

Principle 3 : Use appropriate “thinking” questions to transfer responsibilities and enhance communication in the family

There is a phase when toddlers always bombard parents with questions like:

- “Why is the sky blue?”
- “Why do cat chase rats?” or
- “Where do I come from?”

You get the idea. Well, as they grow, we could learn how to turn this around and ask them questions instead!

As parents, we have a tendency to command and tell (when that continues into the teen years, nagging results). Kind of like, I say, you do, don’t ask! Such authoritative style is fine and needed when they are younger. As they grow, parenting style adjustments are needed. Using wise, “thinking” questions is one such adjustment to stimulate their young minds.

One technique the Ezzos teaches is using “Do you have the freedom?”. The idea behind this is that we do not want to constantly remind our children to do what they are supposed to do. So if they are about to have their play time, we could ask, “Do you have the freedom to play?” Our child is supposed to go through a list of “to do’s” themselves in their mind and ensure that they are done. For example, they must ensure they have completed their homework, packed their bags, tidied their room and switched off the lights in their room. If their reply is “Yes”, then we will allow them to play. However, should spot checks reveal that it is otherwise, there need to be consequences like suspension of privileges. This can be used for any activities that require things to be completed prior to the activities. As parents we have to first explain how this works and walk through different ‘lists’ with our children. This can begin at a fairly young age.

This technique is the start of using “thinking” questions. Other possible questions especially for school going children that are above 10 are:

- “What was good about your chess game?”
- “Tell me how you find your test results?”
- “How does that make you feel?”
- “How do you think that made him feel?”

- “What made you do / say that?”
- “You commented that getting involved with the opposite sex too early is unhealthy. In what way is that not healthy?”
- “Sounds like the teacher was unreasonable towards you. What happened?”
- “You agree that it is not right to burst out in anger. What can you / we do to avoid it?”

When we use questions, our children will do the thinking. The responsibility of thinking and processing is transferred to the rightful owner. At the same time we are practicing a valuable communication skill – LISTENING. The communication and relationship will also be strengthened through appropriate questions.

Some of the family benefits of using questions:

- ✓ Strengthens communication and relationship
- ✓ Improves our ability to listen
- ✓ Transfers responsibilities to our children, and they can learn to be responsible adults
- ✓ Helps all process an issue
- ✓ Helps parents to hold back our emotions / opinions. Releasing only when appropriate
- ✓ Allows our children to have a chance to express themselves, vent their emotions

Using questions, however, is unnatural. Before learning to use “thinking” questions, we need to be aware of the following things:

- Control our anger / irritation (especially if we disagree with their point of view)
- Allow them to vent / answer (not to answer on behalf of them)
- Not to push for an answer immediately (pause and allow silence when necessary)
- Not to have a judgemental attitude

What happens when we disagree? Before we address that in the next issue, let us pause and think through the above. The idea is for parents to first learn “controlled release” of our emotions and allow room for our children to think and talk about their opinions and lives.

Homework. Ask at least 1 appropriate “thinking” question a week for the next 2 months for each family member. Record them. If you benefit from this exercise, do email us as an encouragement.