

Educare Meet 6th August 2016

Raising a village to raise a child By Bala Govinda Dasa bgd@voicepune.com

Prabhupāda: Yes. Yes. Yes. That is the duty of the father and mother. Along with that (*teaching/training their own children*), he (*the parents*) can teach others also. These things are to be organized. But some way or other, our students should be given education and spiritual life, Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Individually, collectively, somehow or other.

Room conversation with Srila Prabhupada – July 31, 1976. New Mayapura (*Italics added for giving the context*)

Summary:

There is great need to offer quality education, culture and spiritual inspiration to children within and outside our ISKCON communities. This chapter gives ideas and tools of how to form small (“educators’ and parents’ association”) groups of devotees to cater to this need (In case of non-availability of such members even an individual/ a couple can still use some of these ideas and tools).

Introduction

The traditional African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child” has been widely quoted when examining the partnerships required during the maturation of our youth. Our “village” has never been as face-paced, instant gratification centered, and pressure-packed! Today’s children are faced with a myriad of both challenges and opportunities. Navigating parenthood can be a daunting undertaking – partnerships and supports are necessary to prepare our children for tomorrow.

We are blessed at ISKCON Pune to have wonderful support from the leadership, strong community partners and a true village approach i.e. we must work together, look out for each other’s children, and have the difficult conversations. The devotees are eager to be active partners with the mission ‘to develop servant leaders to perpetuate our Vaisnava parampara’. At ISKCON Pune we call this group **educators’ & parents’ association (EPA)** that conducts **Educare meetings** - “the educator’s think tank”.

There is synergy of energy, commitment, and excitement. The beauty of this ‘education-care’ group is that participants raise the bar by challenging each other to create and implement goals, brainstorm ideas, and support each other with total honesty, respect and service. They act as catalysts for growth, devil’s advocates and supportive colleagues.

Purpose of the educators' & parents' association:

The concept of the Mastermind Group was formally introduced by Napoleon Hill in the early 1900's. In his book, "Think And Grow Rich" he wrote about the Mastermind principle as: "The coordination of knowledge and effort of two or more people, who work toward a definite purpose, in the spirit of harmony. No two minds ever come together without thereby creating a third, invisible intangible force, which may be likened to a third mind." Nowadays *masterminding* process is often misused by materialistic people for fulfilling their selfish needs. We better put it to use to further the goals of the Krishna Consciousness Movement.

Scriptures talk of power of devotees coming together with a specific purpose of offering pure devotional service to Lord Krishna...

nāham tiṣṭhāmi vaikunṭhe yoginām hṛdayeṣu vā
yatra gāyanti mad-bhaktāḥ tatra tiṣṭhāmi nārada

"My dear Nārada, I do not dwell in Vaikuṅṭha or in the hearts of the yogī, but wherever My devotees sing glories of devotional service" (Padma Purāṇa).

When devotees, intensely desiring to serve, come together & share their ideas, expertise, resources etc., the Lord Himself manifests in that association. And miracles happen.

What happens in the EPA meetings?

In the meeting of this EPA, the agenda belongs to the group, and each person's participation is key. Your peers give you feedback, help you brainstorm new possibilities, and set up accountability structures that keep you focused and on track. You will create a community of supportive colleagues who will brainstorm together to move the group to new heights. You'll gain tremendous insights, which can improve your parenting ability and devotional experience for the children in your community.

What do participants get from it?

- Answers and ideas, differing perspectives to gain better understanding
- Tap into the experience, resources and skills of others
- Increased confidence that you've made the right decisions and are taking the right actions to achieve your goals
- Accountability and real progress in your parenting services and personal life
- An instant and valuable support network
- A sense of shared endeavor - there are others out there!
- Design things to be the way you want them to be, not as you've been told they "should" be
- A boost to your everyday positive mental attitude

Parenting is the easiest thing in the world to have an opinion about, but the hardest thing in the world to do. – Matt Walsh

Who Should Attend the EPA meetings?

We keep this group small. Ideally 5 to 8, maximum 12 members. This group is of committed people who will give time in furthering educational objectives of local devotees' sanga (not just parents who are worried about their child's current scenario).

The key description is "mutual beneficiaries" who have similar drive and commitment, have diverse skill sets, and are problem solvers.

Because of the group nature, a commitment is required. Look for highly-motivated people who are willing to ask for -- and give -- help and support, and are willing to show up for every meeting.

To begin with, they are able to give at least 2 hrs. per month (then eventually per week) for this service. 1 hr. for participation in the meetings and 1 hrs. for acting on the ideas and tasks assigned to them during the week. Each group member must specialise eventually in some aspect of educational/ cultural/ spiritual training.

Procedure for conducting the group meetings:

EPA Group can meet in person, on the telephone, or via online message boards, on Skype/ Google hangouts etc. For those groups that meet in person or on the phone, typically a once-a-month meeting is scheduled in the beginning. As the group becomes evolved they can meet more often. Best is to meet weekly once for at least 1 hour.

Appoint a facilitator:

As far as possible, have a skilled and knowledgeable facilitator. Someone who is capable of running excellent meetings, holding the group accountable, and brainstorming with the members to find solutions to thorny problems will enhance the group. He is the person creates trust and rapport in the group, helps the members coach and advise each other, assists members in creating powerful goals, and hold members accountable. In group meetings he guides the group to deeper levels of discussion and manage any problems that arise among group members that threaten the harmony of the group.

Agree on ground rules that ensure everyone benefits from these meetings and doesn't feel stifled.

Meet Regularly, Start and End on time.

Give each member a chance to share their wisdom, resources and needs

Facilitate a discussion and lead certain thought process.

Capture. Make sure you capture what happened at each meeting – lessons and triumphs, goals, services to be done and items you want to keep each other accountable to.

Three Question to Jump Start Your EPA meeting:

As your group evolves, you'll come up with your own agenda and questions that you'd like each member to answer – but if you don't know where to begin, here is a great way to start:

- **What Are You Working On in your service as a parent or an educator?** Nice and broad, and each member can answer with whatever they feel comfortable sharing.
- **What Did You Learn?** Very often group members are focused on similar goals, and lessons learnt by one member benefit all of us.
- **What Do You Need Help With?** By having a specific question on the agenda, this helps take pressure off the members who want to reach out to the group for help.

What do we actually DO with what we gain here?

EPA generally has 3 types of outcomes:

Mantra - thought, philosophical paradigm with which we work

Tantra - techniques, systems developed based on the mantra

Yantra - physical devices, forums, schools, projects etc. manifestation of mantra moderated by tantra.

After each meeting we can consolidate what we learn in mantra, tantra, and yantra format. Then assign a member to work on that aspect further.

Make 3 categories of ideas and actions churned out - we did it, tried it & thought about it

Structure:

Let me present a sample of one such meeting that we conduct at ISKCON Pune:

EPA group Meeting: Every 2nd n 4th Sunday 2 to 3.30 pm. We have 8 members.

5 min – Kirtan/ Prayers

5 min - Begin with a relevant quote or anecdote from Srila Prabhupada

Begin by sharing good news of EPA's accomplishments and individual appreciations
announce the outline of today's meeting

20 min talk - by the member who comes prepared on a certain predefined topic
He/ she also shares hand-outs/ resources -text, ppt, audio, video, websites etc.

15 min group discussion on the same topic - with a precise query to explore.

40 min- each member accounts for what have they done, what are their future plans and what help do they need from the group. Others comment or commit what help or solutions they can offer. (Around 5 minutes per person to share)

5 min – conclude by displaying out the key lessons, ideas and services discussed and assigned. Later everyone gets an email of these MOMs. The facilitator gives a gentle push to complete the tasks assigned.

Every 3rd Sunday –“Janasamparka” (public awareness) meet with the rest of the community members to enrich their understanding and/or practices and to involve them in EPA projects.

Following are some services the EPA group can generate:

Visit n study various ISKCON/ non ISKCON communities or educational setups
Learn from them mantras, tantras and yantras that address EPA’s needs, interests and concerns.

Share wisdom, practices, resources related to field of education

Study appropriate audio, video, text materials related to education, culture and Krishna consciousness – build a common library.
Support & Synergise our efforts in educational services

Invite one devotee expert in education, culture and Krishna conscious training field on the forum and learn from him/ her

Conducting value education classes in neighbourhood schools, cultivating children and their parents in KC

Arranging visits of local school children to our communities/ temples to give them an experience of Vedic culture.

Create awareness in devotee community - articles, newsletter, monthly get together etc.

Conduct surveys: In our congregation, how many children of diff age group have?

How many congregation members having hands-on experience with teaching children

Who are ready to volunteer in EPA services?

How to match talents and tasks at hand?

Put up Exhibitions of EPA’s ideas/ research and activities for the local community

Support various ISKCON and non ISKCON educational initiatives after thoughtful planning n preparation

Training sessions for parents and teachers

Build a blog/ Website to share all these groups’ ideas, tools and activities

Cultivate various educationists, government officials related to education department, teachers, principals, school owners etc. and make them favourable to Krishna consciousness. Collaborate with them where appropriate and produce quality service for

Srila Prabhupada's movement such as Gita contests, Summer camps, various competitions, cultural festivals etc.

Partnering with families, grandparents, neighbours, teachers, preachers, doctors, employers, politicians, non-profits, other faith communities, businesses, and international governmental groups.

Possibilities are endless... But in short, work at raising an entire village... to raise a child.

Conclusion:

Getting started or organizing the educational, cultural and spiritual offerings to children within ISKCON communities is a pressing need of the hour, everywhere. Deciding the immediate and long range goals, strategic planning, what people and resources are needed, their responsibilities and interrelationships, effective mantras – ideas, tantras – systems and yantras – projects/ structures to be hammered out... etc. is not a single persons/ couple's job.

Parents have the primary responsibility for providing for their children's needs. But putting together a village – an educationally, culturally and spiritually harmonious community furthering common goals will strengthen the bonds between children, parents, educators, ISKCON and Lord Sri Krishna.

I consider this Gurukula School to be one of our most important aspects of this movement and it should be given all serious consideration by the members. If we are able to make a whole generation of our children into fine Krishna Conscious preachers, that will be the glory of our movement and the glory of your country as well. But if we neglect somehow or other and if we lose even one Vaisnava, that is very great loss. So I am very glad that you are taking your business very seriously...

Srila Prabhupada's Letter to: Stoka Krishna, Los Angeles 20 June, 1972