

Why Children Misbehave

By Urmila Devi Dasi

WHY DO CHILDREN disobey or get into mischief? We might assume they're simply rebellious, but that's rarely the case. Let's discuss some possible causes of misbehavior.

The Lower Modes

Lord Krsna explains in *Bhagavad-gita* that material nature is composed of three modes: goodness, passion, and ignorance. Everything is in one of these modes or a combination of them—food, work, games, books, clothing, knowledge, relationships, time of day, and so forth. Children whose environment is mostly in goodness will be generally good, whereas those whose environment is mostly in passion and ignorance will be full of those qualities. For example, an environment in ignorance would be one in which children go to bed and awaken late, watch violent and sexual movies, are served meat and intoxicants (such as caffeine-laden sodas), and are surrounded by insults and fighting. Goodness supports spiritual development; the two lower modes obstruct it.

Hypocrisy

Children living in a spiritually enlivening atmosphere will rarely rebel. Sometimes children rebel because they see hypocrisy, such as non-spiritual behavior in a parent, teacher, or leader instructing them in Krsna consciousness. Such rebellion comes typically in early adolescence, when a child's intelligence expands to understand the nature of adult society. All adults can't be perfect, but we can strive for the ideal, while honestly admitting our mistakes.

Wrong Reaction

Sometimes a child who's rarely treated with affection will act out of line just to get noticed. I've seen children say nasty or disgusting things to make adults angry. The adult's reaction may be negative, but for a love-starved child any emotion may be better than nothing. These children need unemotional instruction when they're unruly, and plenty of love and affection the rest of the time.

Unregulated Life

When children are sick, tired, or hungry, they often don't show their needs like adults and may become rude and uncooperative. Children chronically late to bed are often chronically disobedient as well. Children who eat and sleep irregularly can be difficult because they are always tired and hungry. Regulated eating and sleeping, which Krsna recommends in the *Gita*, is often a simple key to good behavior in a child.

Poor Training

It may seem unbelievable, but some parents and teachers actually train children to disobey, be rude, have tantrums, and so forth. Children learn to act in ways that earn them some kind of "reward." For example, if when a child insults or threatens the parents they give in to the child's demands, the child is being trained to be nasty, as much as an animal is trained to roll over and jump to get food.

Misunderstood Natures

Sometimes what seems to be misbehavior in a child isn't so at all. Adults with little knowledge of the normal behavior of children at different ages may mislabel a child's actions. In addition, every child has an inborn psychology. We commonly think that our particular way of perceiving and relating to the world is ideal, but our child may have a different, equally valid way of doing so. For example, a parent may be reserved, deliberate, and task-oriented, and the child may be lively, outgoing, and people-oriented. To the parent, the child may seem scattered, frivolous, irresponsible, and uncooperative. The parent must learn that every nature can be directed to the Lord's service. A mother satisfied to sit and sew quietly for the Deity might find that her daughter is happier planning a festival.

Bad Examples

One of the most serious mistakes an adult can make is to cut down a child's other adult authorities. If a parent criticizes a child's teacher, the child will think, "Why do I have to do my work or show respect? My parents will take my side." And in families where one parent frequently comes between the child and the other parent, children never learn to cooperate.

We must also be careful not to project our own problems onto children when we are sick, tired, hungry, or uninspired.

When we address the underlying causes of difficulty for our children, we will find that our usual relationship with them is one of peaceful cooperation, helping us and them to advance more easily in Krsna consciousness.

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