

## **Rethinking Parenting Practices for Effective Child Care, Education and Development Provisions in Sokoto State**

**Dr. (Mrs.) ASIYATU ABUBAKAR BAGUDO**

Department of Adult Education and Extension Services,

Faculty of Education and Extension Services,

Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto

E-Mail: [asiyatuabubakar@yahoo.com](mailto:asiyatuabubakar@yahoo.com)

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### **Abstract**

*Since time immemorial, bearing, rearing, raising and training children has been a biological, socio-cultural, moral and even religious obligation of parents, but how prepared, efficient and competent are parents toward this obligation is a fundamental issue that needs to be re-examined and addressed. Currently, the trend in child abuse and neglect, child delinquency, child trafficking, and series of activities that put the young innocent and vulnerable children at risk, or dangerous circumstances seem to be on the increase. This paper attributes all these to inadequate parenting. It reviewed the existing parenting practices and suggested the need to evolve better, integrated alternatives for proper raising of children who are well trained and well equipped for life. Because, the quality of children today would invariably determine the quality of our future adults and at the same time affect the subsequent children they will raise and breed. The paper suggests the need for pre-marital orientation, awareness and sensitization programme on quality parenting. Educational programmes, workshops and training for potential parents to be organized by government and non-governmental agencies. Then there should be capacity building and skill acquisition programmes, support and empowerment programmes to improve the existing parenting practices through community base and non-governmental sustainable involvement.*

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### **Introduction**

Being a parent and raising children is the most fundamental and universal function that has prevailed as a common practice in all cultures throughout the world, though the practice of parenting differs across the world, however good parenting remain a phenomenon that is viable and desired for proper human and societal development. Parent is a symbolic word used to refer to father or mother whose role is to ensure that the needs and well being of offspring are adequately met. Therefore, parents are the most important figures whose single and combined role play can either promote or mar life chances of children. Conceptually, parenting is a biological and social process, or acts in which human beings generate their kinds and provide for their upkeep, needs and wellbeing. Unlike lower animals who within short time after birth regain control over their movement and capacity to engage in life sustaining and survival activities, human babies at birth are, vulnerable, in active and highly dependent on others for supports, for their survival and development throughout the transition period from birth to

adulthood. Taylor, Spencer and Baldwin (2000) indicated that the concept of good parenting is used to describe the characteristic that mark healthy child-parent relationships that would yield positive effect.

There is no one universally acceptable good parenting practice. Rather, good parenting is a multifaceted multidimensional and multifunctional activity involving display of several capacities ranging from personal attributes, behavior, physical disposition, emotions, interpersonal orientations, social values, demonstration, skills, and provision of services, training, education and competency. In Sokoto state just like other societies raising children is perceived as a traditionally and private domain of biological parents and the extended family members, but the involvement of extended family system is being affected by trend of modernization, independent mindedness, urbanization and so called civilization which viewed interference and intrusion by any outsider into family as a violation.

### **Contextual Definition of Terms**

Parenting is used in this context to refer to reproductive process in which an adult bear a new human being and thereby become responsible for fostering the baby to have an enduring peaceful, meaningful and successful life transition from infancy to adulthood. Parenting is more than a set of specific practices. It is about the overall approaches that parents take in guiding, controlling, socializing, training, and educating their children.

Childhood care is used to refer to all form of activities, programmes and provisions whether formal or informal, traditional or modern meant to ensure proper and adequate upkeep of young human species from neonate to end of puberty (0-12 years). This is because puberty is assumed to be the end of childhood period (Santrock 2007, Mangal 2008) and the age range for primary school education which is part of childhood education.

Good parenting refers to adequate and effective ways used in enhancing proper and general development of young human by biological or non-biological parents. The issue is that some people see parenting as a desirable role or activity they engage in with happiness, others viewed it as imposed, difficult and stressful burden, they try to neglect or avoid, while some are unprepared and unwilling to perform the role. This brings about the issue of good and bad parenting. Good parenting results in good upbringing of children with positive and desirable characteristics, while bad parenting result in bad upbringing of children with negative characteristics and consequences. In situation, where children are left at the mercy of uncaring, unconcerned and incompetent parents, or hostile family

members they become vulnerable to dangers and risks as they may subject the child to maltreatment, inadequate feeding, clothing, health care, persistent physical assault, sexual intrusion and any other form of child abuse. Similarly, poverty, stress and illness of parents operate as striking contributing factors compounding issues that constitute hazards to the child.

Degbey (2012) believed that the desire of every parent is to raise his / her children to become good and successful. But somehow some children grow up to become deviant, and problem not only to themselves but the society and humanity at large. The clue is there is need to permeate the good parenting practices and abandon those that are considered bad and harmful practices that yield no good to the child, parent and society.

### **Dimensions of parenting and child care practices in Sokoto state**

Actually, Sokoto people have their customary parenting and child care practices of which some are good, while some are harmful and detrimental to development and well being of children and need to be discarded for more beneficial ones. Islamic religion, being dominantly practiced by Sokoto people has entrenched adequate ethics and values to parenting. Actually, the only acceptable, viable and lawful way to bear a child that is accepted as legal child is through approved marriage, (Mujahid 2012). To this regard, it is a custom that parents in Sokoto marry the first wife for male children, while female children are married out early to avoid illegal and casual sex that may result in unwanted pregnancies, and children born out of wedlock are considered to be outcasts. This has to a large extent promoted the practice of children being born legally and the practice of unwanted pregnancies, abortion, illegal children and its intricacies safeguarded.

In Sokoto state the practice of motherhood is an associative role that is passed informally from generation to generation, as new mothers are introduced to the practice through socialization, stereotype roles, as girl child are involve in feeding, backing, caring and tendering their young siblings. It is also fostered by the custom that allows new mothers to go back to their parent's home to deliver their first born, where they stay for a period of forty days or more. She is exposed to established rites, norms and traditions of nurturing and childcare and the spirit of compliance, conformity, and respect to instruction given to them by parents and elderly in society to enhance the preservation of the customary rites and norms. In the same way, Keller (2000) indicated that mothers, especially primiparae, are often taught basic child psychology by elderly and experienced women, or by their mothers-in-law. These instructions range from issues of health concerns, to normative roles, for example, body movements especially during sleep are

believed to express messages from the ancestors identifying specific signals of illnesses.

The traditional practice of child delivery in Sokoto involve mother squatting on her leg and being attended to by traditional birth attendant, after successful delivery, the mother and child are subjected to traditional rites (e.g. burial of the placenta and navel stock, hot water bath, oiling, massaging and motor stimulation which contribute to development of muscle strength of the baby). The mother is also subjected to hot bath and hot food and pap made from grain and potash or herbs which is considered be beneficial to mother and child, as it is said to increase breast milk flow, The infant is carried almost the whole day on the lap, back and loins by caretakers and co-sleeps with the mother, other family members partake in surveillance and protection of the child. They are sensitive towards cries, negative signals, and needs of the child which are attended to immediately. Breastfeeding is major food for the baby until six to eight months before being introduced to soft food. There after 18 months to 2 years the child is weaned either by biological mother, maternal grandmother or other family relation.

Traditional child care provisions from the period of birth involve so many activities engaged by mother, father, sibling, and extended family members. The customary practices of informal education, instructions, guidance, errands, ceremonies, festivals, storytelling, folklores, disciplinary measures, play and game activities entrench physical, social, moral, mental, religious training and general wellbeing of children. In Sokoto state the practice of parenting begins from birth till when the child gets married and starts his or her own family. Customary, parenting role is a life span activity, parents are involved in their children's life in terms of provision of love, affection, security, social affiliation, material supply, financial, social and moral support, Traditionally, parents and their children have interwoven relation, roles and right on each other, though those of the parents supersede children as they have authority and power over their children as long as they are alive. The problem is not all the parents were able to fulfill their obligations and duties as enshrined by religion and culture toward their children. The prevailing practice of sending young children away from home for almajirci, or to serve as house boys/ girls, hawking, not enrolling children especially girl-child to formal schools constitute challenges to quality parenting and child care, resulting in delinquency, high rate of out of school children, abused and other negative behavioural trends in children

### **Dimension of Good Parenting and Effective Childcare**

Globally, it is accepted that good parenting matters much than anything in raising good children. The quality of parenting that children receive play immense role on

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their development, achievement and success in life. Studies and experts revealed that parenting can affect physiological and genetic system (Myers 2008) emotional stability (Santrock, 2001) social development (Santrock, 2007) and other behavioural outcome of children (Passer and Smith 2008). Hoghughi and Speight (1998) summarized the components of "good parenting" as the provision of love, care and commitment, control, consistent limit setting, and facilitation of development.

Current trends in globalization have provided insight in diversity of parenting approaches and the need to harmonize and device proper practical and desirable best practice in parenting without undermining the socio-cultural values that help individual to thrive toward attainment of personal, communal and societal development and progress. Courses and programmes are now available to help, initiate, train and equip parents with necessary parenting skills. Experts and research studies (Santrock 2001, Keller 2000, Cherry 2012) have distinguished different parental styles on three domains that constitute either effective or ineffective parenting based on their consequences on child development and wellbeing. It was discovered that the key to successful parenting are determined by parental responsiveness/warmth, psychological autonomy, behavioral control/demand. Parenting success is associated with the extent to which these elements are present in the parent-child relationship in relation to the three parenting styles:

Authoritarian parents are said to exhibit higher levels of control/demand, and lower levels of parental warmth and autonomy, and tend to raise children who are relatively discontent, withdrawn, and distrustful. The *permissive* parents exhibit lower levels of control/demand, and higher levels of warmth and autonomy, and tend to raise relatively less socially responsible and less independent children; and *authoritative* parents exhibit higher levels of control/demand, autonomy, and warmth, and tend to raise children who are socially responsible and independent. Most experts are of the opinion that an "authoritative" parenting style can be characterized as the benchmark for successful parenting. Research studies and findings by Michelle, Stone, Lou, Ling, Claassen, Austin, (2006) suggested that this style of parenting is related to increased child academic success and psychosocial maturity.

There are several additional ingredients for facilitating good parenting that will be effective in bearing, breeding and raising children with corresponding desirable positive qualities. These include

**Marital quality:** Good parenting depends on the type of relationship between the couples, because it is an association that is sustained with love, affection, mutual

understanding, respect, co-operation and togetherness, which will result in stability, happiness and satisfaction of spouses,. Lack of these are likely to lead to maladjustment, depression, disagreement and crisis in marital relationship, they can as well result to inconsistency in parenting roles and cause defect to children's development and wellbeing. Mothers seem to gain the most security when they are married and know the father is committed to a lifelong relationship to her and their child. Stacy (1996 a), collected data from a sample of 697, 8 to 12-year-old children from the 1988 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth were used. The results indicated that marital quality is significantly associated with mothers' parenting and children's outcomes in mother/father families. However, in mother/stepfather families, marital conflict is associated with mothers' parenting or children's outcomes.

**Family quality;** Another aspect of good parenting is determined by type of family and home environment. Family is supposed to be a home for its members otherwise it loose its value. Meeting up family responsibilities, spending quality time together, eating meals, having fun , telling stories, playing, talking and listening to children and giving them assurance and placing them in high priorities in the scheme of events are what make good family and home . In a study conducted with 10,000 teenagers in United States found that home environment is three times more important than school when it comes to academic success based on 18-years old test results ([www.telegraph.co.uk>Home>Education>Education](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/Home/Education/Education)).This might be because family relationships are interrelated. Han and Fox(2011) found that, teens in married stepfamilies or in single-mother families had 34 percent greater likelihood of smoking, and those in cohabiting stepfamilies had 97 percent greater likelihood of smoking. This further buttress the importance of intact married biological parent.

**Mother quality:** Mother is the most important figure to her child until he/she establishes a home of his or her own, though relatives, nannies, care centers are quite helpful but they cannot substitute mother completely or perfectly. There is strong neurobiological, psychological and emotional bond between mother and child that is activated right from conception, culminating into motherhood. Actually, motherhood is a very complex, life threatening and high risk task, yet most women believe they are incomplete if they cannot conceive and bear a child. The issue raised by this paper is not just being a mother, but being a good mother, which entails the following characteristics as described by Ddhanny (2013) as:

1. A good mother will always be there for her children, even when they are grown.
2. A mother thinks about her children long after they have “flown the nest”.

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3. A mother supports her children's dreams, even when they seem impossible.
  4. A mother loves her children in a way they will never understand until they have their own.
  5. A mother will defend her children against the world.
  6. A mother will take a bullet, catch a hand grenade, step in front of a train and ask God to take her instead of her child.
  7. A mother will always go the extra mile when it comes to her children; cupcakes for the baseball team or helping build a birdhouse.
  8. A mother will fix scraped knees, kiss away tears and try to mend broken hearts.
  9. A mother will love her children even when they hurt and neglect her.
  10. A mother will love her children 'to the moon and back' and more. They love with an unconditional love, much like God does. Her love is constant.

**Father quality** and good parenting: Accumulating social scientific evidences shows a multidimensional impact fathers play on family well-being. In particular, findings of Pehrson, and Robinson,(1990); Russell, (1997); Adams (2001) suggested that the key factor is the father's marital status. On average, parents and children tend to fare best when the father resides in the home and is married to the mother of his children. Young children experienced the most family stability when they were born to mothers who were married to their fathers than when born to cohabiting parents. Research evidences found that fathers' involvement and presence are crucial to their children's schooling outcomes, social, cognitive and verbal ability (Keller 200; Santrock2007).This means that fathers presence in the home, fathers' interactions sensitive, positive, and stimulating relationships are symbol of good parenting.

**Social welfare packages:** Some parents lack financial capacity required for raising children. Wolfe and Hirsch(2003), indicated that capacity building programmes and social welfare packages, especially for indigent families usually provide avenues for strengthening the quality of parenting and childcare provision in homes and childcare centers. According to Bavolek (2005) training for biological parents are needed to be provided at various stages of the child welfare services continuum, as a preventative measure to strengthen and preserve at-risk families and as a response to prevent the recurrence of child maltreatment either in intact families or in families where children have been placed in out-of-home care.

**Premarital Test of Compatibility:** Scientific findings have indicated that certain specific genes, especially those that code for neurotransmitter synthesis and functions, are being identified to constitute moderate parenting effects. Furthermore, studies Keller(2000), Mennen and Trickett (2006) suggested that the

expression of genes by epigenetic processes. chromosomal defects, genetic diseases, neurological ailments are transferred from parents to offspring and most of them are preventable through valid laboratory tests, and when they occur they are not curable or are very difficult to manage, some may constitute serious shortcoming and handicap to the innocent child, while some diagnostic test could help to avert, check and prevent such occurrences of bearing abnormal children, thereby averting the risk and problem of inadequate parenting and childcare..

**Quality child care centers:** In the event of undesirable parenting, death of parents or situation where parents cannot or are incapacitated to render their parenting functions, Abiodogun (2008) suggested supplementary and substitute to biological and home care are the quality child care centers that are equipped with professionals personnel, facilities, suitable conducive environment and atmosphere to cater for the general needs of the child. Studies by Michelle, Stone, Lou, Ling, Claassen and Austin(2006) revealed that sometime the alternative child care centers were found to be better than some home settings ,while child care providers are found to be more adequate than some parent in their services and delivery.

**Parent Education Programs.** The existence of quality parenting training sessions and Parent education programs, whether explicit or implicit, assume an underlying theory of action; that is, intervening with parents directly to improve parenting skills and capacities, child outcomes, and, reduce the future risk of maltreatment. Michelle, *et al* (2006) reported that over 500,000 children are in out-of-home care and more than a million families were receiving child welfare services to maintain the safety and well-being of their children in their homes, it is apparent that large numbers of parents engage in behaviors that are determined to be harmful to their children. They estimated that approximately 850,000 families in the U.S. participate in voluntary or court-mandated parent education programs each year, and the impact has been tremendous.

### **Dimension of inadequate parenting**

Some parenting practices prevalent in the society are inadequate therefore, need rethink and repairs. The practice of girl-child marriage and motherhood, broken homes, non-resident fathers, inadequate compatibility testing, harsh and abusive parenting of young children has lasting effects on children. lack of parenting programmes which are effective in increasing the security of infant children's attachments, and reducing conduct problems, antisocial behaviour in childhood constitute another problem area, because evidences available shows that formal training and assessment for effective parenting qualities among the population



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help to prevent different dimension of child abuse (Mennen and Trickett 2006). Some causes and manifestation of inadequate parenting are:

**Inter-generational trajectory and recycling:** This explains the vicious cycle in which inadequate parenting skills and practices are passed from one generation to another. However not all ancient or traditional parenting practices are bad (Amos 2012; Degbey, 2012). Studies of America Hamaker (2013) and (Narvaez (2013) revealed that ancient parenting practices have been shown to induce stress reactivity, impulse control, empathy, social capacities, aggression, IQ, and ego resilience. Hamaker (2013) indicated that modern parenting do hinder brain development. This was manifest in many preteens and teens attitudes, lack resiliency and hard work as evidenced in worsening life outcomes and higher rates of mental and emotional disease in American youth. Narvaez (2013) indicated that life outcomes for American youth are worsening, especially in comparison to 50 years ago.

**Personality construct:** Some people are constrained in being good parents by their personality attributes, physical disposition, traits and temperaments. When parent lack behavioural practical, technical and economic capacity, then proper parenting become only a factor of mere chance. It seem that bearing children is practiced as normative or automatic activity that people do even criminals carelessly, as the issue is once you are fertile you just bear children for the fun of it, without thinking about the demands and consequences of your actions commission and omissions, thus children are left to suffer the consequences that is due to deficiency and inefficiency of their parents. The prevailing high rate of child mortality, out of school children, indigent and street children, homeless children, are clear demonstration of inadequate parenting because definitely they have parent and relatives who failed to meet the expected demands of good parenting for whatever reason.

**Occupational demands:** In tune with national demand for education and capacity building of human personnels to meet the demand of varying occupational world. More people are into educational pursuits, training and employment, some are separated from their spouses leading to inadequacy and improper parenting, because though supply of food and shelter are basic need that can met easily, but they are not the ultimate needs of children from their parents. Hoghughi and Speight (2011) summarized some other components of "good parenting" as the provision of love, care and commitment; control, consistent limit setting; and facilitation of development. Which non- resident parent may not be able to deliver causing problem to the children. The situation is worsen where both parents have to be absent from home at the same time for schooling, training, business or job

and children are left in the custody of incompetent care givers, nannies, or inadequate day care centers. .

**Lack of access to antenatal and postnatal care:** some pregnant women do not attend antenatal care to access adequate professional guide and care with its attendant consequences. Nigeria remains marked by a fairly high child mortality rate of 138 per 1,000 live births. Although the government has made noticeable efforts in the field of maternal healthcare, much is yet to be done in order to improve the situation of thousands of women and young children. 30 per cent of all Nigerian children under the age of five are underweight (SOS, 2013).

**Demographic and health problem:** Hoghugh and Speight (1998) disclosed that some parents are poor and indigent thus making them not to be good enough parents, while Taylor, Spencer and Baldwin (2000) indicated that social, economic, medical and political contexts are problems that lead to inadequate parenting. This is manifested in poverty, deprivation, difficulty in meeting family needs leading to inefficiency in parenting. Some children are exposed to dirty, unhygienic, unhealthy, insecurity and environmental hazards making them vulnerable to dangers and harms. SOS (2013) reported that in Nigeria, around 360,000 children live with HIV/AIDS. The pandemic is one of the greatest threats to compliance with child rights. Children whose parents are HIV-positive face multiple vulnerabilities, such as becoming infected themselves, the fear of losing parental care, social discrimination and neglect. Overall, HIV/AIDS is a major cause of the deepening poverty in the country.

**Disintegrated or separated parent.** . Children are very attached to parents; any form of separation can have adverse consequences on them. Some parents, due to misunderstanding, quarrels, disputes and discrepancies between them, decide to quit the union, which is highly detrimental to proper parenting and child care service provisions. Available evidence shows that early and prolonged separation from mothers has attendance negative consequences on children such as excessive and persistent cries, difficulty to comfort, difficulty to feed, difficulty to foster, to be adopted. This is because parenting attachment is somehow instinctual, innate, inborn characteristics enhanced by biosocial and developmental nurturing, humans have practiced since they came on this planet.

**Non-Married or Cohabiting couples :** Single parents and unwed couples are trends that inhibit good parenting and childcare, though this is a rare practice in Sokoto because the family institution is still very strong in rejecting any form of unmarried cohabitation. But in some societies, marriage as a foundation for family life has become controversial (Carlson, Pilkauskas, McLanahan and Brooks-Gunn (2011)). More and more people are cohabiting or living together before marriage or

as an alternative to marriage (Keller, Voelker and Youvsi (2005). More couples also are having children without marrying, this have negative effects on children.

**Modernity and civilization:** Narvaez (2012) indicated that the use of infant formula, use of diapers, the isolation of infants in their own rooms or the belief that responding too quickly to a fussing baby will 'spoil' it," are part of ill-advised practices and beliefs that have become common practices in our homes and culture. Among urban affluent parents there is reported less parent /child attachment rather infants spend much more time in with nannies, carriers, car seats and strollers as against being carried, backed in the past. Narvaez(2012)reported that only about 15 percent of mothers are breast feeding at all by 12 months. Also extended families are broken up, un guided free play, computer games, internet browsing, watching films by children are allowed by parents despite their adverse effects.

Other factors associated which inhibit adequate parenting and childcare are, socially isolated family, poor family, illiteracy, ignorance, unemployment, crime, substance abuse, and chronically ill parent. Passer and Smith (2008) reported that recent development in research on infant brain stimulation suggest that newborns require appropriate nurturing in calm home environment. Children who spend their first years in a home where there is frequent violence, shouting, chaos, or unpredictability, develop brains that are acutely attuned to warning signals and this hyper-vigilance can impair their capacity to use language, to concentrate and to learn. While infants whose parent refrain from touching and talking to them or ignore their cries are likely to develop passive brains and are unlikely to achieve their intellectual potentials. Parenting practices of, harshness, punitive disciplinary measures, physical and corporal punishment as against praise, incentive, reward and positive verbal discipline. Child abuse and child labour, child hawkers ,houseboy house girl and almajirci are some common practices against children.SOS village (2012), reported that around 15 million children under the age of 14 work in Nigeria, many of them under extremely hazardous conditions. They do so for little or no pay while missing out a decent education.

Other related issues are crises and complexities of social phenomena, such as choaos, conflicts, communal disputes, wars, social injustice and competing societal demands for government support, as well as the issue of Boko- haram, insurgencies, kidnapping, robbery, high rate of corruption and economic problems, social and ethnic discriminations, are issues affecting proper parenting and childcare coupled with inadequate support and concern from government not only in Sokoto state but the country Nigeria at large

## **Suggestions**

The truth is that there is no one clear cut or one perfect practice on parenting and child care that is universally applicable. Rather suggested best practices as proposed by experts in the field of child care education should be resorted to, in this regard this paper provide the following suggestions.

There is need to introduce community based parenting education and training to be provided by organized body of experts such as sociologists, psychologists, guidance and counsellors, and stake holders in children wellbeing, where interpersonal and intrapersonal skills are either in workshops, community gathering, festivities and ceremonies.

Each society should introduce as part of marriage rites and naming ceremonies, premarital counseling, orientation programmes for prospective couple or newly wedded, similarly new parents should be acquainted with up to date knowledge and skills on quality parenting practices, intrapersonal and interpersonal skills required to be possessed by parents.

Quality parenting and child care training and skills should be made compulsory in all secondary and tertiary institutions thought by competent experts. This will ensure learners posses the necessary ingredients demanded of good parenting as they are all likely to be parents. And those from poor or inadequate parenting will learn the better ways of parenting rather than repeating how they raised.

To ensure quality parenting, family support programmes, welfare packages, entrepreneurship and skill acquisition programmes should be made available by government, corporate, philanthropic and non- governmental organizations to promote the financial capacity of unemployed and poor families and parents.

There should sanctions and regulatory body to ensure and prosecute parent who are found to careless and improperly dispensing their parenting obligations.

Rethink on the use of negative reinforcement punishment; according to experts in psychology, time outs and punishments, does not only close opportunity to learn, but they are emotionally draining and frightening to children. Parents should stop the use of Harsh words, isolation, yelling, physical aggression as they all shuts down the child's ability to learn and imbibe positive disciplinary measures, children behave well when they feel encouraged, capable and emotionally well. Children need guidance and acceptance, especially if we want to be able to influence their behavior and shape it into a positive one

## Conclusion

Children are like chameleon they can change into any dimension based on the handling, training and opportunities upon to them. Similarly, children are like raw materials, while parenting can be equated to manufacturing and refinery process to change the raw material to any kind of product we want. A dull child can be changed into an intelligent child likewise a bad child into a good one. Actually, bearing, raising and training children could be an over whelming and stressful, but it is also an interesting and most rewarding role when they become successful adults later in life. As such it is time to rethink about changing the current devastating phenomenon of parenting and child care. The trends of child neglect and abuses in its various manifestations resulting in negative consequences need to be stopped. Good parenting should be practiced as a responsibility by all adults to all children. The paper concludes that the best insurance for a bright future is good parenting.

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