hello,
I often get confused when I hear that children have a right to express their views on issues affecting them. Does it mean that we have to listen to whatever children say?
- Reader

Dear Reader,
You have raised an important question. Many parents had similar confusion. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) mentions the following:

"States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child."

The opinion of a child or young person should be considered everywhere, which includes home, school and workplace. For example, adults need to listen to what children want to eat and wear. They should also seek children's views on a quality learning environment in school, how they want to spend leisure time, etc. This is true no matter how young a child or young person is, but the weight of their opinion should change as they grow up and become more mature.

Children's right to participation does not mean that they can do whatever they want to do. One of the principles of the UNCRC is "best interest of the child". If a child wants to do something that will affect his/her life in a negative way then parents or caregivers have a responsibility to provide appropriate guidance.

For example, if a child refuses to eat a balanced diet, does not want to get vaccinated, wants to spend unlimited time online then parents will explain why those will not bring positive outcomes for him/her, and prevent those from happening.

Dear Ms Khondkar,
My son is twelve years old, and I try to set rules for him regarding food, studies, and leisure activities (e.g. amount of screen time allowed per day). But he does not comply in some cases, which frustrates me. I do not want to treat him harshly, but also want to do the right thing as a parent. Please suggest what I should do.
- Confused

Dear Confused,
The challenge you described is quite common. It is very natural that you want to ensure your child learns to lead his life in a disciplined way, and develop positive habits. Sometimes we ask children to do things without clearly explaining the reasons. This is not helpful, as children do not understand why they should do or not do something. When children understand the reasons for the rules set by the adults, they are much more likely to follow them.

It is important for parents to provide structure for their children by setting clear guidelines for behaviour. They also need to state their expectations clearly, explain the reasons for their rules, and encourage their children to think things through. Structure helps children recognise their successes; this also helps them understand their mistakes and what to do to fix them. If parents set rules without a dialogue with the children then they may comply when parents are around, but may not follow the rules when parents are not there.

Here are a few ways through which you can provide structure to your son: discussing rules with him and hearing his point of view, explaining the effects of his actions on other people, giving him the information he needs to make good decisions, talking with him often avoiding threats, acting as a positive role model and a guide.

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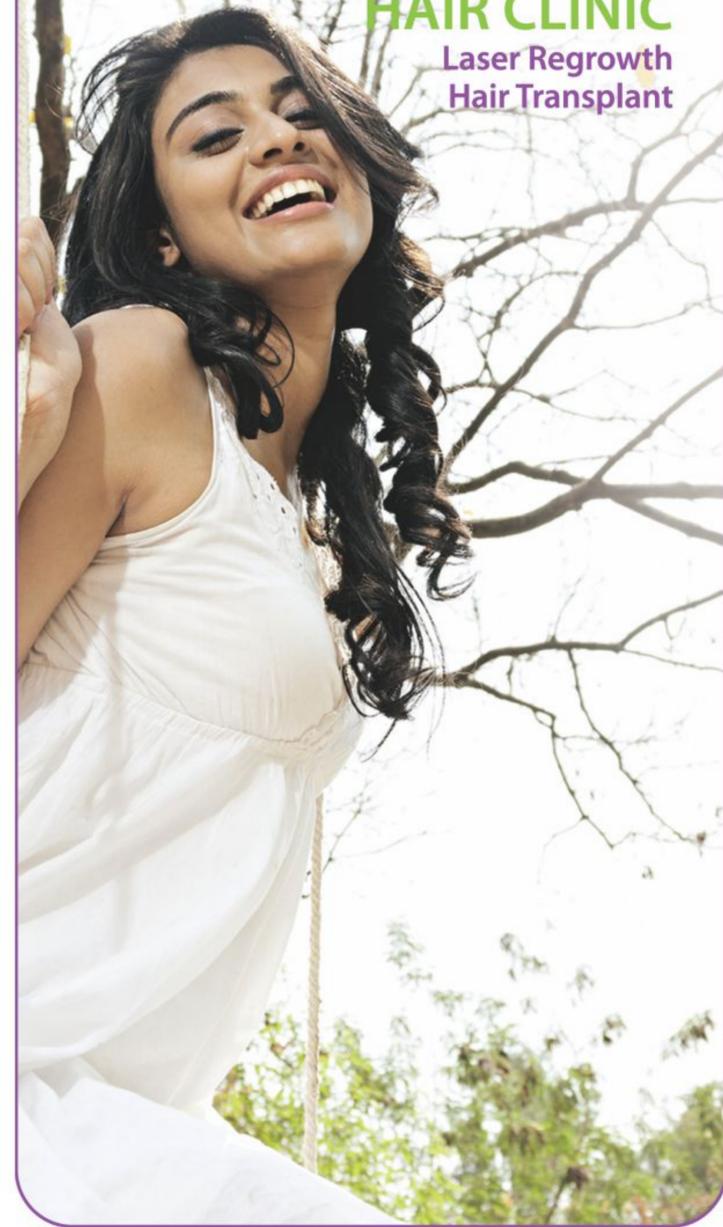
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