

UNDERSTANDING EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE



A relationship-based model for
long-term discipline

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Cover.

Preface.

Chapter 1- How were you disciplined?

Chapter 2- What does God say about discipline?

chapter 3- The goal of discipline.

Chapter 4- Strategies to help a child build emotional regulation.

Closing.

Feedback.

PREFACE.

Discipline is one of the most heated aspects of parenting (especially if you're from African descent), for a lot of reasons. Culturally, no parent wants to be told how to discipline his/her child, many of us parents are raised from a family, cultural and religious background, and all these influences impact our idea of discipline.

Religiously, we believe there is a template to parent and discipline, and because that template aligns with our subjective desires, we treat religious perspectives of discipline as absolutes.

I've been on this journey of guiding parents better for over a decade. What this opportunity has afforded me is a chunk of time to converse with parents, understand their perspective and importantly, evaluate where we are getting it wrong when it comes to conversations around effective discipline.

One of such oversight is believing there is a good way to discipline and a bad way to discipline. When we embrace the black and white model of looking at discipline we run into so many errors or oversight.

A simple truth is, we can never agree on a standard way to discipline children, we can never agree on what works best for everyone because let's face it, we all have different family value systems for our families, we are exposed differently, and have different emotional management skill sets.

The essence of writing this book is to help many who desire to embrace long-term disciplinary methodology with the mindset, framework and strategy to parent children who are happy, independent, assertive, and responsible.

This book is also for parents who desire open-minded options of effective discipline.

CHAPTER ONE.

HOW WERE YOU DISCIPLINED?

A story was told of a young woman who always watched her mother prepare fresh fish. How the mother will cut the fish, dice and salt it.

So by the time she got married and headed to her husband's home.

And when her husband gets fresh fish, she'll prepare it the exact way her mum cooks it with the exact nutrients. On a yearly August visit, out of curiosity she asked her mommy why she usually cooks her fresh fish the way she does.

The mother smiled and replied, 'The pot I'm using is a small one, if I don't cut or dice the fish, the whole fish would not go into the pot'. The scales fell off her face!!

It's the same way we approach parenting; Without researching or seeking for effective answers, but following what others do, forgetting goals differ.

When I run my one-on-one parenting makeover, one of the questions I ask is how do you know you were ready to start parenting?

Let's relate it to discipline, how did you learn about effective and appropriate ways of disciplining a child? Upbringing? Or what is practiced in your environment?

Discipline is an ideology, which is manifested in our actions. To make any meaning change in how we discipline, we first have to explore a few factors responsible for how we discipline. One of the factors is how we were disciplined while growing up.

Were you disciplined with hitting? Yelling? Threatening? Naughty corner? Withdrawal of privileges? How you were raised and disciplined plays a vital role in what you embrace as a normal way of discipline.

We discipline differently.

The truth is, our perspective towards discipline must not be the same, we were raised different, exposed differently and skilled differently. We have different goals for disciplining as parents, and it's genuine.

Like I always say, I don't believe there is a good or bad discipline, the question is do you have a disciplinary goal? And is the way you're disciplining your children helping you achieve your disciplinary goal?

If how you raise your child is helping you achieve your goal, that's all that matters. Oh, by the way, I want to assume your disciplinary goal has the best of your child in mind, to help the child build self consciousness towards what is right and noble.

Even though I have my preference and stereotypical perspective towards discipline, I admit my perspective isn't absolute, and because I hold a preference doesn't mean those who aren't disciplining their children like mine are doing it wrongly. They are just doing it differently.

My desire is that in our differences, we shouldn't use discipline to condition our children to fear. Our children shouldn't see themselves as less and unworthy. And our children shouldn't lose their voice and curiosity to try out things.

Discipline should be a vehicle to guide our child become the best version of themselves and guide them develop repository skills they'll need in adulthood to navigate life.

The perspective captured in this book is fueled by recurring professional experiences. I met a lot of parents who admit how they were raised and disciplined isn't appropriate, and they want to do better, but are helpless, exhibiting the very disciplinary style they believed isn't appropriate.

They don't like the yelling, cussing, and hitting they express to their children, and they want to stop, but don't know how. In my many coaching programs, I've guided parents to make the mental and emotional transition from toxic to empowering discipline, and that is what I'll be sharing with you in this book.

I believe change starts from the mind. If you can evaluate the narrative you hold about discipline, and can embrace a new perspective about discipline, you're almost there.

Next will be to build the required skill to discipline appropriately.

Power of conditioning.

How you were disciplined forms a conditioning (a scripting) that will be difficult to deal with, except with intentional help and practice. The feedback I always get from parents is 'I don't like how I was disciplined while growing up, but I can't help you'.

This is an aspect of discipline a lot of parents aren't aware of. To a larger extent, discipline isn't a conscious activity, it's unconscious. Your body only responds to an emotional trigger, and how you respond tells of what you've deposited inside you. And what you deposit inside you is mostly scripting by upbringing, and environment.

How you were raised can blur your perspective towards what's toxic or dysfunctional. Over time you begin to treat such a dysfunction as normal. Let me share a personal experience.

I was raised by my average income parents who lived mostly in a two room apartment. The implication of my parents' financial reality meant we grew up in an environment mostly low income earners.

Our environments were dirty, unorganized and unhealthy, same with our house. Back then, we didn't have the luxury of buying a carpet or the awareness of using the little you have to have a decent, hygienic and beautiful home.

Oh, before I forget, in the home I was raised with, we only sleep and wake up. No one tells you to make your bed before leaving the house. No one tells you to be intentional in arranging your clothes. And neither did we see it from our parents.

This experience isn't just peculiar to me, but same with my older and younger siblings in their respective homes. We were untidy, carefree, and didn't make our beds, all thanks to the kind of home we were raised in. That was normal to us. Well, I got the shock of my life when I got married.

My wife was raised in a different environment as me. Because her parents were poor, she was forced to go work for some wealthy people as a house help, an experience that changed her perspective and exposed her to lifestyles that magnified my dysfunction.

While waking up and not making the bed was normal to me, it was abnormal for her.

While being untidy was normal to me, to her it was abnormal, same with other aspects of my life.

It took me time to intentionally work on a lot of things I was raised with that were unhealthy and dysfunctional that I treated as normal, all thanks to my patient wife. Even

though I'm still a work in progress, the awareness of differentiating between what is dysfunction and healthy is a ground breaker.

It's the same with discipline. For a lot of parents, their understanding of discipline is how they were disciplined or what is permissible within an environment. Whether it's right, appropriate or abusive.

An example I love using is one of a mother in the area I was staying with my parents. A neighbor's son was alleged to have stolen N50 from a shop, and when she was told, as a disciplinary measure, she dipped her son's hands in hot coal.

According to her, that will serve as a lesson to him, so that when he next wants to carry any money that isn't his, his burned hands will remind him of the repercussions of stealing. While I find that extreme (because of my upbringing, values and exposure), like this neighbor, there are many who find her disciplinary approach as normal.

What about those who beat a child and insert pepper in the child's private part? What about parents who will cut a child's body with a razor and apply pepper? Some will go ahead to tie a child before beating.

American or African discipline.

I must equally admit that not all parents subscribe to this extreme measure of discipline, for some, their approach is subtle, they'll deprive the child from eating, others will deprive the child of some privileges, others will be verbally and emotionally abusive towards the child.

What's usually ironic about these methods of discipline is, the perpetrators see nothing wrong in it, the same way I didn't see anything wrong in being untidy, all thanks to upbringing and environmental modelling.

Again, how were you disciplined if you fell short of your parents expectations? What was the permissible way to discipline children in the environment you were raised in? When you look inwards, you'll realize why you discipline the way you do.

Parenting is cultural.

A lot of Africans are quick to assume any parenting perspective that disagrees with pain-based or fear-based discipline is an American way of parenting. While that is an

uninformed stereotype, there are American cultures that permit children to be subjected to pain-based or fear-based discipline.

In the same vein I don't believe being black or African is tantamount to being abusive or the picture of unhealthy discipline. There are blacks and Africans who despite their cultural permission against pain-based discipline decides to see the act of discipline differently.

I was lucky to be raised by parents who were raised differently, especially my mother. My maternal grandfather was a man who stood against hitting a child. Well, it was years after that I appreciated what he stood for.

A few years ago my family and I travelled to the village to visit our parents and importantly for our children to meet their grandparents and my only surviving grandmother (our children's great-grandmother).

On one of our visits to see my grandmother, we went with our little son who was age two at that time. As a hyperactive kiddo, he was all over the place, hitting, tearing and destroying whatever his hand could find. I wasn't comfortable, and when I tried to hold him to instruct him to stop the destruction, my grandmother told us to allow him.

Allow him to keep destroying? Why is everyone in this village saying that? It's the same with my parents, when he is all over the place in my parents house they'll always say we should allow him to play. So I asked my grandmother why she feels he should be allowed to keep destroying things.

She laughed really hard, and told me that when a child plays and destroys things it's a sign of good omen. That was different from where I was coming from. Where I was coming from when a child is all over the place, the child will receive some high pitched yelling, spanking, or threat.

Child discipline is purely cultural. How the Igbo tribe in Nigeria discipline is different from how the Fulani tribe in Nigeria discipline. How the Israelis discipline is different from Americans. How the Chinese discipline is different from the Germans.

What we rarely don't pay attention to is, as well-intentioned as our individual cultures can be, some of the practices can be abusive, unhealthy and toxic. As painful as it may sound, at the end of the day you have a choice, to be loyal to culture or what is good for humanity.

Well, what I've learned over the years is, many people exhibit dysfunction and extreme discipline not because of culture, many just use culture to mask their inadequacies or perpetuate their agenda.

Let me digress, humans will cheat and be unfaithful because they want to, not because culture permits them to. When you are convinced stealing or killing is wrong, there is nothing culture can say that will push you into it. What you perpetuate is your choice, largely because it serves you.

CHAPTER TWO.

WHAT DOES GOD SAY ABOUT DISCIPLINE?

Like culture, another difficult aspect of our collective growth is religion. There are lots of gray areas and loopholes in religion. It's even more disturbing with sects, and different translations to the holy books adherents embrace with emotions.

Does the God of your religious preference say anything about discipline and how best to discipline a child? Can something be said in your religion's holy book and it's not the express command of the God of your religion?

Let's take this conversation slowly. For most part of my work as a parenting coach, most of my clients are Christians and Muslims. Hence, in this chapter I'll focus on the christian and Islamic perceived perspective of discipline. This is in no way minimizing the impact of other religious preferences of those I've been privileged to interact or work with.

Again, let's ask ourselves, is the bible and koran inspired by God? Is everything said in the bible or koran direct instructions of God? Well, we will find out. It is necessary we start this way because of man's proclivity to use the religious book to fit into personal, cultural or selfish ideology.

The holy book (bible, Koran) is like a buffet, anything you're looking for you can find. The reason the holy books have been subjected to all manner of interpretation and abuse.

We are not here to interpret the holy books, we are here to help ourselves not to selfishly use the holy book to defend our culture, upbringing or what benefits us.

Spare the rod.

Many erroneously believe the phrase 'spare the rod and spoil the child' is a biblical instruction. That phrase is actually from a satirical poem called 'Hudibras ' by Samuel Buttler first published in 1662.

While most people who use the Bible to justify hitting are doing it out of a good intention, there are a few oversights they are not paying attention to.

The book of proverbs isn't a literal book. Let's shed some light here.

The Hebrew word for rod is shebet meaning shepherd crook, used for tending sheep. It's used as a symbol of leadership and guidance. The book of psalm 23 said 'thy rod and thy staff comfort me'.

The Hebrew word for discipline is muwcar meaning instruct or teach.

What about "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die." Prov 23:13 you may say?

Like we shared earlier on, does a cultural perspective give an express command for what must be done? Or does it have contextual application? Let me explain this perspective using the book of Deut 21:18-21.

18 If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him..

21 Then all the men of his town are to stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you.

can we in all sincerity say because the bible said this, a stubborn child should be stoned to death? Are we then guilty of choosing what to apply in the bible? This is a food for thought for all of us who use a chapter in the bible with a peculiar context to support our culture, upbringing or environmental experience.

Hitting a child and Islam.

Many are quick to quote Nabi for saying biting children is right, especially when the beating is for a just cause. Nabi (Sallallaahu Alayhi Wasallam) has often been reported to have said, 'Enjoin Salaah on your child when he is seven years old and beat him if he neglects it after he reaches ten years of age'. (Abu Dawood; Durr-Manthoor).

Again, what is the context of such a perspective? Is it a direct or absolute command that a child should be beaten for a just cause? Let's juxtapose this with the words of the prophet (PBUH).

In a Hadeeth, the Prophet, ﷺ, said: “Do not lift your stick against your wife and children and urge them to fear Allah The Almighty.”[Al-Albaani: Hasan]

Are these contradictory perspectives? I don't think so. We confuse culture with religion. Your faith isn't the challenge, but cultural interpretation. We try to use scriptures to validate our stands or dysfunction with improper application of the scriptures.

Our cultural realities.

1. Mis-education.

We can't differentiate between discipline and punishment. Many of us are raised to believe or assume discipline is tantamount to beating or punishing a child. Its even a bigger challenge as our society has institutionalized fear, control and especially for the weak.

We aren't educated about the hazards of punishment, like persistent hitting of a child. The brain isn't logical, can't differentiate between induced pain and discipline. No matter how logical your disciplinary procedure is, when hitting is introduced, the brain records it as a threat.

While the brain tries to suppress the impact of hitting, the pain is stored in the brain, waiting for a trigger to give it expression. Over time, the child's brain is impacted leading to adverse childhood effects.

2. Hurting.

We perpetuate how we're treated. For many people, hitting others is an unconscious behavior, all thanks to how they were raised. As painful as this may sound, many of us were raised in dysfunction, neglect, and abuse.

Many of us were raised to harbour unresolved issues. Because our feelings weren't validated, we lack the proper way to express our emotions. These bottled emotions find expression in our children, when they trigger us.

(Because we are a hurting people, we are raising a generation of hurting, confused and abusive individuals, who feel their importance and relevance is through control and instilling fear)

3.Helpless.

How we discipline is a wired response. When a child falls short of our expectations, it's either we yell, threaten or hit. It's a predictable loop. It's black and white for us. We lack the disciplinary options to leverage other options of discipline that don't have to be the use of pain, or fear.

We are ill equipped to express emotional regulation. Many of us lack the skill to manage our emotions or appropriately interpret what children do in such a way that we don't get triggered. And because of that, we are quick to lash out on our children emotionally, verbally and physically.

Psychology of punishment.

It wouldn't be fair if we limit inappropriate discipline to hitting alone. I believe there are other methods that parents use whose effect is similar, if not more compared to hitting, that doesn't involve a parent hitting a child.

Methods like deprivation of privileges, silent treatment, silent corner etc. While physical pain isn't introduced, emotional pain is induced, the child feels rejected, and not heard. Like all humans, children are quick to internalize how they are treated, which impacts their self esteem and how they relate with others.

Let's imagine you did something you don't like, I decided to discipline you by seizing your phone for 12 hours. How would you feel? Would you like to be treated how you discipline your child?

Your goal of discipline is to teach the age appropriate way of behaving. The question is, is deprivation a form of teaching?

In a traditional system, deprivation is used, there are others who equally say it's better than beating. But, while some disciplinary measures wouldn't inflict physical pain, it does inflict emotional and mental injury.

Interestingly, there is little difference to how the brain reacts to emotional pain. The part of the brain that is triggered when physical pain is introduced to the body is the same part that is triggered when children go through emotional pain.

The brain interprets pain as a threat. So when a parent inflicts physical pain on a child, that child faces an unsolvable biological paradox. On one hand, we're all born with an instinct to go toward our caregivers for protection when we're hurt or afraid.

But when our caregivers are also the source of the pain and fear, when the parent has caused the state of terror inside the child by what he or she has done, it can be very confusing for the child's brain*

Balanced emotional responses will be hindered.

The way we interact with our kids when they're upset significantly affects how their brains develop, and therefore what kind of people they are, both today and in the years to come.

The psychology of punishment is to regain control, to enforce submission. Physical, emotional and verbal discipline is a conditioning strategy, using pain to mold a child into submission. I believe any strategy that deprives one of the free will to grow mentally and emotionally is abusive.

CHAPTER THREE

THE GOAL OF DISCIPLINE

1. How do you readily discipline your child?
2. What do you tend to achieve when you discipline your child?
3. Are there other disciplinary methods that can achieve your disciplinary desire without inflicting pain?
4. What is discipline to you?
5. Where is the source of ideas about how to discipline a child?
5. Where is the source of ideas about how to discipline a child?
6. How effective is your idea of discipline to your disciplinary goal?

The effectiveness of any disciplinary method is tied to these questions.

These questions will help you sieve away the ambiguities, while you focus on your disciplinary goal

Discipline is a word derived from the Latin word DISCERE (to learn), which is pronounced DISCIPLINA (to guide, to teach or to educate).

As a parent, is your method of discipline yielding your discipline desires or goal? Do you even have a disciplinary goal?

Just like L.R. Knost asserts, discipline is helping a child solve a problem. Punishment is making a child suffer for having or creating a problem. To raise problem solvers, focus on solutions not retribution.

Our children will exhibit inappropriate and unhealthy behaviors. As a matter of fact, children at their younger age are of the worst behavior, for a lot of reasons we may not be able to look into now.

From resistance to destruction to tantrum, to oppositional behaviors. Other times they'll behave in an emotional and illogical manner.

The irony for a lot of parents is, in their mind, while the discipline uses fear based approaches (Withdrawal of privileges, time out, naughty corner) or pain inducing approaches (beating, spanking, punishment, threatening), they do that with the intention to teach the child.

The question you should always answer is 'Is this the best and appropriate way to teach my child how to behave better next time?'

Appropriate disciplinary framework.

1. ***The child is clearly informed about do's and don'ts.*** Your child can't read your mind to know what you expect. You must carry your child along with your family values and what you expect of him/her.

2. ***Clearly outline and explain the repercussions of not meeting your expectations.***

Your child should also understand the implication of not meeting your expectations. Discipline isn't emotional, but strategic. When the repercussions are explained, it helps the child know what to expect, rather than wrongly interpret how he/she is disciplined.

3. ***The child is emotionally, mentally and cognitively matured to meet your expectations.*** While it is not out of place to expect right behaviors from your child, are your expectations appropriate, recognizing the development realities of your child? Expecting a toddler to run isn't appropriate. Same way expecting a little child to know how to express his/her emotions is uninformed.

4. ***You've helped the child see and understand his/her lapses.*** Effective discipline is when the child's attention is brought to a lapse in expectations. When the child realizes where he/she has missed the step, it helps the child to do better next time.

Connect with your child.

If your goal is to teach the child how to behave appropriately NEXT TIME, you must learn to connect with the child.

Any disciplinary method without connection is counter productive. Connecting with the child attunes you to what the child is trying to communicate.

EVERY behavioral manifestation is indicative of an INTERNAL turmoil

Inappropriate behavior is a pointer to a need expressed in an unlikely fashion.

As children the capacity to communicate their internal struggles are underdeveloped..

Hence, their unlikely way to communicate in ways that pisses you off

The question is..

- Will you connect to understand what needs the child wants refilled in?
- Can you teach without connecting? As a parent, can you learn from someone who is annoying?

Without connection, truth become repulsive

If discipline for you is a tool to teach, it must be done with a long-term agenda

Please save this somewhere, if you can

when we discipline, we must always consider a child's developmental capacity, particular temperament, and emotional style, as well as the situational context

Conclusive, if teaching a child how to act appropriately next is our goal for discipline.

Will shouting, spanking, withdrawal of privileges, naughty corner etc be effective?

I hope this helps reassess our goals and method of discipline.

Before you discipline.

1. Discipline isn't about you, detach your ego from any expression of discipline.

It's about a child. Discipline is a vehicle to teach and groom the child on what is expected. Again, do you think how you teach (discipline) is effective and appropriate?

It's about your child. You need to understand your child and what best works for your child. Children are different and have different models of learning. When you apply that to how you parent, it yields phenomenal results.

It's tempting to put yourself first in anything your child, like most parents do, but you must learn to treat your child independently of his/her actions. What a child does doesn't define you, or the child. Neither should you use the child as a vehicle to fill up your inadequacies.

This understanding doesn't put you in a dis-empowering position, and when you're not in a dis-empowering position, you don't get blinded by your emotions to be impulsive or erratic with how you discipline your child.

As a parent you should learn how to interpret your child's actions from a position of strength. How you feel and act towards your child isn't because of what the child has done. I hear parents blame their children for making them discipline them the way they do.

You didn't beat your child because of what your child did, neither did you get angry at your child because of what your child did, you got angry because of the interpretation you gave to what your child did. It's your interpretation that influences how you feel and ultimately how you behave.

As a parent, you're a meaning giving machine, and you must learn to give positive meaning to your child's behavior or you'll be impulsive towards your child's behaviors. An example of interpretation is reminding yourself that children don't know any better. They are still developing and lack the cognitive, emotional and physical skills to meet your expectations. The irony is, the process of building these skills will be messy. They will make mistakes, they'll act in unusual ways you may not appreciate, but it's what it is, a process of growth.

This understanding will help you guide them, instead of acting out on them because they didn't meet your expectations.

2. *What is your child trying to communicate?* If discipline isn't retribution as we saw before now, we must strive to look past what children are doing that isn't going down with us. We should be focusing on helping them behave better, not just punish them for falling short of our expectations.

Children communicate to us in unusual ways. a lot of times to communicate a need. A call for attention, affection or acceptance. A child's cry may not be because the child is hungry. A child's destruction may not be because the child is careless or destructive. It may just be a call for connection.

Connecting with a child is knowing the needs a child is seeking for.

Even when they are asking for it in an unusual manner .Connecting with a child is deeper than meeting a child's need. A child who needs food may not be hungry. A child who is crying may not need candy. Connecting with a child is detaching from a position of assumption to understanding the need of the child .To connect with a child, you must treat every misbehavior as a call to training .Before you discipline, connect and understand

By misbehaving, kids actually communicate to us what they need to be working on.. what has not yet been developed or what special skills they need practice with. If a child is throwing tantrum, the child is only saying mummy, teach me how to manage my emotions,

through discipline (teaching, modelling, cutlass, beating etc any method that fits your disciplinary goal)

A child's inappropriate behavior is a call for skill development . And you can only help a child form those skill set or learn appropriate behavior through connecting Through connection, we can soothe their internal storm, help them calm down, and assist them in making better decisions

Connection triggers the curiosity to understand..

“What is she wanting here?

Is she asking for something?

Trying to discover something?

What is she communicating?”

When the disciplinary goal is clear, and understanding the need for connection is appreciated..

The question now remains, How do I connect with my child or What are the strategies to connecting with your child

Look at these two words CAN'T and WOULDN'T

A child will exhibit all ranges of behaviour, largely because THEY CAN'T behave any better.

Not because THEY WOULDN'T

Knowing something and having the capacity to execute are two different things. The role of long-term discipline is to help the child form those skills set and develop those behavioral

muscles needed for future leverage.

Not just to punish a child for lacking the capacity, skill sets and emotional maturity

3. *Teaching takes place in an atmosphere of empowering energy or vibe.* If discipline is about the child, you must pay attention to when your child is in the right place and frame of mind to learn what you're sharing.

When a child is angry, tired, anxious or not in the right frame of mind, it will be difficult for your disciplinary approach to be effective. So, you must know how to influence or put your child in the right frame of mind, to make your disciplinary approach effective.

Timing is an important ingredient in effective and long-term discipline.

4. *Pay attention to the developmental timeline of your child.* Are you expecting so much from your child, like some parents do? Does your child have the emotional, mental and cognitive skills to meet your expectations? A lot of times the answer is no. A lot of times our children don't have the skill and capacity to exhibit what we expect of them.

If your child exhibits a behaviour you don't which a lot of times will get you mad. You need to ask yourself.. Does my child have the capacity to act differently? Is my child responsible for my anger or something different?

When discipline isn't handled carefully and intentionally, it can truncate a child's holistic development. Some of the impacts of ineffective discipline are..

Attachment- Issues with boundaries, distrust, social isolation, and understanding perspective.

Biology. Unable to regulate emotions, react negatively to stress, and increased medical issues of a wide variety.

- Affect Regulation- Difficulty with explaining emotions, communicating wants and needs, and with emotional self-regulation.

- Dissociation- Disconnect between thoughts and emotions which can impair memory and leave the child to have different states of consciousness.
- Behavioral Control- Issues with impulse control, rules, aggression, eating disorders or substance abuse, and reenacting trauma in behavior or play.
- Cognition- Problems with attention, learning, completing tasks, planning, responsibility, language development, and time.
- Self- concept- Poor sense of self, body image, self-esteem, and shame and guilt.

5. *Work on your triggers and develop emotional regulation.* You're a meaning-making machine. You will interpret your child's behaviour in a way that will trigger disempowering (anger, fear, anxiety, bitter, indifference, etc) emotions in you. Other times your scripting (upbringing and past experience) and protective nature of the brain will kick in when your child behaves a certain way. You must train your mind to act intentionally, rather than impulsively.

Emotions as data.

One of the ways to achieve that is by treating how you feel as data. Your emotions aren't facts, they are just communication signals drawing your attention to what needs evaluation. How you feel is a call. If you feel angry at your child, you need to evaluate your source of anger.

Because a lot of times it's not about your child, but some degree of unresourcefulness (emotionally, financially, physically, mentally and spiritually).

Let's play a game. Has your child ever done anything that got you pissed off? Let's flash back our mind to one of the scenarios. In that moment, imagine if you just got a bank alert of 100 million, will that thing your child did that got you pissed off still get you pissed off?

While this may be a hypothetical illustration, it mirrors a lot of our disciplinary experience with our children. We are just financially or emotionally 'broke' and transferring the anger to our children. I've been there. I remember one time I was down financially, and

our daughter wanted to play with me, I was not in the mood and she wouldn't let me be, unconsciously I raised my voice on her, and that got her startled.

Did I raise my voice because our daughter was disturbing me or because I felt financially inadequate. Our daughter had nothing to do with how I treated her, it was my inner experience. After I calmed down, I went to her, apologized and told her how I was feeling that triggered me to raise my voice on her.

If you're tired or feel anxious, this too can trigger you to act in an inappropriate way. Life is what it is, there are times things won't go as planned and will trigger your emotions, you must know when dis-empowering emotions are building up in you and what you must do to calm down and act from a place of resourcefulness.

Your unresolved issues with your parents too can serve as a trigger to your children's behavior. While growing do you feel heard? Do you feel loved? Were you given the opportunity to express yourself? Who must you become for you to get your parents' love?

If you experienced emotional inadequacy while growing up, it will find expression in how you raise your children. They'll never be adequate in your site, you will be threatened by their expression of independence and resistance, unconsciously use them to feel adequate.

Again, how you feel isn't entirely about your children, but you, step back and evaluate how you feel and act the way you do.

6. Model appropriate ways of communicating needs. Children are yet to label how they feel. Their brains are still underdeveloped to explain their needs. It's our responsibility to help them develop vocabulary of what they need and self expression. Let me share a personal experience. When our daughter was two, when she felt scared, she'll say 'daddy carry'. She is not saying 'daddy carry me' for the fun of it. But my arms give her security.

When our son wants us to gist, he'll say 'I'm feeling tired'. He just wants attention and someone to connect with him on a mental and social level .

When we are focused on the wrong way the express their needs, we miss the opportunity of

understanding what they're trying to communicate and equally how to discipline (teach) them on how to behave better or communicate their needs appropriately.

If you can

1. Seek the guidance of an expert to guide you to raise your child intentionally.

There are times you need to seek the help of a parenting coach or therapist to help you deal with past parenting hurt, unresolved issues while growing up, how to deal with emotional triggers and develop emotional regulation skills.

2. Be part of a community of like-minded people. To parent effectively and importantly how you discipline, you must intentionally hang around people who discipline effectively. You can not be around parents who use force, threat, manipulation and fear to discipline their children and expect to do differently.

you must connect with parents who share the same family values system with you, and importantly parents who share similar disciplinary goals with you. That you can be a source of guide and encouragement to each other.

3. Be vulnerable and compassionate with yourself as you unlearn, relearn and learn. You were raised a certain way, and how you were raised scripted you a certain way. Change will take time. Be vulnerable to admit how you were raised wasn't the best way. Be vulnerable to admit your parents raised you the way they did because they didn't know any better.

Be compassionate with yourself as you journey to deal with the dysfunctions you were raised with as you parent differently. You will make mistakes, you will relapse, like we all do, you will be triggered in moments you least expect. When such moments occur, there is no need to feel discouraged or beat yourself up, it's a journey, and we learn, unlearn and relearn.

CHAPTER FOUR

STRATEGIES TO HELPING A CHILD DEVELOP EMOTIONAL REGULATION

The first mental question parents have when I talk about connecting with children is 'How do I connect with my child'?

How to connect with a child is sooooo easy that it's often missed due to ignorance and lack of patience. The adult life is a fast paced life. We want to solve any issue immediately. This attitude of trying to fix things deprives the adult of the opportunity to connect or understand the journey of a child's internal turmoil.

As a recap, we learned that what children exhibit is indicative of their internal turmoil or storm. Children's unhealthy emotional behaviour is their way of saying I lack the capacity to behave appropriately, teach me.

And we learned that WITHOUT connection, at most you're adding to the frustration or emotional turmoil a child is passing through.

Let me explain...

A child is crying (experiencing emotional turmoil).

The child's stress level is already high.

The child's cry gets you irritated.

You angrily hushed the child to keep quiet.

Your angry face and tone will heighten the child's stress level.

Cortisol is further pumped into the child's blood stream.

The cry cries the more because of inability to make sense of emotional turmoil

Two things will actually happen in a case like this...

* The child will keep quiet in fear, conditioned by threat.

Or

* The child will cry more and learn to rebel.

Whichever way, the child didn't learn how to calm their internal turmoil. The aim is to stop the child from having an unhealthy emotional response TEMPORARILY, but losing the opportunity to teach the child how to learn a long term skill set for emotional

management. And CONNECTION IS ONE OF THE WAYS TO CALM A CHILD'S internal turmoil.

Let's look at four ways to connect with a child...

1. ***Physical affection.***

Be it a touch, pat, squeezing of hand, hug, carry.

Physical affection is magic!!

When a child is touched, feel-good hormones (like oxytocin) are released into our brain and body, and their levels of cortisol, a stress hormone, decrease.

In other words, giving your kids loving physical affection literally and beneficially alters their brain chemistry. When a child is crying, cortisol (stress hormone) is released.

When the body notices or experiences a touch, oxytocin is released, calming down the stress level of the body chemistry. When the body chemistry is calm, it makes learning easier and faster. Are you connecting the dot? It's so simple that a parent can miss its importance and usefulness.

As a parent, you are used to using physical touch to calm a child. The slight oversight is that because you don't know the power behind physical touch, you're not intentional about using it.

For example, if your newborn baby is crying, what do you do first? You carry the baby.

Over time, the baby learns assurance and self calming through touch. Have you noticed when the baby is carried, the cry stops or reduces? That's connection

As an adult, how will you feel if you're angry or stressed, and your husband before trying to fix anything hugged you for 30 seconds without saying a word?

Touch calms any INTERNAL STORM.

2. ***Validate a child's emotions.***

Validating a child's feelings serves a major function. It teaches the child to understand their emotional journey. Over time, a child learns how to label their emotions.

Instead of crying when they need food, they'll say I'm hungry. Instead of just crying out of anxiety, they'll say I'm scared. They'll be vocal with what they need.

Another advantage of validating a child's emotion is the child feels UNDERSTOOD.

Feeling understood is a powerful storm calming strategy. As an adult, how do you feel being understood when you're angry?

3. *Inquire*

Just like validating a child's emotions, inquiring seeks to understand what is going on in the mind of the child, and equally offers the parent the opportunity to listen to the child. For a lot of parents, when their children exhibit unhealthy or inappropriate behavior, that is when the

lecture, sermonize, counsel or punish. While it can make a parent feel good, the question is how effective is it?

How does it help in calming the internal turmoil of a child? When children exhibit destructive or unhealthy behavior, seeking to understand why they did what they did or the source of their ideology around their behavior will go a long way to equip the parent on how to help the child change or see a reason not to repeat that behavior next time and in the future.

However, without inquiry, the child wouldn't know why he/she shouldn't repeat that behavior. For example, you gave an instruction and it was carried out, instead of concluding your child deliberately refused to carry your instructions out, inquiring will expose you to the child's fears, confusion, helplessness, or reason for forgetfulness why the instruction wasn't carried out. That way, you're better equipped on how to guide the child not to repeat that oversight next time.

4. *Emotionally separating yourself from how the child is behaving.*

For a lot of parents, they take their child's behavior personally. Some soak in the internal turmoil of the child. Some of the child's behaviour triggers childhood unresolved issues. And unless a parent learns to fix their inner turmoil, and learns to separate themselves from what a child does, they'll project their flaws and unhealed emotional baggage on the child.

CLOSING.

Is it enough to instruct a child? No it's not.

1. Teaching isn't a one off experience, it's a journey.

Is it developmentally possible for a child to internalize an instruction once and for all?

No.

2. Learning takes repetition.

Repetition enables the brain and neurons to form connections that become habit.

Is it herculean repeating the same thing to a child?

Yes.

Can it be frustrating?

Yes.

If you can work on your frustration, you'll be fine.

Your child may never do what you need overnight.

You'll need to be repeating yourself over and over again

You must always consider the developmental milestone of a child.

Do you expect a child of less than 10 year to carry out a habit without repetition?

Check your expectations again.

True, you have other things to do.

You must always remind yourself to calm down.

Truth is, it wouldn't be easy, it's not meant to be.

Effective parenting is not easy.

Effective discipline is not easy.

Being an empowered parent is not easy.

That's why not many parents are getting the desired result in parenting.

It will take a lot from you, your time, finances, ego, emotions etc

But the long term result is worth every INVESTMENT

Make a commitment to intentional parenting.

So that even when it seems convenient and easy to relapse to fear based parenting, you wouldn't.

As an African parent, my culture allows me to be a parent who isn't accountable.

I choose to be different.

I'm a full time and stay at home dad.

I choose to play a 100% role in the life of my children.

I was raised with great hurt, sexually abused as a little boy, grew with fear.

I choose not to transfer my trash to my children.

Why am I sharing this with you?

I choose not to parent the easy way.

I choose not to leverage the excuse to be an abusive or unavailable parent.

I choose to have a parenting goal and meet it.

It wouldn't be easy or convenient for you.

You have a choice..

ASSESSMENT

EFFECTIVE PARENTING SELF ASSESSMENT

1.Is your partner actively involved in parenting the children?

(a)Never (B) Rarely (C) Absolutely

2.Is parenting overwhelming for you?

(A)Never (B) Rarely (C) Absolutely

3.Do you feel heard and understood by your partner?

(A)Never (B) Rarely (C) Absolutely

4.are your children difficult to deal with?

(A)Never (B) Rarely (C) Absolutely

5.I'm always anxious about the unknown.

(A)Never (B) Rarely (C) Absolutely

6.I'm struggling to make life comfortable for my children.

(A)Never (B) Rarely (C) Absolutely

7.My family has a family values system.

(A)Never (B) Rarely (C) Absolutely

8.My children are always fighting.

(A)Never (B) Rarely (C) Absolutely

9.I find it difficult to sleep.

(A)Never (B) Rarely (C) Absolutely

10.I have supportive in-laws.

(A)Never (B) Rarely (C) Absolutely

SELF-ASSESSMENT GUIDE

A=1

B=2

C=3

RESULT

1-8= Difficulty in parenting.

9-18= At risk.

19-30= Effective parenting.

EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE SELF ASSESSMENT

1.Have you clearly communicated your desired goal to your child?

(A)YES (B) NO

2.Is your child developmentally equipped to express your desired goal?

(A)YES (B) NO

3.Do you always remind and guide your child to express your desired goal?

(A)YES (B) NO

4.Do you communicate your desired goals appropriately?

(A)YES (B) NO

5.Is your child always in the right frame of mind to learn from you?

(A)YES (B) NO

6.Is the price of defaulting clearly communicated to your child?

(A)YES (B) NO

7.Are your actions consistent with your desired goals?

(A)YES (B) NO

8.Are you consistent with your disciplinary approach?

(A)YES (B) NO

9.Is your partner or 'adult influence' close to you on the same page with your disciplinary strategy?

(A)YES (B) NO

10.Are you stressed as a parent?

(A)YES (B) NO

SELF-ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES

Answer YES or NO.

YES=1

NO=0

RESULT

0-5= Not effective

6-9= effective parenting.

FEEDBACK.

Every conversation ends with the 'question and answer' segment, and as I stop here, I'm opening the door to you to ask your questions. If there are perspectives you don't subscribe to (which is healthy and encouraged) and desire clarity, feel free to ask.

If you feel empowered by this book and desire to buy me lunch, I'll be most honored.

Whether a question or need for clarity you can connect with me here

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