

The Parents' ChatRoom

By: Dr. Maulik Trivedi



Q: Dear Dr. Trivedi - I have a two year old who is full of energy and has stopped taking naps since the past two months. This exhausts me as I get no down time! My husband tries to help me as much as he can in the evenings, but she is a handful and we are exhausted by the time she goes to sleep around 9 PM. We are talking about putting her in daycare for a few hours every day so that I can get a break. I don't work so I feel a little guilty about this. I also feel that this will help her with her social skills as she is an only child so far. Am I being selfish or am I making the right decision?

Sadhana

A: Every parent has to make this choice at one time or another. There is no right or wrong answer that suits everyone. You have to come up with your own formula and implement it. You also have to be ready to be flexible and change the formula as you discover new obstacles. What helps in your case is that you are very aware of your own sense of guilt and that you have a supportive husband. You just need to merge your 'logical side' with 'letting go of fear' to figure out what's right for you. Try thinking about it as follows.

From a child's developmental perspective, the age of two is full of exploring the wonderful and amazing world we live in. At this age, children finally have the ability to ambulate comfortably on their own while having a better development of motor skills and coordination of the smaller muscles of their hands. As a result, children begin to fully explore their environment. In their emotional development, the child is trying to, if not already

done so, overcome separation anxiety. This is the fear a child feels while they are physically away from their primary care-giver.

The age of 2 to 3 is the time to explore what it feels like to be away from mommy and later, rediscover mommy to be safe and sound upon return to her. Practicing independent exploration allows the child to get a sense of confidence and security in knowing that the world is a safe place, even when mommy is not around. This is an essential foundation stone for an individual's future success.

Certainly, when you are ready to place your child in daycare, you want to assess the environment as well as the people that you'll be leaving your child with. Be sure to

1. Check for safety precautions.
2. Assure a stimulating environment full of age-appropriate activities.
3. Allow a transition into the change.

Along with academic stimulation and opportunity, it is very important to have emotional nurturing from a comforting and warm teacher.

To prepare your child, you may begin by letting her stay with a relative or a baby-sitter in your own home prior to challenging her to stay in a new environment with an unknown person. With these basic instructions kept in mind, you are sure to be amazed by the progress your child makes when allowed to explore the world away from you.

Q: Dear Dr. Trivedi - I am going through divorce proceedings with my wife and we have a five year old daughter together. She wants to fight for full custody and does not want to award me any visitation at all. I realize that my daughter

needs her mother, but I feel that she needs me too and I want to be a part of her life. My wife is seeking vengeance and I recognize that too. How can I strike a balance to ensure what is best for our child?
Sudhir

A: It is not uncommon to have such a scenario in a divorce process. As the conflict is dividing the parents, it need not affect the child's emotional wellbeing. If you want to preserve fairness and respect in the process and truly want what is best for the child, make sure you involve a trustworthy third person that guides all of you towards what is in the best interest of your child.

The court will usually provide a mediator for couples. You can discuss the same situation you have presented to me with your court appointed mediator. Because the divorce process can be very confusing for the child and leave lasting marks on the emotions of the child, it is best to have your child see a therapist during and after the divorce process. This is the only neutral person with professional qualifications to guide your child through this process. They use language and play that is appropriate for the child's age to help the child understand and cope with their parents' divorce.

Dr. Trivedi is a Board-Certified Psychiatrist. He treats children, adolescents and adults. Please visit www.MINDvantage.com for more information.

Send your questions to: theparentschatroom@citymasala.com.

Parenting the "Pre-teen" - Challenge or Cruise Control?

By: Shaphali Jain

I have a pre-teen daughter, she's almost 13, and likes to remind us of this fact every single day. I have always thought of myself as a fairly balanced and not overly paranoid parent, but am quickly learning that no one theory fits the bill when it comes to raising my daughter.

She is a wonderful and amazing child and fills me with pride at every academic, musical, dramatic and stage related activity that she undertakes. In fact, it would be quite fair to say that whatever she does undertake, she comes out of it over the top and completely wipes out any competition. I am not boasting here, in case you misunderstand where I am going with this. Much to her dismay, if she deigns to read this column, she will know exactly where I am going - the way we relate to one another when we don't agree with one another.

Now, I have been to so many internet advisory sites that my eyes cross over and glaze into blindness at just the thought of going to another one. I have also spoken with a good friend who is a board certified child and teen psychiatrist, yes, Dr. Trivedi himself, and have realized quite a few

facts. I thought it would be beneficial to share them with our readers because they have helped me, to some extent, when I remember them, that is!

First, it is completely NORMAL to have struggles with our children, especially the pre-teens and the teens.

Second, it is very important to take time for yourself daily. When we are stressed out, we tend to do and say things that we later regret. There is a useful acronym borrowed from Alcoholics Anonymous, HALT, which stands for Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired. These are the states in which we do our worst parenting and our worst relating to in our marriages.

Whether you work outside your home, from it or in it, raising kids is a full-time job by itself, made even more challenging if you are a single parent or if your spouse doesn't support you. You *have* to present a united front when it comes to rules and follow-through.

Aside from these obvious thoughts, I find that for all of us who struggle to raise children, it is our

own anxiety and unnecessary guilt that causes the most trouble. When we manage to gain some perspective with both of these, it usually becomes easier.

As the adults in the family, it is our job to master our own feelings before we can expect our teens to master theirs. If you are getting frustrated, take a couple of steps back from the center of the conflict and force yourself to NOT come up with ANY response - trust me, this is the KEY. My daughter and I have a pact where we say, "let's both take a timeout for 10 minutes." Again, this is possible only when I am calm enough to allow it! It works wonders and 9 times out of 10, she comes back to talk about things in a more rational manner.

Another very important fact is that we parents often have too many rules, none of which are enforced consistently. It is better to have a few rules that are sacred and pretty much non-negotiable. So pick your battles wisely, and then make sure you have a strategy that you can adhere to and remember!