

# Role of Parents and Teachers in Supporting a Child's Growth and Learning: Aurobindonian Perspective

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## Abstract:

Children are mostly guided by their parents and teachers. The problem lies in the fact that parents and teachers have their own deficiencies which are transferred to their children consciously or unconsciously. Our way of upbringing may nurture or spoil the possibilities within a child. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have envisaged a new world upon this earth which will be led by the Divine Consciousness. They have shown the ways to prepare ourselves for a better tomorrow. The childhood is the most important period of human life. The personality begins to build up and take shape with habits. If good habits are instilled at this stage, they become very natural with the child. The aim of this life is to walk on the path of discovering the inner truth, the Divine within. In this context, the role of parents and teachers bears immense significance. In order to be a good guide, they need to be the living examples of the ideals they teach. A child is a little scientist. He discovers the world through investigation and experiment. This trait must be nurtured by the parents and the teachers. By instilling good habits, giving freedom to explore, creating a conducive learning-atmosphere, helping the child strengthen the contact with his real self, parents and teachers can fulfill their role most effectively and meaningfully.

**Keywords:** Sri Aurobindo, The Mother, Aurobindonian Perspective of Education, Intuition, Inner Truth, Self-discovery

## 1. Introduction

Home is the first classroom and parents are the first teachers of a child. After being born into a new world, parents are his/her main guides in understanding it. Through observation and later through parents' instructions, the child learns language, skills, social norms and values. The home environment plays a significant role in building the personality of a child. The early years of a child are very crucial for his/her physical, emotional and mental growth. With the love and support of parents, a child can grow to be independent and bring out the best. The next important role is played by the teachers. At the age of 3-5, the child enters into the school which is again a new world for him/her. The teachers work as mentors during the formative years and help in building a well-rounded self of the child. Apart from mental training through academic instruction, they have a great role in building their personality by cultivating critical thinking, tending curiosity, motivating great ideals, inculcating values, instilling love for life, helping to get rid of weaknesses and so on. But the question is, are the parents and teachers aware of these responsibilities? Are they adequately equipped to fulfill these responsibilities?

## 2. Parents and teachers must be aware of their influence

Parents and teachers have their own weaknesses and shortcomings. As they come in contact with the children for long periods of time, these weaknesses start exerting their ruinous influence upon the children. Unfortunately, the parents and teachers are unaware of this fact. The Mother (the spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo) says—

“With very few exceptions, parents are not aware of the disastrous influence that their own defects, impulses, weaknesses and lack of self-control have on their children. If you wish to be respected by a child, have respect for yourself and be worthy of respect at every moment. Never be authoritarian, despotic, impatient or ill-tempered.” (The Mother, 1999, P.10)

## 3. Good advice has little impact

Parents and teachers think that they can bring changes in the nature of a child by giving advice time to time. According to the Mother, only words of mouth in the form of advice cannot have a substantial impact upon the child. Students are motivated when they have living examples before them. The teachers and parents must be living examples of the qualities they wish to inculcate in the children. If we want our children to be sincere, honest, unselfish, courageous, patient, calm, then we as parents and teachers must be living life in accordance with these values.

## 4. Encouraging curiosity

By nature, all children are curious. As they grow up a little, they find themselves in a new world and every little thing draws their attention. The sky, the sun, the moon, plants, flowers, birds, insects— all carry bags of wonderful things for the child. It is obvious that he would ask questions out of curiosity. Many people think that the child cannot understand the answer. Therefore, they scold the child for asking such questions or give very silly answers. The Mother says,

“When your child asks you a question, do not give him a stupid or silly answer under the pretext that he cannot understand you.” (The Mother, 1999, p.10) She says that for a young child, it is very difficult to grasp abstract and general ideas. However, with the help of concrete images, symbols, parables, stories they can be trained to understand concepts.

## 5. Giving freedom

There are different theories on the freedom to be given to a child. Freedom to experience the world helps the child to learn the world and its mechanism in a better way than all the theories. The Mother says that usually the elders discourage children doing experiments. They show the fear that if they do so, some mishap might happen. This way, the child loses the opportunity to learn boldness and courage. The child must be encouraged to experiment. Without freedom, the child would withdraw or retreat into himself. However, this freedom should be given with some restrictions due to the fact that “... if you let a child walk on the edge of a wall and he falls and breaks a leg or his head, the experience is a little hard; or if you let him play with a match-box and he burns out his eyes, you understand, it is paying very dearly for a little knowledge!” (The Mother, 2004, p. 282)

## 6. Supporting child's physical growth

If a divine life is to be established upon the earth, the human body must be perfected to be eligible to work as a base. It is the body which houses the soul. Sri Aurobindo says—

“Perfection is the true aim of all culture, the spiritual and psychic, the mental, the vital and it must be the aim of our physical culture also. If our seeking is for a total perfection of the being, the physical part of it cannot be left aside.” (Sri Aurobindo, 1998, p. 521)

According to the Mother, the education of the body should begin at birth and should be continued till death. Eating, drinking, sleeping, emptying the bowel are the basic things which need to be taken care of since the birth of the baby. In the early period of his life, if the child forms good habits, he will be saved from a number of troubles in the future. The main recommendations by the Mother (1999) regarding physical education are given below.

### **6.1 Knowledge of bodily organs**

To make the physical education effective, the child should know the external and internal parts of the human body and their functions. The Mother says, “As the child develops, he must gradually be taught to observe the functioning of his internal organs so that he may control them more and more, and see that this functioning remains normal and harmonious.” (The Mother, 1999, p. 13) The child must be trained to have correct body postures and movements.

### **6.2 Proper diet**

A simple, healthy, tasty but uncomplicated diet helps the body in its proper growth. The Mother warns that the instinct of the body should not be neglected. If a child finds a particular food distasteful, he/she should not be forced to take that. Food should be consumed as per the body’s need. The child should never be encouraged to have greed for food. He/she should know that food is a requirement of the body, not a thing to satisfy his/her desire.

### **6.3 Hygienic habits**

The child should be taught to maintain cleanliness. Once it is formed in him/her as a habit, he would follow the rules of hygiene naturally. However, for forming such a habit, one should not instil fear of illness into him/her. “Fear is the worst instrument of education and the surest way of attracting what is feared.” (The Mother, 1999, p. 14)

### **6.4 Adequate rest**

It is very important that our body gets enough rest. The duration of sleep changes with age. A baby sleeps for long hours. This duration gradually comes down as the child grows up. However, until maturity, eight hours of sleep is a good habit. The place of sleep should be well-ventilated and free from any noise. The child should go to bed early in the night.

### **6.5 Games and sports**

Games and sports not only are a great source of joy but also instrumental in keeping the body agile and healthy. They have a good impact on the mental health also. In the education programme, games and sports should have a prominent place. According to the Mother, “ ... more than all the medicines in the world, (it) will assure the child good health”. (The Mother, 1999, p.15) These activities help in the development of body parts, in the functioning and growth of muscles and they prevent stiffening of the joints.

## **7. Teaching-learning process**

### **7.1 Self-control**

The Mother says that self-control is a necessary attribute of a teacher. Keeping calm, not getting angry and remaining undisturbed in trying circumstances come under the ambit of self-control. The teacher should never be complacent with his/her existing nature or knowledge. There should always be an

endeavour to perfect oneself and one's knowledge more and more. The teacher should never think himself superior to his students as all are spiritually equal. No preference or attachment he should have towards particular students. (Vijay, 1980)

### **7.2 Refraining from scolding and beating**

The parents and teachers should refrain themselves from beating or scolding their children. The Mother notes, "Do not beat your children—It clouds your consciousness and spoils their character." (Words of the Mother — Marriage and Children, n.d.) It is harmful for both the parties. The children should never be scolded "without good reason and only when it is quite indispensable". (Vijay, 1980) The Mother warns that a child should never be scolded by parents and teachers for a weakness which the parents and teachers themselves have not overcome.

It must be ensured that the child confesses the mistakes committed. It is important that "... a fault confessed must always be forgiven". (Vijay, 1980) Teachers and parents should treat the child with affection and make him identify the wrong movements so that the same mistakes are not repeated.

The Mother says that if a student disturbs others in the class, the teacher may advise him to behave properly or otherwise, send him out. This is a "natural consequence of his actions", not a punishment. She emphatically says that parents and teachers do not have the right to punish. "Who has given you the right to punish? The children too can punish you for your actions. Are you perfect yourselves?" (The Mother, 1999, p. 378)

### **7.3 Discovery learning**

Mostly it is seen that parents without considering the inherent nature and tendencies of their child, pressurise him/her to fulfil their own dreams. Secondly, the teachers spoon-feed information and thereby neglect the development of creativity and critical thinking skills. The child should learn to discover things himself/herself. The teachers and parents should help to "develop his own intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical capacities and to grow freely as an organic being, not to be kneaded and pressured into form like an inert plastic material." (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p.33 )

### **7.4 Teaching through self-practice**

The qualities a teacher wants to develop in his students must be practised by the teacher himself. The Mother says, "Never demand from a child an effort of discipline that you do not make yourself." (Vijay, 1980, p.20) The Mother prescribes certain minimum qualities such as "calm, equanimity, order, method, absence of useless words". The teacher should also be punctual and truthful and should not be losing temper while dealing with students.

### **7.5 Supporting inherent qualities**

According to Sri Aurobindo, every child has certain inherent qualities which can be tapped by the teacher for their proper expression. The children love to listen to stories, they appreciate and adore the heroes for their valiant actions, and they love their country dearly. They are inquisitive in nature. Their intellectual curiosity and metaphysical enquiry can be tapped to comprehend the world and himself. The power of imitation and imagination can bring out the hidden artist within the child. These inherent qualities should be used with utmost advantage. If they are channelised properly, the children can progress towards a bright future. (Sri Aurobindo, 1948)

### **7.6 Teaching the vital**

The five senses of the children must be developed. Apart from these, the inner senses must be gradually discovered and developed. These senses are to be directed to strive for higher experiences. Through self-observation, the movements of desire are to be recognised. Children are to be motivated to work upon

these movements by exposing them to the light of the psychic being. Art, craft, music poetry etc. can help in a great way to nurture the vital in the children. These activities channelise the emotions, energy and creativity and push them towards their greater heights. (*Vital Education*, n.d.)

### 7.7 Supporting intuition

The Mother says that when the child is small, he/she has a strong contact with his/her “superconscious” part. This part receives knowledge with the help of intuition. (Vijay, 1980) Regarding the expression of intuition, the Mother remarks that it does not need the support of reasoning and analysis. The knowledge comes suddenly “without having made use of one’s brain, without having put together the elements of the problem and tried to resolve them ...” (The Mother, 2003, p.423)

Gradually, this contact gets “lost in the course of his education”. This happens as teachers encourage them to gain knowledge only through reading books and following what others have said about the subject. This contact should be nurtured and strengthened in students. The Mother discourages to fill the minds of the children only with different types of data and information. (Vijay, 1980)

### 7.8 Discovering the inner truth

One of the most important qualities that is to be developed in a child is the urge to find his/her inner truth. This should begin at a very early age. Normally, when a child does something which is contrary to the inner truth, he/she would feel a type of uneasiness inside. This feeling of uneasiness is not the same that arises because it has been forbidden, or due to the fear of punishment. It comes to him naturally and spontaneously. The child should know “that there is an inner reality – within themselves, within the earth, within the universe - and that they, the earth and the universe exist only as a function of this truth, and that if it did not exist the child would not last, even the short time that it does, and that everything would dissolve ...” (Vijay, 1980, p. 40) Instead of being exposed to its philosophical explanation, if the child could feel the joy within by obeying “this little very silent thing within him”, he could get help to walk on the path of self-discovery.

## 8. Conclusion

The present world is undergoing a crisis. Confusion, chaos, conflict loom everywhere. Though man has made tremendous material progress, he has yet to find peace. It must be admitted that peace cannot be truly established by any social, economic or mechanical means. For this, we must turn inward and bring a change in our nature. We must discover that there is one truth which is present in everyone. With this discovery, human unity and peace can be established. As the children are the makers of the future, their growth in all aspects—physical, vital, mental, and spiritual—must be nurtured with care, guidance, and encouragement to ensure they develop into well-rounded individuals imbued with spiritual values. Then only they can be harbingers of peace. Parents and teachers are the immediate mentors of a child. Rooted in ordinary consciousness, they can never be able to guide children towards a higher Divine consciousness. They must embark on the path of spirituality to bring substantial changes within themselves in order to be truly able to guide the children.

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