

VIII. CHILDREN

Compiled from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l

Original English



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A. Adopted Children and Orphans

1. "He that Bringeth Up His Son or the Son of Another..."

"...He that bringeth up his son or the son of another, it is as though he hath brought up a son of Mine; upon him rest My Glory, My loving-kindness, My Mercy, that have compassed the world."

(Bahá'u'lláh: The Kitab-i-Aqdas, K. 48, p. 37)

1. Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá Laud Those Who Adopt Children

"It was a pleasure to Shoghi Effendi to receive your letter of May 26th and to hear about your adopted children. This is a truly Bahá'í act especially as it was often lauded both by Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá, and the Guardian trusts that they will grow to become Bahá'í workers, and thus repay your kind generosity."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, June 20, 1931)

1. Adopted Child and Its Natural Parents¹

"It is clear that the separation of a child from its natural parents is a tragedy that society must do its best to prevent or mitigate. It is also clear that in certain cases the actual separation may be better for the child than to continue living with a parent whose conduct and character make him unworthy of this sacred function, for the Guardian has explicitly stated that the severing of family ties and renunciation of responsibilities between parents and the children is, in certain cases, permissible under the law of God, but that the Universal House of Justice has to make the law governing such matters."

"Whenever the law of the land or the agreement of adoption prohibits future contact between an adopted child and its natural parents, the Bahá'í law does not require the child to seek the consent of those parents to its marriage."

"In the situation, however, where contact with the natural parent is permitted, it should be a matter of wise discretion at what stage contact, in cases where it has been broken, should be re-

1. Laws of Marriage, Parental Consent, 1231-1254)



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established. Just as love for one person need not reduce the love one bears to another, so unity with the adoptive parents need not destroy or reduce the unity a child has with its natural parents, or vice versa. The characters and attitudes of the individuals concerned will have an effect upon this...."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, February 17, 1971)

1. A Bahá'í Cannot Take Vow to Educate Adopted Child in Another Religion

"A Bahá'í may not undertake a vow which commits him to any action contrary to the principles of the Faith [pg 142]

"Furthermore, if it is necessary to go through the Catholic marriage ceremony for the sake of the adoption, Mrs. ... must make it clear to the church authorities that she is a Bahá'í, intends to remain a Bahá'í, and that she cannot undertake any vow which is contrary to the laws and principles of her Faith."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, November 26, 1964)

1. A Bahá'í Who Swears to Rear His Children in Another Faith is Subject to Administrative Sanction

"...no Bahá'í can conscientiously swear to bring up his children in another religion; and of course he has no right to lie; therefore it becomes impossible for him to make such a promise on his marriage to a non-Bahá'í. Any Bahá'í doing this should be deprived of his voting rights; and, as he has already made plain before, Bahá'ís who go to the church and are married as Christians must also of necessity be deprived of their voting rights."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the European Teaching Committee, May 13, 1956)

1. Duty Towards Orphans

"In this holy Cause the question of orphans hath the utmost importance. The greatest consideration must be shown towards orphans; they must be taught, trained and educated. The Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, especially, must by all means be given to them as far as possible."

"I supplicate God that thou mayest become a kind parent to orphaned children, quickening them with the fragrances of the Holy Spirit, so that they will attain the age of maturity as true servants of the world of humanity and as bright candles in the assemblage of mankind."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Bahá'í Education, p. 46)



B. Godparents or Co-Parenthood

1. Bahá'ís Serving as Godparents

"In answer to your letter of 28 September 1984 on the above subject, the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to send you the following guidelines."

"The position of 'godparent' varies considerably from country to country, and from one Christian denomination to another."

"In many cases it involves the godparent in participation in a religious service as a member of the church in question, and in assumption of the obligation to bring the child up in the teachings of that church. It is clearly impossible for a Bahá'í to become a godparent in such circumstances. However, where individuals have undertaken vows as godparents prior to becoming Bahá'ís, the Faith does not require them to disavow their promise, but the new Bahá'í should inform the parents of his change in religion so that they may make a change in godparents if they so desire."

"In some countries a godfather or godmother is regarded by most people simply as a good friend of the family who sends gifts to the child annually. If that were all, there would, of course, be no objection to a Bahá'í's accepting [pg 143] to be a godfather or godmother. However, even in such countries it is likely that, beyond assuming this responsibility, the godparent would have to take part in the baptismal ceremony of the infant and, although many nominal Christians may treat such matters very lightly, a Bahá'í should be aware of the solemnity with which the church regards the rite and should not assume an undertaking which he cannot fulfil or do anything which would imply a denial of his faith."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Switzerland, November 4, 1984)

1. Bahá'í Couple Should Not Have Their Child Baptized

"The House of Justice has noted your strong emphasis upon the social and economic aspects of co-parenthood in your country, and your mention of the religious basis for the custom. While the diminution of Christian fervor among the rank and file of Dominicans may be great, nevertheless the baptismal origin and other religious aspects of godparenthood cannot be minimized, particularly for rural people who may well be under pressure from parish priests. Your Assembly understands that a conscientious Bahá'í couple must not have their children baptized, nor should Bahá'ís ordinarily participate as godparents in a baptismal ceremony for this also may seem to imply their affiliation with the church...."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Dominican Republic, February 17, 1980)

1. A Bahá'í May Become Godparent of a Non-Bahá'í Child if Conditions Are Clear

"You ask whether a Bahá'í may 'become the godparent of the child of a non-Bahá'í if he made it clear that he is a Bahá'í, cannot promise to bring up the child in the Catholic religion, is not affiliated with the Church...'. He may do so, for in such a case all concerned are informed of his beliefs. If called for, an agreement may be drawn up, through the Local Assembly or a lawyer, which would define the social elements of the co-parental relationship while omitting the religious ones."

(Ibid.)

1. Those Who Took Vows as Godparents Prior to Becoming Bahá'ís

"You ask about those who have undertaken vows as godparents prior to becoming Bahá'ís. Trustworthiness is one of the great qualities which must characterize Bahá'ís, and the new believer therefore, far from repudiating any commitments entered into before becoming a Bahá'í, must be ever more conscientious in discharging them. However there are certain actions which would violate Bahá'í principles and from which the believer must abstain. Others would be incompatible with his allegiance to the Faith, such as the promise made by a godparent to bring up the godchild in the teachings of the Catholic church. In such a case the new believer could suggest to the parents that because of his new understanding of Christianity they would probably prefer to cancel that part of the agreement, at the same time explaining his willingness to continue to discharge the social and economic functions of the godparenthood. The whole matter should be dealt with in a gentle and conciliatory manner, in the hope of retaining the friendship and trust of all concerned."

(Ibid.) [pg 144]

1. Non-Bahá'í Godparents of Bahá'í Children

"In the case of non-Bahá'ís who are godparents of Bahá'í children, the changed obligations of their roles may be quietly discussed with them by the Bahá'í parents, who would point out that they may now wish to be freed of their commitments, and that in any case the religious aspects of the relationship are no longer in effect."

(Ibid.)

1. Two Bahá'ís May Enter into a Co-Parental Agreement

"You have asked about the possibility of two Bahá'ís entering into a co-parental agreement within the Faith, there is no objection to this."

(Ibid.)



C. Education and Training of Children

1. Must First Train Children in Principles of Religion

"...Schools must first train the children in the principles of religion, so that the Promise and the Threat recorded in the Books of God may prevent them from the things forbidden and adorn them with the mantle of the commandments; but this in such a measure that it may not injure the children by resulting in ignorant fanaticism and bigotry."

(Bahá'u'lláh: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 68)

1. Encourage the Children from Early Childhood

"Encourage the children from their earliest years to master every kind of learning, and make them eager to become skilled in every art — the aim being that through the favouring grace of God, the heart of each one may become even as a mirror disclosing the secrets of the universe, penetrating the innermost reality of all things; and that each may earn worldwide fame in all branches of knowledge, science and the arts."

"Certainly, certainly neglect not the education of the children. Rear them to be possessed of spiritual qualities, and be assured of the gifts and favours of the Lord."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Bahá'í Education, pp. 27-28)

1. Incumbent Upon Bahá'í Children to Surpass Other Children

"It is incumbent upon Bahá'í children to surpass other children in the acquisition of sciences and arts, for they have been cradled in the grace of God."

"Whatever other children learn in a year, let Bahá'í children learn in a month. The heart of Abdu'l-Bahá longeth, in its love, to find that Bahá'í young people, each and all, are known throughout the world for their intellectual attainments. There is no question but that they will exert all their efforts, their energies, their sense of pride, to acquire the sciences and arts."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 141)

1. Parents Held Responsible to God for Education of Children

"It is for this reason that, in this new cycle, education and training are recorded [pg 145] in the Book of God as obligatory and not voluntary. That is, it is enjoined upon the father and mother, as a duty, to strive with all effort to train the daughter and the son, to nurse them from the breast of knowledge and to rear them in the bosom of sciences and arts. Should they neglect this matter, they shall be held responsible and worthy of reproach in the presence of the stern Lord."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982, pp. 126-127)

1. Teachers of Children Serving Bahá'u'lláh

"...this teaching of the children is a service to the Blessed Perfection. Whosoever serves the world of humanity in this or any other way is serving His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh. Your heavenly reward is with Him. The education of children is one of the most great services. All these children are mine. If they are educated and illumined, it is as though my own children were so characterized..."

(Talk of Abdu'l-Bahá in the Holy Land: Star of the West, Vol. XIII, No. 6, p. 172)

1. Failure to Educate Child is an Unpardonable Sin

"This is a sin unpardonable, for they have made that poor babe a wanderer in the Sahara of ignorance, unfortunate and tormented: to remain during a lifetime a captive of ignorance and pride, negligent and without discernment. Verily, if that babe depart from this world at the age of infancy, it is sweeter and better. In this sense, death is better than life; deprivation than salvation; non-existence lovelier than existence; the grave better than the palace; the narrow, dingy tomb better than the spacious, regal home; for in the sight of mankind that child is abased and degraded and in the sight of God weak and defective. In gatherings it is ashamed and humiliated and in the arena of examination subdued and defeated by young and old. What a mistake is this! What an everlasting humiliation!"

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. III, p. 579)

1. Child Left in Natural State Grows Up in Ignorance...

"If a child is left in its natural state and deprived of education, there is no doubt that it will grow up in ignorance and illiteracy, its mental faculties dulled and dimmed; in fact it will become like an animal..."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 311, 1982 ed.)

1. If Babe Did Not Live at All, Better Than to Grow Ignorant

"Therefore the beloved of God and maid-servant of the Merciful must train their children with life and heart and teach them in the school of virtue and perfection. They must not be lax in this matter; they must not be inefficient. Truly, if a babe did not live at all it were better than to let it grow ignorant, for that innocent babe, in later life, would become afflicted with innumerable defects, responsible to and questioned by God, reproached and rejected by the people. What a sin this would be and what an omission!"

"Beware! Beware! that ye fail not in this matter. Endeavour with heart, with life, to train your children, especially the daughters. No excuse is acceptable in this matter."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. III, p. 579) [pg 146]

1. Training in Morals and Good Conduct is Far More Important Than Book Learning

"Training in morals and good conduct is far more important than book learning. A child that is cleanly, agreeable, of good character, well-behaved — even though he be ignorant — is preferable to a child that is rude, unwashed, ill-natured, and yet becoming deeply versed in all the sciences and arts. The reason for this is that the child who conducts himself well, even though he be ignorant, is of benefit to others, while an ill-natured, ill-behaved child is corrupted and harmful to others, even though he be learned. If, however, the child be trained to be both learned and good, the result is light upon light."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 135-136)

1. Pupil Must Be Encouraged²

"If a pupil is told that his intelligence is less than his fellow-pupils, it is a very great drawback and handicap to his progress. He must be encouraged to advance, by the statement, 'You are most capable and if you endeavour you will attain the highest degree.'"

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 77)

1. Station of Those Who Serve and Teach Children

"O thou teacher of the children of the Kingdom!

"Thou hast arisen to perform a service which would justly entitle thee to vaunt thyself over all the teachers on earth. For the teachers of this world make use of human education to develop the powers, whether spiritual or material, of humankind, whilst thou art training these young plants in the gardens of God according to the education of Heaven, and art giving them the lessons of the Kingdom."

"The result of this kind of teaching will be that it will attract the blessings of God, and make manifest the perfections of man."

"Hold thou fast to this kind of teaching, for the fruits of it will be very great. The children must, from their infancy, be raised to be spiritual and godly Bahá'ís. If such be their training, they will remain safe from every test."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Bahá'í Education, p. 34)

1. Methods of Teaching Children

"Among these children many blessed souls will arise, if they be trained according to the Bahá'í Teachings. If a plant is carefully nurtured by a gardener, it will become good, and produce better fruit. These children must be given a good training from their earliest childhood. They must be

2. (See also: VIII. C. Education and Training of Children)

given a systematic training which will further their development from day to day, in order that they may receive greater insight, so that their spiritual receptivity be broadened. Beginning in childhood they must receive instruction. They cannot be taught through books. Many elementary sciences must be made clear to them in the nursery; they must learn them in play, in amusement. Most ideas must be taught them through speech, not by book learning. One child must question the other concerning these things, and the other child must give the answer. In this way, they will make great progress. For example, mathematical problems must also be taught in the form [pg 147] of questions and answers. One of the children asks a question and the other must give the answer. Later on, the children will of their own accord speak with each other concerning these same subjects. The children who are at the head of the class must receive premiums. They must be encouraged and when any one of them shows good advancement, for the further development they must be praised and encouraged therein. Even so in godlike affairs. Oral questions must be asked and the answers must be given orally. They must discuss with each other in this manner."

(Talks of Abdu'l-Bahá: The Bahá'í World, Vol. IX, p. 543; Bahá'í Education, p. 73)

1. **A Wise Schoolmaster**

"A wise schoolmaster should send his scholars out to play or to practice gymnastics for an hour, so that their minds and bodies may be refreshed, and during the hour of the lesson they may learn it better. If the teacher proves that his scholars are advancing, no on-looker has a right to object to his system, or to question his wisdom and say he wastes the boys' time. If a wise father plays with his children, who has a right to say it is not good for them? He calls them to come to him as the hen calls her chicks; he knows that they are little and must be coaxed along — coaxed along because they are young and tiny."

(Words of Abdu'l-Bahá: Star of the West, Vol. IX, No. 8, p. 91)

1. **Curriculum of Study: Must Follow Same Curriculum for Daughters and Sons**

"He promulgated the adoption of the same course of education for man and woman. Daughters and sons must follow the same curriculum of study, thereby promoting unity of the sexes. When all mankind shall receive the same opportunity of education and the equality of men and women be realized, the foundations of war will be utterly destroyed. Without equality this will be impossible because all differences and distinction are conducive to discord and strife. Equality between men and women is conducive to the abolition of warfare for the reason that women will never be willing to sanction it. Mothers will not give their sons as sacrifices upon the battle-field after twenty years of anxiety and loving devotion in rearing them from infancy, no matter what cause they are called upon to defend. There is no doubt that when women obtain equality of rights war will entirely cease among mankind."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 174-175)

1. **Beginning of Formal Education**

"...From the age of five their formal education must begin. That is, during the daytime they should be looked after in a place where there are teachers, and should learn good conduct."

"Here they should be taught, in play, some letters and words and a little reading — as is done in certain countries where they fashion letters and words out of sweets and give them to the child. For example, they make an 'a' out of candy and say its name is 'a', or make a candy 'b' and call it 'b', and so on with the rest of the alphabet, giving these to the young child. In this way children will soon learn their letters..."

"When the children are ready for bed, let the mother read or sing them the Odes of the Blessed Beauty, so that from their earliest years they will be educated by these verses of guidance."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Bahá'í Education, pp. 39-40) [pg 148]

1. Subjects to be Taught in Children's Classes

"The subjects to be taught in children's schools are many, and for lack of time We can touch on only a few: First and most important is training in behaviour and good character; the rectification of qualities; arousing the desire to become accomplished and acquire perfections, and to cleave unto the religion of God and stand firm in His Laws; to accord total obedience to every just government, to show forth loyalty and trustworthiness to the ruler of the time, to be well wishers of mankind, to be kind to all."

"And further, as well as in the ideals of character, instruction in such arts and sciences as are of benefit, and in foreign tongues. Also, the repeating of prayers for the well-being of ruler and ruled; and the avoidance of materialistic works that are current among those who see only natural causation, and tales of love, and books that arouse the passions."

"To sum up, let all the lessons be entirely devoted to the acquisition of human perfections."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: from a Tablet published in The Bahá'í World, Vol. XVI, p. 37)

1. Formal Education Must Begin at the Age of Five

"The Tablet of Abdu'l-Bahá concerning the education of children refers particularly to their formal education which He says must begin at the age of five. The Master makes it clear that during the daytime children of that age and older should be looked after in a place where there are teachers. They should learn good conduct and be taught how to spell and to read and He indicates that spelling and reading can be learned by the use of simple games. Children of all ages can benefit from the guidance given to mothers by Abdu'l-Bahá in which He advises that when the children are ready for bed their mothers should read or sing to them verses of Bahá'u'lláh so that from their earliest years the children will be educated by these words of the Blessed Beauty. The House of Justice adds that you should feel free to hold classes for children under the age of five provided you keep in mind that their attention span is relatively short and so the duration of their class periods should be measured accordingly."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the Spiritual Assembly of Newton, Kansas, March 24, 1976)

1. Nothing in Teachings States Child Must Not Be Separated from Parents for First Five Years

"There is nothing in the teachings specifically to state that a child must not be separated from its parents and its home for the first five years of its life. In a Tablet, however, Abdu'l-Bahá points out that formal education at school begins when the child is five years old. Shoghi Effendi has indicated in one of his letters that the formulation of a system of education based on the teachings can only be gradually undertaken, and has to be accomplished by Bahá'í scholars and educationalists of the future...."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, March 10, 1975)

1. Mother Has Chief Responsibility for Bringing Up Child

"The task of bringing up a Bahá'í child, as emphasized time and again in Bahá'í writings, is the chief responsibility of the mother, whose unique privilege is indeed to create in her home such conditions as would be most conducive to both his material [pg 149] and spiritual welfare and advancement. The training which the child first receives through his mother constitutes the strongest foundation for his future development...."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer in India, November 16, 1939: Dawn of a New Day, p. 202)

1. Mothers Ordained Primary Trainers of Children and Infants

"...It is incumbent upon you to train the children from their earliest babyhood!... It is incumbent upon you to attend to them under all aspects and circumstances, inasmuch as God — glorified and exalted is He! — hath ordained mothers to be the primary trainers of children and infants. This is a great and important affair and a high and exalted position, and it is not allowable to slacken therein at all!"

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. III, p. 606)

1. Training of Children in Case One of Parents is Non-Bahá'í

"The question of the training and education of children in case one of the parents is a non-Bahá'í is one which solely concerns the parents themselves, who should decide about it the way they find best and most conducive to the maintenance of the unity of their family, and to the future welfare of their children. Once the child comes of age, however, he should be given full freedom to choose his religion, irrespective of the wishes and desires of his parents."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India, December 14, 1940: Dawn of a New Day, p. 86)

1. Greatest of All Services Rendered by Man to Almighty God — Teach Children to Deliver Speeches of High Quality

"Among the greatest of all services that can possibly be rendered by man to Almighty God is the education and training of children..."

"It is, however, very difficult to undertake this service, even harder to succeed in it. I hope that thou wilt acquit thyself well in this most important of tasks, and successfully carry the day, and become an ensign of God's abounding grace; that these children, reared one and all in the holy Teachings, will develop natures like unto the sweet airs that blow across the gardens of the All-Glorious, and will waft their fragrance around the world."

"Ye should consider the question of goodly character as of the first importance. It is incumbent upon every father and mother to counsel their children over a long period, and guide them unto those things which lead to everlasting honour."

"Encourage ye the school children, from their earliest years, to deliver speeches of high quality, so that in their leisure time they will engage in giving cogent and effective talks, expressing themselves with clarity and eloquence."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 133-134)

1. Preferable that Child Should Receive First Training at Home Under Mother Instead of in the Nursery

"With reference to the question of the training of children: Given the emphasis placed by Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá on the necessity for the parents to train their children while still in their tender age, it would seem preferable that they should receive their first training at home at the hand of their mother, rather than be sent to a nursery. [pg 150] Should circumstances, however, compel a Bahá'í mother to adopt the latter course, there can be no objection."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 13, 1940)

1. Spiritual Assemblies Should Provide Mothers with Well-Planned Programme

"So long as the mother faileth to train her children, and start them on a proper way of life, the training which they receive later on will not take its full effect. It is incumbent upon the Spiritual Assemblies to provide the mothers with a well-planned programme for the education of children, showing how, from infancy, the child must be watched over and taught. These instructions must be given to every mother to serve her as a guide, so that each will train and nurture her children in accordance with the Teachings."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 138)

1. Difficult to Teach and Refine Character Once Puberty is Passed

"It is extremely difficult to teach the individual and refine his character once puberty is passed. By then, as experience hath shown, even if every effort be exerted to modify some tendency of his, it all availeth nothing. He may, perhaps, improve somewhat today; but let a few days pass and he forgetteth, and turneth backward to his habitual condition and accustomed ways. Therefore it is in early childhood that a firm foundation must be laid. While the branch is green and tender it can easily be made straight."

"Our meaning is that qualities of the spirit are the basic and divine foundation, and adorn the true essence of man; and knowledge is the cause of human progress. The beloved of God must attach great importance to this matter, and carry it forward with enthusiasm and zeal."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Bahá'í Education, pp. 24-25)

1. Should Train Children to Memorize Prayers and Tablets³

"He is very glad to know that you attach importance to the training of the children, for whatever they learn in that early stage of their development will leave its traces upon their whole life. It becomes part of their nature."

"The Master used to attach much importance to the learning by heart of the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh and the Bab. During His days it was a usual work of the children of the household to learn Tablets by heart; now, however, those children are grown up and do not have time for such a thing. But the practice is most useful to implant the ideas and spirit those words contain into the mind of the children."

"With 'the Dawn-Breakers' in your possession you could also arrange interesting stories about the early days of the Movement which the children would like to hear. There are also stories about the life of Christ, Muhammad and the other Prophets which if told to the children will break down any religious prejudice they may have learned from older people of little understanding."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Spiritual Assembly of West Englewood, October 19, 1932) [pg 151]

1. Sacred Duty of Children Towards Their Parents

"...The fruits that best befit the tree of human life are trustworthiness and godliness, truthfulness and sincerity; but greater than all, after recognition of the unity of God, praised and glorified be He, is regard for the rights that are due one's parents. This teaching hath been mentioned in all the Books of God, and reaffirmed by the Most Exalted Pen...."

(Bahá'u'lláh: The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, Q. 106, p. 139)

3. (See also: No. 1516)

"There are also certain sacred duties of children toward parents, which duties are written in the Book of God, as belonging to God. The (children's) prosperity in this world and the Kingdom depends upon the good pleasure of parents, and without this they will be in manifest loss."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Bahá'í Education, p. 50)

1. Children Should Be Trained to Understand Spiritual Significance of Bahá'í Meetings

"The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 14th September 1982 concerning the role of Local Spiritual Assemblies in guiding parents and children in standards of behaviour for children at community gatherings, such as Nineteen Day Feasts and Bahá'í Holy Day observances."

"Further to the letter we wrote on its behalf on 28th June 1977, the House of Justice has instructed us to say that children should be trained to understand the spiritual significance of the gatherings of the followers of the Blessed Beauty, and to appreciate the honour and bounty of being able to take part in them, whatever their outward form may be. It is realized that some Bahá'í observances are lengthy and it is difficult for very small children to remain quiet for so long. In such cases one or other of the parents may have to miss part of the meeting in order to care for the child. The Spiritual Assembly can also perhaps help the parents by providing for a children's observance, suited to their capacities, in a separate room during part of the community's observance. Attendance at the whole of the adult celebration thus becomes a sign of growing maturity and a distinction to be earned by good behaviour."

"In any case, the House of Justice points out that parents are responsible for their children and should make them behave when they attend Bahá'í meetings. If children persist in creating a disturbance they should be taken out of the meeting. This is not merely necessary to ensure the properly dignified conduct of Bahá'í meetings but is an aspect of the training of children in courtesy, consideration for others, reverence, and obedience to their parents."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, October 14, 1982)

1. Few Children Are Really Bad

"He is sorry to hear your little boy is not developing satisfactorily; very few children are really bad. They do, however, sometimes have complicated personalities and need very wise handling to enable them to grow into normal, moral, happy adults. If you feel convinced your son will really benefit from going to ...'s school you could send him there. But in general we should certainly always avoid sending Bahá'í children to orthodox religious schools, especially Catholic, as the children receive the imprint of religious beliefs we as believers know are out-dated and no longer for this age. He will especially pray for the solution of this problem."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, May 30, 1947) [pg 152]

1. Children Fighting

"Regarding your question about children fighting: The statement of the Master, not to strike back, should not be taken so extremely literally that Bahá'í children must accept to be bullied and thrashed. If they can manage to show a better way of settling disputes than by active self-defence, they should naturally do so."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, May 11, 1945)

1. **Physical Punishment**

"As to your question about the use of physical punishment in child training, although there is a Tablet of the Master which considers beating as not permissible, this does not necessarily include every form of corporal punishment. In order to have a full grasp of the Master's attitude towards punishment, one has to study all His Tablets in this respect. For the time being no hard and fast rule can be laid down, and parents must use their own wise discretion in these matters until the time is ripe for the principles of Bahá'í education of children to be more clearly elucidated and applied."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, August 12, 1975)

1. **Problem Child: Discipline of Some Sort Indispensable**

"With regard to the statement attributed to Abdu'l-Bahá and which you have quoted in your letter regarding a 'problem child': These statements of the Master, however true in their substance, should never be given a literal interpretation. Abdu'l-Bahá could have never meant that a child should be left to himself, entirely free. In fact Bahá'í education, just like any other system of education is based on the assumption that there are certain natural deficiencies in every child, no matter how gifted, which his educators, whether his parents, school masters, or his spiritual guides and preceptors should endeavour to remedy. Discipline of some sort, whether physical, moral or intellectual, is indeed indispensable, and no training can be said to be complete and fruitful if it disregards this element. The child when born is far from being perfect. It is not only helpless, but actually is imperfect, and even is naturally inclined towards evil. He should be trained, his natural inclinations harmonized, adjusted and controlled, and if necessary suppressed or regulated, so as to insure his healthy physical and moral development. Bahá'í parents cannot simply adopt an attitude of non-resistance towards their children, particularly those who are unruly and violent by nature. It is not even sufficient that they should pray on their behalf. Rather they should endeavour to inculcate, gently and patiently, into their youthful minds such principles of moral conduct and initiate them into the principles and teachings of the Cause with such tactful and loving care as would enable them to become 'true sons of God' and develop into loyal and intelligent citizens of His Kingdom. This is the high purpose which Bahá'u'lláh Himself has clearly defined as the chief goal of every education."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, July 9, 1939: Bahá'í Education, pp. 65-66)

1. It is Not Permissible to Strike a Child

"Let the mothers consider that whatever concerneth the education of children [pg 153] is of the first importance. Let them put forth every effort in this regard, for when the bough is green and tender it will grow in whatever way ye train it. Therefore is it incumbent upon the mothers to rear their little ones even as a gardener tendeth his young plants. Let them strive by day and by night to establish within their children faith and certitude, the fear of God, the love of the Beloved of the worlds, and all good qualities and traits. Whensoever a mother seeth that her child hath done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart; and if the slightest undesirable trait should manifest itself, let her counsel the child and punish him, and use means based on reason, even a slight verbal chastisement should this be necessary. It is not, however, permissible to strike a child, or vilify him, for the child's character will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Bahá'í Education, pp. 49-50)



D. Registration of Children

1. Bahá'í Children Do Not Automatically Inherit Faith of Parents

"In letters replying to questions on the registration of children and youth the Universal House of Justice has attempted to avoid laying down rulings that are universally applicable. However, for the assistance of National Spiritual Assemblies it is now providing the following summary of guidelines and elucidations that have been given. We are to emphasize that no hard and fast lines should be drawn, and procedural matters must never be allowed to eclipse the spiritual reality of belief, which is an intensely personal relationship between the soul and its Creator."

"Unlike the children of some other religions, Bahá'í children do not automatically inherit the Faith of their parents. However, the parents are responsible for the upbringing and spiritual welfare of their children, and Spiritual Assemblies have the duty to assist parents, if necessary, in fulfilling these obligations, so that the children will be reared in the light of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and from their earliest years will learn to love God and His Manifestations and to walk in the way of God's Law. It is natural, therefore, to regard the children of Bahá'ís as Bahá'ís unless there is a reason to conclude the contrary. It is quite wrong to think of Bahá'í children as existing in some sort of spiritual limbo until the age of fifteen at which point they can 'become' Bahá'ís. In the light of this one can conclude the following:

Children born to a Bahá'í couple are regarded as Bahá'ís from the beginning of their lives, and their births should be registered by the Spiritual Assembly.

The birth of a child to a couple, one of whom is a Bahá'í, should also be registered unless the non-Bahá'í parent objects.

A Spiritual Assembly may accept the declaration of faith of a child of non-Bahá'í parents, and register him as Bahá'í child, provided the parents give their consent."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom, July 19, 1982)

1. Children Whose Parents Become Bahá'ís

"In the cases of children whose parents become Bahá'ís, much depends upon the ages and reactions of the children concerned. They will require great love and [pg 154] understanding, and each case must be judged on its own merits. This applies to an added degree, of course, if only one of the parents has accepted the Faith, in which case the attitude of the other parent is an important factor; the aim of the Bahá'ís should be to foster family unity. The important thing is that the children, whether registered as Bahá'ís or not, should be made to feel welcome at Bahá'í children's classes and other community gatherings."

(Ibid.)

1. Status of Children Under the Age of 15⁴

"We have your letter of 18th August 1971 concerning the status of children under the age of 15 years who wish to become Bahá'ís. We share with you an extract of a letter on the subject written on behalf of the beloved Guardian by his secretary:

'Up to the age of 15 years, children are under the direction of their parents. At the age of 15, they may declare their Faith as a conviction, and be registered as Bahá'í youth, whether the parents are Bahá'ís or not. Children under the age of 15 of Bahá'í parents who wish to attend meetings and associate with the friends as Bahá'ís may do so. If non-Bahá'í parents permit a child of less than 15 to attend Bahá'í meetings, and in fact, to be a Bahá'í, this is likewise permissible.' (To the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany, dated July 23, 1954)"

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia, August 29, 1971: Australian Bahá'í Bulletin, No. 205, September 1971, p. 14)

1. Age 15 Relates to Spiritual Functions and Obligations

"Regarding the age of fifteen fixed by Bahá'u'lláh: This relates only to purely spiritual functions and obligations and is not related to the degree of administrative capacity which is a totally different thing, and is, for the present, fixed at twenty-one."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, May 15, 1940: Bahá'í News, No. 138, p. 1, September 1940)

1. Children Under 15 Cannot Marry

⁴. (See also: No. 262)

"QUESTION: In a treatise in Persian on various questions, the age of maturity hath been set at fifteen; is marriage likewise conditional upon reaching maturity, or is it permissible before that time?"

"ANSWER: Since the consent of both parties is required in the Book of God, and since, before maturity, their consent or lack of it cannot be ascertained, marriage is therefore conditional upon reaching maturity, and is not permissible before that time."

(Bahá'u'lláh: The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, Q. 92, pp. 133-134)

1. Children Are of Age at 15 as Far as Keeping Laws of Aqdas

"Regarding children: At fifteen a Bahá'í is of age as far as keeping the laws of the Aqdas is concerned — prayer, fasting, etc. But children under fifteen should certainly observe the Bahá'í Holy Days, and not go to school, if this can be arranged on these nine days."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, October 25, 1947)[pg 155]

1. Children of Bahá'í Parents Considered as Bahá'ís

"Although the children of Bahá'í parents are considered to be Bahá'ís, there is no objection at the present time, for purposes of keeping a correct census, and also ascertaining whether the young people are, sincerely, believers, and willing to do their share in service to the Faith, to asking them to make a declaration of their intention, at the age of fifteen or so. Originally the Guardian understands this was adopted in America to enable young Bahá'í men to make certain arrangements in connection with their application for non-combatant status, upon their attaining the age of military service. There is really nothing about it in the Teachings or in the Administration. Your Assembly is free to do as it pleases in this matter."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, June 17, 1954: From a compilation of the Universal House of Justice, Extracts from letters written on behalf of the Guardian on various aspects of age and obligations)

1. Registering Children Upon Attaining Age 15

"...the way in which Bahá'í children should be registered upon reaching the age 15 is within the discretion of each National Spiritual Assembly; there is no objection to using for this purpose the general enrolment card, if such a card is adopted, or a new and separate one specially for Bahá'í children attaining the age of fifteen. It is important, however, that whatever method of enrolment is used or card adopted, it is clear to such children that they had been Bahá'ís up to that time, and that on attaining the age of spiritual maturity they are reaffirming their belief in Bahá'u'lláh."

"The form and wording of an enrolment or registration card is also within the discretion of a National Spiritual Assembly."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany, October 28, 1975: From a compilation of letters written on behalf of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice regarding enrolment of children. Included in a letter from the House of Justice to the National Assembly of Ecuador, August 9, 1979)

1. Upon Attainment of Age 15 Child Must Reaffirm His Faith

"...Both children of Bahá'í parents, and children who, with their non-Bahá'í parents' consent, declare their faith in Bahá'u'lláh before they are fifteen years old, are regarded as Bahá'ís and it is within a Spiritual Assembly's discretion to request such children to undertake work of which they are capable in the service of the Faith, such as service on suitable committees. However, upon attaining the age of fifteen a child becomes spiritually mature and is responsible for stating on his own behalf whether or not he wishes to remain a member of the Bahá'í community. If he does not then reaffirm his faith, he must be treated, administratively, as a non-Bahá'í."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Brazil, December 12, 1975: Ibid.)

1. Registration of Children of Bahá'í Parents

"In answer to your letter ... concerning the registration of children of Bahá'í parents the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to say that at the present time it prefers to leave the details of such matters to the discretion of each National Spiritual Assembly. One National Assembly, for example, sends a very nice letter [pg 156] to each Bahá'í child in its community on the occasion of its fifteenth birthday (unless, of course, it has reason to doubt that the child in question is a Bahá'í), explaining the meaning of attaining the age of maturity, and extending the good wishes of the Assembly for his or her future services to the Cause. This does not require an active response from every child but does provide each with an opportunity to make his or her position clear if desired."

"The House of Justice points out that the Assembly must wisely steer a course between seeming to doubt the faith of a child who has been brought up as a devout Bahá'í on the one hand, and seeming to compel a child to be a member of the Bahá'í community against his will, on the other."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany, October 5, 1978: Ibid.)

1. May Be Circumstances in which Children Should Not Be Registered

"It is within the discretion of your National Spiritual Assembly to determine whether children should be registered as Bahá'ís in cases where one parent is not a Bahá'í, although children of Bahá'í parents under age 15, are generally considered Bahá'ís, there may be circumstances in

which they should not be registered as such, and this is also left to your discretion. Local Spiritual Assemblies should help by advising the parents to consider it one of their primary obligations to raise their children in a spirit of love and dedication towards the Faith."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Ecuador, October 13, 1976)



E. Miscellaneous Topics in Reference to Children

1. Children Should Be Free to Choose Their Own Religion

"Shoghi Effendi wishes me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter ... which you wrote concerning Catholic marriage and the promise that any resulting children should be Catholic."

"The basic principle of the Cause is independent investigation of truth. This applies to us as much as to our children. They should be free to choose for themselves any religion they wish. To promise that they will belong to a certain Faith and not to another is therefore not only contrary to our precepts, but is also a futile promise to give. How can we make the future generation think as we do or follow our dictates. God has made them free. All that we can do is to open their eyes and tell them of what we think to be the truth."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, March 3, 1931)

1. Teach Child to Say Greatest Name in Moments of Crisis

"He thinks you are wise in not separating yourself from your child; and he will pray that he may grow out of this condition, and gain in physical and spiritual strength. It would be a great advantage to him if you could teach him to say the Greatest Name, when he is himself going through a moment of crisis and suffering."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a Bahá'í couple, December 4, 1954)

1. Criticizing the Faith in Front of Children

"Regarding the question you asked about the attitude of criticizing the Faith in [pg 157] front of children in a Bahá'í family: The Guardian feels that this is not something that one can lay down a general rule for. A great deal would depend on the age of the children, and whether they are able to think for themselves, and whether one of the parents has sufficient influence over them to offset the effect of the criticism of the other parent. It would seem that if the children are very young, and torn between the influences of both parents, it would be wiser to avoid discussing the Faith in front of them; but only encourage them when the staunch Bahá'í is alone with them, to revere and uphold the Faith."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, April 16, 1951)

1. The Real Object of Life — The Guardian Prays for Children

"The Guardian will pray that each of you may become a brilliant light in this dark world, and in due time, lead many seeking souls to the Splendor of the Cause of God. This is the real object of life, and he hopes all your training, will be a means of training your characters, and enriching your spirits, so you may teach the Faith, and become strong supporters of its institutions."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'í children of Kenosha, Wisconsin, December 28, 1956)

1. Teach Children to be Kind to Animals

"Train your children from their earliest days to be infinitely tender and loving to animals. If an animal be sick, let the children try to heal it, if it be hungry, let them feed it, if thirsty, let them quench its thirst, if weary, let them see that it rests."

"Most human beings are sinners, but the beasts are innocent. Surely those without sin should receive the most kindness and love — all except animals which are harmful, such as bloodthirsty wolves, such as poisonous snakes, and similar pernicious creatures, the reason being that kindness to these is an injustice to human beings and to other animals as well... Tenderness and loving-kindness are basic principles of God's heavenly Kingdom. Ye should most carefully bear this matter in mind."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 159-60)

1. Bahá'í Children Can Give to the Fund — Non-Bahá'í Children, No Ruling Made; Teacher to Solve Problem

"Any Bahá'í can give to the Cause's Funds, adult or child. No statement is required on this subject. Bahá'í children have always given to the Cause, everywhere. Whatever situation may arise in a class which non-Bahá'í children attend is for the teacher of the class to solve. No ruling should be made to cover such things."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, February 12, 1949: Lifeblood of the Cause, p. 18)

1. The Universal House of Justice Responds to Children's Questions Regarding the Catastrophe

"The heart-warming messages from the children attending the Indiana District Convention forwarded with your recent letter brought much joy to the Universal [pg 158] House of Justice, and the House of Justice asks if you will kindly relay to these dear ones its comments on the several questions posed by the children."

"When telling about the Faith to people who disagree with what you are saying, don't argue with them. Try to find a point of agreement and if you can't, then leave them alone. You have done what you can by speaking of the Faith. Now leave them to Bahá'u'lláh."

"Regarding the sad plight of the Bahá'ís in Iran and what children can do about it, the House of Justice suggests that you remember these dear friends in your daily prayers, and encourage your parents to support the efforts of their Local Spiritual Assemblies and National Spiritual Assembly to bring this terrible situation to the attention of the media and the authorities."

"One of the children asks, 'Why did they call it the Universal House of Justice?' In the Most Holy Book the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, Bahá'u'lláh has written, 'The Lord hath ordained that in every city a House of Justice shall be established...'; we know them by the name Local Spiritual Assemblies. Abdu'l-Bahá, in His Will and Testament, has stated 'and now concerning the House of Justice which God hath ordained as the source of all good and freed from error, it must be elected by universal suffrage, that is, by the believers... By this House is meant the Universal House of Justice, that is, in all countries, a secondary House of Justice (National Spiritual Assembly) must be instituted, and these secondary Houses of Justice must elect the members of the Universal one.' When you study the wonderful Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá, and the explanations of Shoghi Effendi, you will find many references to this supreme administrative institution which will help you to understand why it is called the Universal House of Justice."

"Two of the questions are, in a way, interrelated: 'Will the sun die on us pretty soon?' and 'Will the world end if there is a nuclear war?' No doubt both are prompted by the current wave of rumors about impending calamities that are circulating amongst adults and which are overheard by the children."

"Without minimizing the serious situation facing a world heedless of Bahá'u'lláh's admonitions, it must be remembered that He also refers to the Golden Age of civilization to come. The House of Justice hopes that Bahá'í teachers and parents will do their utmost to encourage the children to study the explanations of the beloved Guardian about the twin processes at work in the world — the steady growth of the Faith, and the devastating forces of disintegration assailing the outworn institutions of present-day society."

"We are asked to assure you that the House of Justice will remember you and the children of your class at the Holy Threshold."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, December 29, 1981) [pg 159]

