

[Parenting Part II](#)

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Parenting Part II

In part one we heard the voices of four parents from Madras who shared how they handled 12 sensitive areas of child-raising. Now four parents from the USA offer their approach to the same questions.

What were three values you taught your children?

Prof. T.K. Venkateswaran (TKV): Deep spirituality, not just shallow religiousness; sensitivity to others; and freedom in their decision-making process wherever it may lead them.

Mrs. Kunda Kane (KK): Ethics, honesty and hard work.

Dr. Kamalkant Mittal (KM): Moral value, financial discipline-that is, not to be wasteful-and also neatness.

Mrs. Raji Murthy (RM): Honesty, faith and love.

What were the most important Hindu teachings you gave them?

TKV: Seeing others in yourself, a deep sense of prayerfulness and doing one's

duty to the best. I'm not the kind who says my children have to meditate or do puja at a set time. I do not regiment them.

RM: Accepting everybody and accepting other religions. And looking on others with love.

KM: We got our kids initiated into Paramahansa Yogananda's Self-Realization Fellowship. It has influenced their behavior quite a bit. Strong values are derived from teachings based on Veda.

KK: Celebrating Diwali. Because we belong to an organization, they have lots of programs when friends can get together, etc. It's very colorful.

Was there regular worship in your home?

TKV: My wife and I had our daily prayers and meditation, but I never required our children to attend.

RM: On special occasions, I would have puja at home. Pujas are important, but I emphasize that one should not get hung up on rituals. Sunita attended Bal Vihar at the temple when they built one here. I taught there for ten years.

KM: Nothing! We don't even eat together. But we went to the temple every Sunday for service and meditation. I meditate regularly. My grandfather did and it influenced me.

KK: Yes, we prayed and we liked them to be there. It's important that kids be taught that there is a Supreme Being.

Did you ever strike your children to discipline them?

TKV: We could not bring ourselves to do that. My wife and I both feel it is not right. If we teach sensitivity, we should practice it, not just to adults. Hitting one's kids goes against Hinduism and ahimsa, the principle of noninjury.

RM: I believe spanking in certain situations is ok, but I have never spanked my kids. Daddy spanked them on a very few occasions. When our daughter Sindhu would be argumentative, I have seen him raise his hand, but never hit her.

KM: I do not believe in any kind of corporal punishment whatsoever. I think that if words and eyes can't convey what you want to tell them, then hitting isn't going to get through either.

KK: Never. I don't think anyone should be treated that way. I wasn't hit and neither would I.

Did you permit them to date?

TKV: We did not set any guidelines for dating. I didn't ask them what was going on. I trusted them.

RM: I feel I was too strict on Sindhu, because of Daddy. Fathers feel they "know what boys do" and so they don't like boys near their daughters. But when I was a girl and went to the movies, etc. no one ever treated me with disrespect.

KM: One guideline. No sex. Be home by midnight. But the kids didn't have to be told. They knew what the standard was. They had to be home early, because I could not sleep while my daughter was still out.

KK: Yes, I allowed it. Never restricted my kids. Both are happy and doing very well. My daughter is at Yale University in graduate school and my son is at UC Berkeley.

Did you set any restrictions about marriage selection?

TKV: We told them marriage was an important thing and compatibility is easier within one's own culture but the final decision was left up to them.

RM: My husband and I decided not to get involved in their marriage selection because I had heard so many stories of arranged marriages ending in divorce. They are all now married and happy.

KM: I think they should find someone within our culture because that's closest to who they are, and the less changing you are forced to do the better.

KK: No. No. No. They may marry whomever they please.

What was the most important thing you learned from your parents?

TKV: I learned to be loving to one's children but detached. This is not being irresponsible. It is respecting kids because each one has their own karmic pattern. The relationship is custodial, not possessive.

RM: Whenever my father had to scold us, he would take us to a separate room and talk with us there. This made me trust and respect him. Most kids get scolded in front of everyone. This is humiliating.

KM: My parents were not very rich, an average, ordinary UP family. So I learned not to accept being average, ordinary-academically, financially or spiritually.

KK: Maybe just love I guess. They put it in me to help me do my very best.

For mothers-Did you work during child-raising years? For fathers-Did you decide your son's career?

TKV: I let him choose. Even my father let me do what I wanted. Kids resent it when parents choose and ignore their feelings, leading to violent conflicts. My son is now a geologist/physicist leading an international team to explore oil in India. He excelled from his own interest.

RM: I did work. I worked as a nurse in a hospital. But I don't think it changed the quality of the kids' time with me. I got involved in everything they did. I was always there. I used to skip my coffee break and lunch and come home to feed them and talk with them.

KM: Absolutely his choice. He can decide what he wants to do as a profession. He's gotten involved in many activities, and he's very popular. So now he wants to go into mass communications, and I said alright.

KK: Yes. It was extremely stressful. If I had it to do over again, I wouldn't work. It's absolutely too stressful. We always want to do so much-for our kids and husbands. We're brought up that way. But my kids are glad I worked. They didn't want a mom who just cooked.

Did you talk about sex matters openly?

TKV: I trusted them to decide what is right. They can figure it out and learn

whether it was right or wrong. I left this area to them and would do it again the same.

RM: I didn't talk to them thinking they would be doing "it." They knew how I felt. Today's kids need to teach morals and values to ones younger than themselves.

KM: It's all around them, so we didn't really converse about it. Also, I don't want to be my kids' friend. God didn't intend parents to be friends of the child.

KK: Well, probably not. You can't just teach these things. We met weekly with other Indian families and shared experiences and difficulties. Kids do listen.

Did you set dress rules?

TKV: No rules.

RM: I didn't have to. Sindhu never wore make-up until college. Then one day she came home and her hair was colored orange! I threw my kitchen towel on her head. "Everyone's doing it," she said.

KM: The only time I had a problem was when Parul came home with a "perm." I didn't like it. My wife told me I upset her a lot because she spent three hours trying to straighten out all the curls.

KK: I would have objected to hair dyed a strange color, etc. but they are both normal suburban kids, so I didn't have to worry.

Hardest part of raising children outside India?

TKV: In 1959, the challenges were less difficult than in this decade. Our challenge was trying to understand the American culture and relate that to home.

RM: Kids spend their most important time outside the home, and they are naturally going to pick up this culture. They can be both Hindu and American.

KM: When they go through the 10-16 period. We are terrified they may get into drugs and sex. But most Indian kids are very good and focused on their goals.

KK: I didn't have any problems. We wanted them to feel comfortable with American culture. When we came to Berkeley, Vani on her own got into Indian culture.

What did your children protest the most?

TKV: No protests. In that day and age, kids' wants and demands were not as much in this culture as they are today. I provided them with what they needed, and toys.

RM: Lots of arguments. They wanted freedom. I tried to find a balance. When we were in the car, we played Indian music one way and their music the other.

KM: They didn't argue much with us. When Parul was invited to the prom, the Indian boy's mom called us first. Beyond that, it is their life and I don't interfere.

KK: They had no objections. They could see I was doing my best.

How did you respond to the "When in Rome, do as the Romans" logic?

TKV: Back then there was no drug culture like today. We provided a religious atmosphere. My daughter went to Germany in the Air Force. Many people couldn't accept a brahmin girl doing this.

RM: I have no objection about acting as a Roman when in Rome, as long as they keep a standard in thinking. Every culture has morals. Your behavior shows where you come from.

KM: When Rahul came back from Germany, he showed us pictures of him with beer. "What kind of beer should I stock for you," I asked. He was so embarrassed. He knew it was not correct behavior.

KK: I have no problem with that. I give my children freedom.