

Parenting in a new culture...

...the preschool years



Raising Australian born children of Arabic background effectively

Produced By The Northern Migrant Resource Centre
Supported by The Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services

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THE HON LARRY ANTHONY MP
MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR RICHMOND

FOREWORD

The simple aspirations that parents have for their children cross all cultural divides. All good parents, from whatever cultural background, love their children and want the best things in life for them.

But family values and parenting practices are not the same in all cultures and it can be especially difficult for parents to raise children in an unfamiliar culture. Moving from one culture to another means dealing with new rules, new customs, and new and different influences on children.

These children may not behave in traditional ways and may not want the same things their parents want for them. This can cause confusion, misunderstandings and pain.

These books aim to reach out to these parents of young children who are growing up in Australia. The Australian Government welcomes these families and the different experiences they bring with them. Without abandoning their own ideas, we ask them to acknowledge Australian law and custom and to balance the best elements of both cultures.

These books will help parents find some of the answers to the questions they have about supporting their children and help them to understand the changes that are happening in their children's lives and how to grow with them.

Yours sincerely

Larry Anthony

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Introduction

It is widely recognised that a majority of migrants and refugee families migrate in order for their children to have improved life opportunities. The decision to migrate to a new country is not always a voluntary one, in the case of refugees; families are typically escaping war, civil strife or persecution in their home countries.

The migration process may result in a dramatic transition from one culture and language to another. In the case of refugees, families may have been involuntarily uprooted. The decision to leave one's own country of birth can result in significant trauma and loss for both the parent and accompanying children. Not surprisingly, it is often reported by migrants that parenting in a new cultural environment can be highly problematic, challenging and quite often confusing. Successful parenting outcomes are dependent upon increasing the skills of these new migrant parents in the context of the new Australian social and educational environment.

Similarly, the literature in this field indicates that effective parenting among newly arrived families will be dependent on 1) how well parents can manage the process of adaptation to a new society with diverse values and expectations and 2) how to balance preserving the ethnic identity on the one hand and incorporating the positive aspects of the adopted culture on the other. Unfortunately, very little is known about this process here in Australia. To our knowledge, there are no published parenting programs or documentation about parenting within migrant families.

The *"Parenting in A New Culture"* (the preschool age) is a project initiated and developed by the Northern Migrant Resource Centre and supported by the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services. The project targets three migrant community groups (Arabic, Chinese and Samoan), whose cultural and social values regarding parenting and families are quite different from mainstream Australian cultural and social values and norms.

The project aims to strengthen and support parents' roles and enhance parents' skills to raise their children confidently in the Australian context. It also provides opportunity to strengthen the confidence, knowledge, ability and skills of parents from the three community groups (Arabic, Chinese and Samoan) living in Australia. A significant component of the project is to develop and produce a parenting guide for parents within the three community groups written in their own respective languages.

The Northern Migrant Resource Centre is proud to offer this important and culturally appropriate parenting document to enhance the parenting skills of parents from the three community groups.

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Immigration and parenting

Introduction:

Arab migration to Australia dates back to more than a century ago with the arrival of a few Lebanese families. The number of Arab migrants increased with time, and the countries from which these migrants came varied as well. Arabic migrants today form a major community in Australia's multicultural society and those migrants have come to Australia from 22 Arab countries from across the Arab world ranging from the Arab Gulf in the east to Morocco in the west. Arab migrants from Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt and Iraq comprise the majority of Arabs in Australia and they all speak the Arabic language with its basic linguistic concepts and terms but have different dialects and colloquial usage.

Arab traditions vary from one region of the Arab world to another, from one country to another and from one territory to another within the one country. Traditions also vary between rural and city dwellers as well as between tribal and civic communities. Despite all these variations, Arabic people all share a number of common traditions and practices which form the fundamental basis of Arab society.

What does good or positive parenting mean generally?

There is no specific definition which may be used comprehensively to refer to good or positive parenting. The concept and methods vary from one culture or community to another but the term generally refers to a group of methods and practices which contribute to children's development, build their abilities and control their behaviour using constructive methods. This form of parenting is based on a good understanding of children, an appreciation of communication with them and the ability to ascertain their needs at different age stages to assist their growth and development.

The subject of parenting conjures a mixture of feelings comprising love, compassion, care and nurturing and is fruitful yet challenging for both parents and children. Positive parenting is described by Dr Matt Sanders from Queensland University to be based on five main elements comprising: (i) providing a safe and secure social environment, (ii) creation of a positive learning environment, (iii) using constructive teaching methods, (iv) having realistic expectations and (v) parents taking proper care of themselves.

Arab family values

Arab culture, through a number of values, traditions and practices, places emphasis on the importance of the family's role as a basic unit and as the main structure for building society. It also gives emphasis to the importance of an individual as integral part of a family as well as complimenting that unit. Arab culture also gives the community an important and complimentary role in building and correcting the individual's character and in self fulfilment.

The concept of family in many Arab communities goes far beyond the narrow definition of parents and children and engulfs the extended family comprising brothers, sisters, uncles and aunties as well as cousins. In tribal Arab communities, this definition extends beyond the immediate relatives to include distant ones as well.

Arab culture places a lot of importance on close social relationships between family members and extends to include relatives, neighbours or friends. These relationships are embodied in all kinds of support such as social and psychological and often go beyond that to include material support.

One of the important principles upon which community relations in Arab culture are based is the principle of complete respect and total obedience by children towards their parents, older family and community members in general. It is also considered a sign of the family's ability to bring up its children in an appropriate manner and reflects upon the family's reputation in society.



The following may summarise children's and parents' responsibility towards each other in Arab culture:

Children should:

- respect and obey parents and older family members
- meet parent expectations of proper behaviour and maintaining family reputation
- meet parent expectations in educational and academic achievement
- provide the family with financial contributions and moral support whenever possible
- care and support for parents at different stages of their life.

Parents should:

- provide their children with all kinds of support to grow and develop; Arab society, from all various religious backgrounds, regard children as a responsibility which has to be cared for and protected in order for them to make the best achievements
- provide their children with health, social and psychological care. Both parents share in the care and upbringing of children; parents' responsibilities change according to circumstances as well as current traditions and living environment.

Parenting concepts in Australian society:

People all over the world tend to have similar basic principles and attitudes to parenting. People share a human depth and cumulative experiences which stem from the contributions of civilisations, religions and human experiences. It is natural for these basic principles to form a common foundation between individuals and groups from various racial, cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds.



Western culture is characterised generally as one that places an emphasis on the person's role as an individual and as an independent entity within the family and society. Establishment and government programs as well as educational institutions tend to follow this tendency towards building the individual's character from early years.

Western culture places an emphasis on:

- social justice at all levels
- individualism, which emphasises personal freedom and independence.

It is clear that there is a direct clash of some values, concepts and practices relating to children's upbringing, inherited from Arab culture and those prevalent in the new environment of "Australia".

Where does the Arab family stand in such an environment of challenges? How has the Arab family prepared its children to face these challenges?

Before reading the following sections of this booklet, you are asked to reconsider your role as a parent in providing care to your children in the new environment of migration.

What are your expectations for your children? How do you want them to behave?

What methods of parenting should you follow in order to fulfil your expectations and those of your children while stressing and implanting good values in them?

Are you in favour of inherited parenting methods? Are you prepared for a change in parenting to suit the environment and values of the new society?

Through the discussions which took place while preparing this booklet with families and individuals in the Arabic community, it became clear that many Arab families are still using outdated parenting methods to raise their children. Some of these techniques are contrary to modern methods and are not in line with values and practices which are prevalent in the new society. It was also found that many parents are fully prepared to familiarise themselves with new parenting methods which would help them in caring for their children and successfully developing their capabilities.



Children's developmental stages and needs

The need to understand child development

Parenting is one of the most complex challenges facing parents, regardless of their ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Providing the appropriate environment for good parenting is high on the priorities of parental responsibilities in the Arab culture. Many parents take great care to overcome difficulties facing their children and make enormous efforts towards meeting their physical needs. However, many of them could make more efforts towards meeting their children's social, emotional and psychological needs. This could be due to a lack of awareness or an ignorance of these needs.

The most common methods of parenting in Arab culture are the old methods, which place little importance on the psychological and social needs of children at various ages.

Research findings indicate that the social and psychological needs of children will vary dramatically according to their developmental stages.

Understanding the developmental stages and patterns of child development and recognizing children's social, emotional and psychological needs in general is of prime importance for Arab parents.

Children's needs

Children in all developmental stages, in particular early childhood, require some essential supports to survive and thrive in life. This is primarily a family responsibility. In addition, families and communities require support to promote children's healthy development, provide opportunities for exploration and active learning as well as providing social and emotional care. The responsibility for such support falls on society, educational, health and other related social institutions.

Parental responsibility towards children in all modern societies goes beyond the provision of food, drink and shelter and includes:

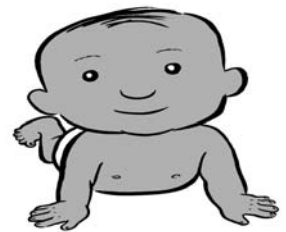
- psychological, social and emotional care
- health and medical care
- preventing the incidence of physical, emotional and psychological abuse
- preventing them from exposure to all kinds of negative effects resulting from domestic violence.

Levels of children's needs:

Researchers and child psychologists have almost unanimously identified five levels of need that apply for both children and adults. These are:

- Level 1 the physiological needs (eat, drink, sleep, etc...)
- Level 2 the needs of safety and security
- Level 3 the social needs (love, affection, social interaction, friendship and intimacy)
- Level 4 the recognition and achievement needs (including competency, usefulness, ability, and mastery of skills and self-esteem)
- Level 5 is the top of the hierarchical needs and these needs are for self-actualisation. (This refers to the individual reaching their potential, development of new skills and achieving personal growth).

However, when our lower level needs are unmet, we will not be motivated to fulfill higher level needs. For example, when a boy feels very insecure (Level 2), he will not be motivated to seek out friendships in the next level (Level 3), nor spend time and energy to develop his competence in some complex skills (Level 4). On the other hand, when his lower level needs are adequately satisfied, he would be strongly motivated to strive to meet his higher level needs.



Security and the various developmental stages of children

Parents are concerned with and responsible for the physical safety of their children especially during the early years of the child's life. This includes protecting them against risks from accidents and the provision of security. Physical safety is one of the most basic of the hierarchical needs. When the physical safety and physiological needs of children are ensured, parents feel relieved and secure and the children can be encouraged to explore their environment.

The following outlines general characteristics of two preschool age groups as it relates to potential safety issues.

First age group (birth to 3 years):

In this developmental stage, children:

- are naturally curious; like to touch, feel and explore
- learn by physically interacting with things around them
- learn about properties of things by putting them in their mouths
- drink anything (no matter what)
- are attracted to moving objects and like to crawl into small spaces.

As a result children in this age group are at high risk for accidents such as choking, drowning, poisoning, burns and others.



Second age group (three to five years):

In this preschool developmental stage, children:

- continue to learn about the world primarily through interacting with things around them
- become less likely to put objects in their mouth
- continue to feel, touch and explore the surrounding world with little thought to danger
- begin to develop “some” self control, but don’t easily recognise dangerous situations.

Research findings show that accidental injury is the main cause of death among Australian children. Accidents often occur unexpectedly as caregivers are not aware of what children can do and how quickly they develop new skills.

Psychological needs of children at various developmental stages

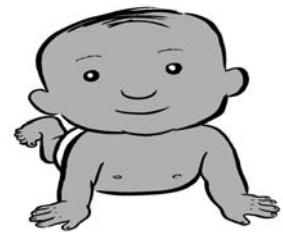
“The more parents learn about and understand their children the more they can help and support them to develop and grow”.

Children of all ages are constantly watching, listening and learning from their parents. Parents, at the same time, constantly learn more and more about their children as they grow. Thus, our parenting practices should change with the changing needs of our children.

It is widely accepted that children go through different stages of social development during the preschool age. It is the successful completion of each that governs the child’s and later the adult’s psychological health.

1. Birth to 18 months

Babies learn to trust and develop optimism only if their needs are met and they are well handled, nurtured and loved. On the contrary, badly handled babies become insecure and mistrustful.



Your role during this stage is to:

- provide your child with emotional security and a calm home environment
- give your child lots of cuddles and smiles
- use a gentle voice with your child
- avoid all kinds of violence within your home
- spend quality time with your child whenever possible
- avoid high excessive noise and shouting within your home.

2. 18 months to 3 years

This is a new stage for the child physically, psychologically and emotionally. During this stage the toddler learns to become an individual, as he is able to walk, jump, run, search and think. From 18 months, children start to say 'no' and feel they can do things for themselves when moving around. The well-parented child emerges from this stage sure of himself and proud rather than ashamed.

Your role during this stage is to:

- respect the ownership of your child's possessions and teach him to respect that certain things belong to certain people
- teach "but don't force" your child to engage and share with others
- be flexible and give your child a space to develop his independence and respect his privacy.

3. From the age of 3 to 6 years

At this stage, your child will tend to show strong desire to explore the surroundings, experiment his new ideas and to carry out his plans. In addition the child learns to imagine, to cooperate with others and to lead as well as to follow. His favourite saying at this age will be, "I can do it", "let me do it".

In the later years of this stage, the child attempts to share with peers and older children according to rules (team work) and mastering social activities and reading.



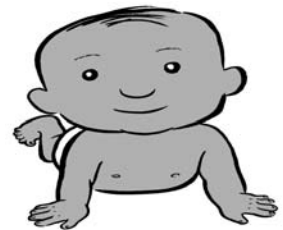
Your role during this stage is to:

- encourage your child to develop their own creativity and imagination
- help the child to carry out some tasks and allocate him limited responsibilities
- help your child to feel that his opinion carries weight and that he is a respected member of the family.

During the late years of this stage you can:

- accept and respect child's decisions within reason
- train the child to respect his commitments and promises - no matter how small they are - as a sign of maturity
- share the child's imagination and fantasies
- train your child to co-operate and share with others.

Well-parented children in their earlier developmental stages who are trusting, autonomous and full of initiative will easily learn to be industrious. However, shame and guilt filled children often experience defeat and inferiority.



Self esteem and self confidence

What is self-esteem?

In general terms self-esteem is the collection of beliefs or feelings that we have about ourselves. With young children however, self-esteem refers to the extent they expect to be accepted and valued by the adults and peers who are important to them.

Children with a healthy sense of self-esteem feel that the important adults in their lives accept them, care about them and are working hard to ensure that they are safe and secure. On the other hand, children with low self-esteem feel that the important adults and peers in their lives do not accept them and don't care about them or their safety and security.

Family role in developing self-esteem

Self-esteem is gained during a person's early years within the family and remains with him and helps him to achieve success in later years. With young children however, self-esteem refers to the extent they expect to be accepted and valued by the adults and peers who are important to them.

To provide children with the appropriate environment to ensure the development of self esteem, the following basic factors are important:

- the family structure should be based on principles of love, affection and respect
- parents must enjoy high levels of self esteem and a positive outlook
- family life should be based on a spirit of frankness and ability to express individual opinions.

Self-esteem and self-respect in Arab culture

Generally speaking, Arab families from various cultural, ethnic and racial groups have a different outlook towards self-esteem and self-respect of the individual than western families.

While western communities place a great emphasis on esteem within the principles and programs of raising children, eastern communities generally do not consider the concept of self-esteem to be such an important issue in raising children. Racial and religious practices and discrimination which are prevalent in many societies are important factors impacting on the confidence of families from particular backgrounds in their very existence, traditions and practices. This inevitably impacts on them and their children and their confidence and self-esteem.

The Arab is a very proud individual, taking pride in his history, heritage and identity. This pride extends to self-esteem and respect. However, there are many other elements related to current child rearing practices in Arab communities which impact on self-esteem and respect in individuals generally and on children in particular.

Some Arab communities, for example, prefer males to females. Patriarchal child rearing practices are widespread amongst families of Arab backgrounds. This allows no freedom for the child within the family and community during the child's formative years. This type of parenting is one where the child is merely receiving and obeying instructions dictated to him by his parents and specifically by the father.

Many Arab families that migrated and settled in Australia, have suffered enormously as a result of wars, forced departure or oppression under totalitarian regimes. This in turn has impacted directly on their self-esteem and the first victims of such suffering were their children.

All of these factors collectively contribute and continue to impact on the confidence of Arab families in their abilities and subsequently on their children's self-esteem in general.



Characteristics of children with high and low self-esteem:

Children with positive self-esteem	Children with negative self-esteem
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• have a sense of self importance and value within family and community• act independently• take pride in achievements• tolerate frustration• assume responsibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• feel unloved and not important within the family and community• avoid trying new things• blame others for own shortcomings• are unable to tolerate frustration• put down their own talents and abilities.

Parents can play a vital role in strengthening children's self-esteem by treating them with respect and considering their views and opinions seriously. Promoting children's self-esteem is not a difficult task. In reality, most parents do it without realizing that their words or actions have a great impact on their children.

Here are some suggestions:

1. Feeling connected to the past and future

To build your children's self-esteem, it is important that they feel:

- a sense of connectedness to their family's past and heritage (mother land)
- a sense of direction and belonging to their current life in the new country
- positive about their future in a secure, settled and successful life.

You can help them to achieve this by:

- sharing stories and photos from your past, your roots and your ethnic background with them
- sharing stories about your migration, settlement stages and difficulties accompanying this with them



- talking to them about your current place and roles in the community and the society as a whole
- talking to them about your participation in social, sports and general activities
- talking to them about your future goals and expectations for the family's future
- talking to them about your dreams and hopes for their future.

2. Positive Affirmation

During their early formative years, children need to be acknowledged, praised and encouraged by their parents. This leads to their happiness and self-esteem.

Do not forget to praise them by:

- saying I love you no matter what
- saying I am happy and lucky to have you
- letting them know that it is quite normal to make mistakes, but it is necessary to learn from them
- helping them to solve their own problems
- making limits and expectations clear and consistent.

3. Acknowledgment

Parents should always praise and show appreciation towards their children's achievements at the appropriate time and place. This should be made every time a child attempts a positive task or behaves appropriately regardless of the outcome, this can include saying things such as:

- thank you for what you have done
- you did it very well
- I appreciate your effort and perseverance.

4. Other Hints

- listen to your children
- spend special / quality time together
- participate in their games and activities
- give them warm gestures of affection whenever possible



- give them opportunities to participate with you and help you
- avoid insulting the child under any circumstance.

Children's Self-esteem and competency

Self-esteem is a prerequisite for success in life. If children feel confident and think they are competent based on their past successful experiences, they will most likely succeed. If they see themselves as a failure, they are likely to be unsuccessful and this may reinforce their low self-esteem. When children have low self-esteem, their self-worth is also low.

You can contribute towards increasing your child's abilities and competencies by:

- coaching your children and demonstrating the new skill to them
- encouraging your child to make repetitive attempts to achieving a task
- allowing the child an opportunity to apply what they have learnt
- assisting your child to enhance their strengths.



Enhancing children's social skills

Introduction

Developing children's language and social skills are amongst the basic principles of raising children outside the parents' homeland. These skills help to build their character and develop them as good citizens who are able to interact with and contribute to society at large and their community in particular. This responsibility to develop social skills is primarily a parental one and is also assumed by child care centres, kindergartens and other educational institutions.

The majority of Arab families in their homelands and abroad still follow traditional inherited methods of parenting. The family plans the paths children will follow in other stages in their life. The family under this model assumes the role of setting their children's steps towards maturity as they determine their friends, choose their marriage partner and resolve other details, which may be considered personal issues. In western culture, including Australian society these are considered to be basic rights and choices the child will make as he matures.

Some of these traditional methods will impact in one way or another on the child's capacity to develop their abilities, including the ability to interact with society.

In addition, language is the basic method of communication and interaction with society and represents the tool through which an individual is able to fulfil himself within his environment, whether it is at home, school or the community at large.

Thus, Arab families should take language and other social interaction into account especially during the early stages of childhood.

Children experiencing difficulty in expressing themselves through language will suffer from emotional as well as social stresses.

1. Children experiencing emotional stress may:

- become more frustrated
- become more aggressive
- tend to have more behavioral problems.

2. Children experiencing social stress may:

- display inadequate social skills and experience shyness and isolation
- lack self-confidence
- become very quiet
- become passive, timid and an easy target for teasing and bullying.

It is natural for Arab migrant families to attempt to congregate together in groups which meet their social and cultural needs as is the case with other migrant groups (activities, centres and Arab community organisations). Thus, pre-school children from Arab families may not have experienced much interaction with the wider community. The first contact that many Arab children have with Australian mainstream culture is when they enter playgroups, kindergartens and primary schools. It is then when they find that their Australian peers are more expressive and assertive.

It is noteworthy here to stress the importance of the role played by child care centres, kindergartens and other educational organizations in developing language abilities and social skills for children from non English speaking backgrounds.



Ways to enhance children's verbal expression

It may be useful for Arab families to attend child care centres and kindergartens before enrolling children at school as this can be very important in developing children's language abilities and social skills. Child care centres and kindergartens are an intermediate stage which integrates some specifics from the home environment along with those from school life.

Family's role

It is the role of the family to:

- give children time and opportunities to express themselves verbally and socially
- ask children questions so that they consider the answers, especially during the early stages of their childhood
- make use of every opportunity to encourage them to talk. Here are some examples:
 - when you go shopping, ask them to search for goods you want to buy
 - when you have a train ride, ask them questions or to describe what they see and what they hear
 - while in the park or at the zoo, allow the child to name animals and to describe them or to state the difference between them, etc...
 - during social events, ask the child to talk about his observations, his role, which of his friends were there, etc...



Ways to develop children's social skills

1: Encourage your children to share with and care for others

Sharing is important in building relationships, self-confidence and acceptance of others. There is no substitute for the experience children gain from interacting with peers. Parents play a vital role in developing this side of the child's character, parents can:

- provide children with opportunities to play and share with peers
- encourage children to share their time, opportunities and belongings at very early age
- encourage children to develop and maintain long lasting relationships with their peers from a very early age.

2: Encourage children to accept others

Australia is a multicultural society comprising many minorities, languages and religions. In order for children to have a sense of belonging, parents should develop and enrich children's ideas about this society. To feel an accepted and effective member of society, an individual has to be trained to accept others from all religious, ethnic and community groups.

3: Play with children

Children learn crucial skills in playing with other children as it provides them with the opportunity to think, innovate and explore. Children also learn a great deal through playing with their parents.

4: Talk and discuss things with children

Talk to your children in a "conversational" manner and discuss social issues, values and practices at a level appropriate to the child's age and interests. Engaging in regular, age appropriate conversations and avoiding lecturing provides opportunities for the child to:

- talk topics of special interest and enjoyment
- frankly exchange opinions with parents
- express himself freely and discuss issues of importance as well as think about appropriate solutions to his problems.



Teaching the Arabic language to children

Teaching children the Arabic language and training them in its vocabulary and development is considered of vital importance among migrant communities.

Language:

- is an important link and means of communication with both parents at different stages of the child's development
- narrows the misunderstandings between children and parents and provides a better chance of continuing dialogue between them
- is a part of an individual's character and identity and a tool to learn about his heritage, history and civilization of fathers and forefathers
- contributes to laying the foundations of self-esteem towards opening the child's horizons and maturity in later years and may act as an important factor in finding employment opportunities later on in life.



Developing effective communication with your children

Introduction

Developing effective communication between parents and children contributes tremendously to building a child's character, developing his abilities and creating family harmony.

Communication is much more than telling someone something. Communication is any meaningful sharing of opinions, feelings and emotions between two (or more) people.

Communication between parents and their children has always been very important for both. For migrant communities, there is an even a greater need for effective communication mechanisms between parents and their children. Moreover, in light of their new environment and the uncertainty about their future, the need for developing better communication might be even greater for migrant families.

It is imperative that parents play a major role in communicating with their children and becoming familiar with their needs through constructive and meaningful dialogue. This is particularly so in a new society with the various challenges facing families and their continually changing environment.

Communication with children in Arab culture

Arab culture generally does not consider communication (in its modern context) with children to be very important. As a result of inherited traditions and the major role parents play in deciding their children's destiny and future, the dialogue tends to be virtually non-existent, especially during the early years.

Parents, especially the father, often play the main role in directing the child and the child plays a passive role of accepting and implementing these directions.

Types of communication

Communication consists generally of two important components, which compliment each other, talking and listening.

The following section lists some strategies for listening and responding to your child's feelings and needs and talking to your children so that they will listen to you.

How to listen and respond to your child's feelings and needs?

A child likes a person who carries out a conversation and listens to them and parents should respect this instinct in children. The way you listen to your child has a magical effect with children, helping them to learn about their physiological, emotional and social needs.

Some of the ways you can improve your skills in listening and responding to your child's feelings and needs include:

- understanding that listening to children makes them feel happy and tells them they are important
- showing that you are interested in listening to him / her by using a smile or similar indication
- arranging a time and a quiet place to listen to your children, you may wish to sit in a quiet place at home
- verbally acknowledging what your child says, e.g. "I understand what you are saying"
- sitting at the same level as the child instead of towering over them
- ensuring that you regularly listen to your child even when you are busy.

How to talk so that your children will listen?

Continuous confidence between parents and children is important in building and maintaining family relationships and affections and it encourages the child



to express his feelings and talk about his needs. Children accept and respond to certain types of conversation and dialogue.

Some ways to encourage your child to listen and respond include:

- talking to the child in a calm voice at an appropriate time
- from an early age, hold discussions with your children as much as possible and train them to carry out a discussion (by not lecturing)
- asking the child about topics of interest (such as kinder, friends and games)
- getting involved in your child's daily activities and making time to talk about them
- avoiding criticising, teasing, ridiculing, making light of what they say or putting them on the spot or in difficult position
- Trying to use "I" instead of "YOU" statements whenever possible.

Compare the difference between the (I) and (YOU) messages.

I - Message:	You - Message:
"I am very disappointed when you don't complete your homework."	"You are a negligent person and you not do your homework."



Discipline

Introduction

Raising children refers to a group of methods used by parents to teach their children behaviour, which is sanctioned by the family and the community. Parenting does not imply the use of punishment. It is a difficult, complex and confusing task in many situations, especially in a multicultural society with differing values and practices.

In general terms, parenting is a positive action, it involves teaching children to behave appropriately, to understand right from wrong and to respect the rights of others. Parenting also aims to develop a child's abilities and his confidence so he feels secure and loved and can control his instincts. Punishment on the other hand is a negative action by parents, perhaps in the face of unacceptable behaviour taken by the child, it may aim to deter the child by making him afraid of unacceptable behaviour.

Parenting in Arab culture

Arab communities in general, including Arab migrant families, emphasise the importance of children continuing their parents' culture, values and practices, the most important being to maintain family value, unity and reputation. Arab culture also stresses the importance of children obeying their parents, fulfilling their wishes and following their instructions and advice during various stages of development.

Many families in Arab communities resort to parenting methods based on deterrence including fear and, in some instances, physical punishment. Australian laws and traditions do not condone physical punishment as a means of child discipline. However, despite the risks and potential negative psychological and social effects of these inherited methods, evidence suggests that they are still being used on a limited scale in some sectors of Australian society, including Arab communities within it.

Child abuse and physical punishment

In many civilized societies, including Australia, it is a crime for parents to abuse their children either physically, emotionally, mentally or sexually. Parents may be warned, notified, charged and possibly jailed if they are found to have committed abuse. Depending on the nature and the extent of abuse, children may be separated from their parents by child protection agencies.

However, child abuse in all its forms still happens in all different societies. In general, there is a fine line between physical punishment and child abuse. Quite often, physical punishment might easily turn into physical abuse, especially when parents lose control of their temper and emotions.

Impact of physical punishment on children

Below are some of the effects of physical punishment on children.

- Physical punishment causes pain and emotional injury.
- Physical punishment may reduce children's creativity and ability to explore their environment.
- The child loses his sense of security and confidence and the values of love and affection at home.
- It creates tension in parent-child relationships.
- It encourages aggression, which models violence as a solution to problems.
- It contributes to the child's loss of self-confidence and reduces his level of self-esteem.



What is the best style of disciplining children?

Studies and research in parenting and child psychology have shown three main streams of thought or methods of discipline summarised below:

- **Authoritarian style**

Parents believe in “absolute obedience to authority” and commanding the child in what to do and not do and leaving no room for creativity and thinking. Misbehaviour is strictly punished. Although practiced on a limited scale by parents within the Arab community, this style is no longer accepted or tolerated by a rapidly changing society particularly in a multicultural setting.

- **Permissive style**

Where parents are lenient, and do not set limits for their children's behaviours. Children learn from consequences of their own actions.

- **Assertive democratic style**

Where parents delegate responsibilities to their children according to their abilities, clarify issues and give reasons for limits. Children are guided and given lots of practice in making choices. Misbehaviours are handled with appropriate consequences or by problem solving taking into consideration the child's needs. Out of control children will have “time out” as an alternative to punishment. This style is widely practiced in western societies.



Experience from many different societies, supported with scientific research, shows that there is not one specific style of discipline or school of thought appropriate for all situations. There are however, a number of directions and convictions which form effective parenting and discipline methods taking into account the ever-changing circumstances of the societies in which we live. Parents should be guided by feelings, emotions and trial and error to choose the appropriate style for their social and cultural backgrounds.

Parents should realise the vital importance of being clear and consistent in their discipline with children and always remember that each child is an individual and that one style of discipline may not be appropriate to follow for all children.

Effective discipline techniques

- Children should learn to understand that there are consequences of their actions and behaviours and potential disciplinary action for negative actions and behaviours. Plan / think ahead and be prepared with actions to help your child understand the consequences. Such a method will develop a sense of responsibility and aspirations in the child as well as helping him to know the limits of his actions and behaviours;
- Act immediately to implement punishment or rewards. Avoid waiting a long time to connect the action with the outcome, as this may not give the appropriate result.
- Be firm in implementing punishment or carrying out the promised reward.



- Allow mistakes. It may not be logically possible for parents to correct all minor misbehaviour issues in one action. Parents should differentiate between intentional and unintentional mistakes, unacceptable actions with minor issues of behaviour.
- Remember that it is not wrong to say “no” to your child sometimes but it is wrong to say “yes” all the time.
- Stop inappropriate behaviours with a firm “no” in a pleasant voice and a simple and clear explanation.
- Set up a daily routine and make every effort to stick to it.
- Do not offer choices in circumstances where the child has to cooperate with your rules. e.g. say “it is time to go to bed”, but don’t say “would you like to go to bed”.
- Be a good role model in all situations, stay calm, don’t focus on the negatives and reward and praise good behaviours.

An alternative to physical punishment

Time out is an alternative positive strategy to shouting, threatening or smacking. When used appropriately, time out can be effective in helping children learn self-control and acceptable behaviours. By using this method, you as a parent, are giving your child time out from positive reinforcement after an inappropriate behaviour.

- Prepare a quiet place in the house, which can be a chair in any room, a space on the floor, the child’s bed etc. You should make clear to the child the reason for this “Time Out”.



When a child misbehaves

- Explain the issue/misbehaviour and its consequences in a clear manner using simple examples, stories and events which are appropriate to the child's age.
- Verbally caution the child using firm language, especially when the child persists with his actions/unacceptable behaviour. You should avoid demeaning and insulting terms.
- If the behaviour persists, take the child to the time out chair / space and say, "You are not allowed to play with your toys or carry on any other activity". You must explain clearly the reasons, which led to the "Time Out", its length and what is expected from him as a consequence.
- When the time is up, then the child can come back to the situation and are expected to say sorry and to behave cooperatively having learnt what behaviour is unacceptable.



Stress management for parents

What is stress

Stress is one of our reactions as we adjust to our continually changing environment. It is a healthy reaction in many situations, which is born out of our attempts to acclimatise and react with changes taking place in our lives and its challenges, including the family, social, employment, financial and political challenges confronting us.

Certain amounts of stress are important and helpful. Stress can help us to engage in an action, can result in a new awareness and may add anticipation and excitement to life. Too much stress can make us sick. Stress can result in feelings of anger, distrust, and depression and this may be associated with health problems such as insomnia, heart problems, headaches and other health conditions.

Raising children can be a very stressful experience. Although it brings happiness and excitement, it is often accompanied with stress and tension regardless of the child's age.

As such, managing stress and anger is a skill that each parent needs to develop and practice to achieve a healthy relationship with their children.

Arab parents and stress

In general, the Arab region has gone through political and social upheaval for much of the last fifty years. These events have left their stamp on Arab society's structure and values in general and upon the family unit in particular. As a result of these changes, Arab families may fear the unknown future and these anxieties and tensions can impact on family members, particularly parents. Add to that, the turbulent international events of the last few years, which have impacted on Arab communities everywhere, including Australia.

All these factors combined together have a significant impact on psychological and social tensions for Arab families.

The particularly disturbing issue for migrant Arab parents, which leads to social and emotional tension, is the failure of their children to recognise and acknowledge traditions and inherited family values and to reject the Arab culture.

These internal and external circumstances surrounding Arab families have impacted negatively on the family and its members. This combination causes tension and anxiety within the family and consequently affects their ability to raise and bring up children.

Before moving on to methods of confronting these tensions and stresses, we should in our capacity as parents recognise the following:

- children are unique individuals with different personalities, needs, talents, strengths and weaknesses
- children grow at different paces physically, emotionally and intellectually
- it is unfair and unrealistic to compare your children with other children even within your family
- you are not responsible for your children's behaviour but instead you are responsible to teach your children to be responsible for their own behaviour.



Tips on stress and anger management

1. Recognise that you are stressed

- You must say to yourself I am stressed. Do not deny it or ignore it.
- Talk about your feelings with other adult family members or friends.

2. Identify the causes of your stress

- Take notice of when, where and why you feel stressed.
- Recognise how this stress affects you and your parenting role.

3. Recognise what you can change as a parent

- Can you avoid the cause of stress?
- Can you reduce your exposure to stress?
- Can you devote the time and energy to make a change?

4. Reduce the intensity of your emotional reactions to stress

- Don't exaggerate the stress. Don't overreact.
- Do not focus on the negative aspects.
- Try to see the stress as a normal process in our daily life.
- Try to see the stress as something you can cope with.
- Talk to a confidante about your emotional stress.



5. Learn to reduce your physical reactions to stress:

- Try to do gentle regular daily exercises. Choose a form of exercise that is fun, enjoyable and easy to keep with it such as walking, jogging or swimming.
- Find time to sit quietly near a lake and listen to your favourite music or read a favourite book.
- Get adequate sleep.

6. Maintain your physical and emotional reserve

- Eat well balanced nutritious meals.
- Avoid excessive caffeine and other stimulants.
- Develop mutually supportive friendships / relationships, mother groups are a great idea.
- Be realistic. Expect some frustrations, failures and sorrows.



Issues in positive parenting for children under five years of age

Introduction

Most people agree on the importance of caring and raising children and its role in building the child's personality and determining the nature of their behaviour and consequently contributing to their success in future life. A child is born with an instinctive tendency towards good and will carry within him a clear heart similar to a blank page. The educator plays a role in determining this person's path in life. Children need to be nurtured and provided with positive educational and learning experiences in order to fulfil their potential and create their own path in life.

Throughout history, attempts have been made to address the issue of parenting and discipline. Laws were enacted in many countries to emphasise the importance of discipline, to provide the appropriate psychological, physical and health care for children and to respect their emotions in a form which makes him an effective member of tomorrow's society.

Many scholars and philosophers in Arab culture dealt with and tackled aspects of child psychology some centuries ago.

Parents should make every effort to benefit from opportunities available through learning and increasing their experience in child care and discipline. As well as what has already been presented on various issues in child raising and discipline, we provide some other hints which will help you to effectively deal with children in migrant families.

Consistency of parental approach with children

Consistency of directions from both parents is an important basis and a clear message to the child which will motivate him to respond quickly and be attentive. The opposite is also true if the child is given conflicting directions. We must remember that children in very early stages of childhood take the differing parental views as a weak link through which they can achieve their aims and get their way.

Learning is accumulative

The accumulative learning method is an instinctive one, which follows logical sequencing. It is based on the fact that building knowledge comprises sequential steps and links. What happens in the future is inevitably an extension of what took place in early stages and what is taking place now. In terms of development in children, each child sits before they stand, and babbles before they speak, will draw a circle before a square, is self centred before caring for others, will be reliant on others before becoming self reliant.

Each step accompanies an appropriate time and stage in a child's life. Successful parenting does not imply issuing the child a huge number of orders or directions and pressuring them to implement them. Nor is it fair to ask a child to implement tasks, which are far beyond his abilities and preparedness or are beyond his stages of development in order to exaggerate his abilities in front of other parents.



Parents as models

A child is born with an instinctive tendency to copy the behaviour of others, both good and bad, especially his parents and older brothers and sisters. These behaviours may form an outline of a model to follow through life. The behaviour of elders becomes a model to follow and the child may attempt to make every effort to break away from child-like behaviour in order to behave in a similar way to the model.

If our children discover difference and contradictions between what we say and do, they will be disappointed and feel that we misled them.

Accordingly, as parents we must be good models for our children. This includes, disciplining ourselves as well as our children so that we provide good models to follow and imitate.

Fairness in treating our children

One of the issues that can cause great damage to a child is the feeling that their parents favour another brother or sister. This may happen unintentionally or inadvertently as the family sometimes pays particular attention to one child over another.

The danger of an imbalance in treatment of children may reach its peak when parents begin making comparisons between children and make comments such as: Your brother or sister is more beautiful, better or acts more appropriately; or to say, "Why can't you be like your brother or sister", or some other comment along these lines.

These comparisons may often be innocent and unintended, they may however cause divisions within the family and can ultimately have a terrible impact on the child's psyche as well as affect the confidence and trust between the siblings.



Reward based on readiness

Means of encouragement and rewarding children's positive behaviour should be carefully chosen. Parents need to be very cautious about unfairly comparing one child with an interest in one field to the other who clearly does not care about this area.

An environment of fairness and justice amongst siblings is not contrary to encouraging initiative and rewarding positive behaviour / deterring negative behaviour. These are acts that are normally accepted by children without any sensitivities or reactions because they are based on accepted concepts of competition and excellence.

Avoid judging when children have a conflict

It is natural for children to argue verbally or engage physically and parents may have to intervene. A parent may pass judgment on one or another of the children arbitrarily to end the dispute between them. Child psychologists recommend against such action, as it is wrong for parents to play the role of a judge in children's disputes. The dispute should be considered objectively without reactions where the aim is not to merely separate them at any cost.

If the parents find the issue a simple one, it is recommended that the children are left to solve the problem themselves without parental involvement because they will quickly forget their arguments and fights. If the issue is more serious, firm interference becomes the last resort. It should not be at the expense of one of them but on the basis of directing each of them to stop arguing and fighting as a first step, then to direct and advise each of them either individually or together in an even-handed manner.



Clarity in issuing directions

The methods used in raising children should be as clear as possible and the messages between parents and their children should not be vague or ambiguous. Directions and advice should be clear and specific without leaving the child wondering about the meaning or implications of messages.

We can't expect children to respond if they don't understand what we are saying. A child with limited ability and awareness will not understand these directions and we must try to put ourselves in the child's position in order to appreciate how he perceives such messages.

Love and affection as the basis of relationships between parents and their children

Love and affection are the most important elements, which help children to obey and follow parents' instructions. Love is an emotional bond of affection that drives a person to act in a similar manner to the beloved, thus when parents give an abundance of love, the child is captivated by that love.

Children's love of their parents is a natural reaction stemming from parental love and it should be used by parents to educate and raise the child and to lift his behaviour appropriately. When the child feels that he has made his best efforts to please his parents' wishes and seeks to obey their instructions and directions, he also feels closer to them and fulfils his instinctive need to show his love and affection towards them.

If on the other hand, he neglects their directions and instructions, ignoring them and continuing to violate set rules, he may be testing that love.

An alternative to harsh treatment when a child misbehaves is to temporarily ignore the child. This temporary measure will affect the child as it touches on a relationship of love, which he considers important and will in turn give him a strong motive to obey his parents and return to their warmth, love and affection.



Strengthening bonds of love with children

Many communities, especially within Australian society, are the combination of many cultures with differing values in terms of parenting issues. These values may differ and conflict with values held by many Arab migrant families. Providing a family environment based on love and strong bonds between parents and children and relatives is one of the most important issues contributing to maintaining family traditions in migrant communities.

Strong familial bonds are also a protective factor in preventing children from falling into some practices, which are contradictory to Arab family structure, traditions and values.

Parents should endeavour to show extensive expressions of love to their children. The following practices are worth considering:

- spending quality time with the child
- listening to children's conversations
- expressing praise whenever appropriate
- participating in children's games
- giving hugs and kisses
- giving presents.

Avoid over indulgence

Research and studies have confirmed the importance of not allowing the child a free reign without restriction, deterrence or deprivation.

Parental instinct in showering the child with love and affection may drive them to meeting his needs and be held hostage to his every whim and wish. Their love for the child may prevent them from disciplining the child.



Parents of migrant families may tend to spoil and pamper their children and meet their children's wishes to their own detriment to avoid falling into the new society's unfavoured practices. This practice carries with it many unforeseen hazards and dangers.

Some negative outcomes associated with excessive pampering and spoiling are:

- inability to act responsibly
- inability to be self reliant
- inability to face challenges and difficulties
- an emphasis on self centeredness and lack of motivation
- a tendency towards misbehaviour.

Avoid wrongly chiding or rebuking the child

Discipline and child raising in the context of rewards and punishment has to be subject to a very delicate balance so there will be no excessive rewards or punishment.

If frequent blaming of the child ends up being a normal practice, he gets used to hearing such rhetoric. But if it comes at the appropriate time and for the appropriate reason, it affects the child, influences his behaviour and becomes a more meaningful form of discipline.



Conclusion

A child is similar to a pure picture, which reflects the beauty of being. He is a white sheet of paper, which accepts all forms and colours and is the foundation stone of human society. He is the leader of the future within which all forms of renewal are embodied. So how do parents maintain the beauty of this pure picture and what are the shapes and colours with which we can fill the pages of his future life? What have we done for him to prepare him to carry out his expected role with other members of society? What forms of discipline should we follow to motivate him to recreate and invent? Many parents in all places and times ponder these questions.

Regardless of the reasons and motives, migrating from the motherlands carries with it many problems and challenges for families and individuals. Children are probably most affected by migration. Child raising changes according to the surrounding environment. This reminds us of the ancient saying "don't force your children to embody you, they were born for a different time to yours". There are inherited methods of raising children in many Arab migrant families, which may seem at first as appropriate in the mother country but are not acceptable or may be socially rejected or contrary to the laws of the new country (Australia).

If we take the authoritarian style of child discipline as an example, we find that such a style implies physical punishment, which is one of a number of common styles that are socially and legally acceptable in many cultures and communities including Arab communities. This style is, however, unacceptable in many modern communities and most Australian states have banned the use of unreasonable force in disciplining children. Child protection societies, international agreements, studies and research and child psychologists encourage parents to use alternative methods of discipline to physical punishment.

This humble study aims to focus the important issue of raising children by migrant families and the accompanying circumstances that differ from those in the homelands.

We, as migrants, are in need of a practical study to find a balance between life's requirements and its realities in our new country (Australia) on the one hand, and the backgrounds within which we grew on the other hand. We need to redraw and rewrite new methods of child raising based on this premise.

We are called upon to embrace our values, which have been gained through our Arab traditions to complement the new experience. At the same time we have to reject unacceptable traditions and practices carried with us from our old countries in the same manner that we reject unsuitable behaviour common in the new country, which we want our children to avoid. This is where the issue becomes complicated in the new environment and where difficulties arise for parents as they face new conflicts and are forced to continually revise the parenting methods they inherited from their forefathers.

Parental feelings of responsibility towards their children increases as children grow and enter life's challenges. They find themselves needing to listen to more advice and directions on different methods of parenting and familiarise themselves with various ways and means of dealing with their children. Their motivation stems from their instinctive love for their children and their need to implant in their children the seeds of virtue and success at the earliest stages.



A child's early years have a critical impact on his future character and identity. Most of the characteristics and features of the child's personality are formed during his early years based on the environment in which he was raised and the treatment he was subjected to.

The migrant's feelings of being under-resourced in the field of child raising and the huge lack in experiences, the lack of references and programmes coupled with shortage of experienced bi-lingual workers may lead to frustration. This can result in a dilemma forcing migrant parents to adopt poor choices in parenting methods and practices based on inherited traditions, or on a wrong interpretation of what is available. This may lead to alienation, disengagement or giving in to reality (cultural pressure) and accepting it under duress and suffering.

Accordingly, we find ourselves facing a critical challenge requiring careful and focused awareness. As migrants we can reach for and build new parenting concepts and methods which are consistent and harmonious with our culture and which take into account the transformation of Arab migrant families in the new environment. This can be done so that the methods and styles will not be far removed from the basic values and principles dictated by human instinct, religious and humanitarian teachings and principles. This booklet focuses on chosen topics, which are considered essential for positive parenting in the hope that it may compensate for the lack in information available to Arab migrant families. We hope to have made a contribution towards providing appropriate and suitable advice to Arab parents to assist them in parenting in their new country and a contribution to overcome difficulties faced in the challenging environment in which we live.



Support networks

Family Support Organisations (Victoria):

- Australian Breastfeeding Association (03 9885 0653)
- Drummond Street Relationship Centre (03 9663 6733)
- Maternal and Child Health Line (13 22 29)
- Northern Migrant Resource Centre (03 9484 7944)
- ParentLine (Victoria toll free number: 13 22 89)
- Parents Without Partners (03 9852 1945)
- ParentZone: parenting classes and information (03 9478 9499)
- Playgroup Victoria (03 9388 1599)
- Thornbury Women's Services (03 9480 0466)
- VICSEG (Arabic women's groups: 03 9383 2533)
- Victorian Arabic Social Services (03 9309 0055)
- Victorian Legal Aid (Telephone information and legal advice Arabic – Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 9:00 to 4:00pm 03 9269 0127)
- Alawi Islamic Association of Victoria (03 9416 8679)

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