

# Moral intelligence: the need of the hour in the 21<sup>st</sup> century upbringing

## Abstract

A number of psychologists such as Freud, Adler, Piaget, Levinson and Kohlberg have talked about the various stages of development of children and the important role each stage of development plays in the healthy and enriching personality shaping of children that ultimately continues through adulthood. Since the world is ever changing, that has both positive and negative impact on the growth and development of children in the technological jet age. This throws a number of challenges for the parents and educators of today, as to how children can be reared up being a part of this constantly evolving social milieu, where the drain of moral values has become rather integral. This paper is an attempt to draw attention of parents and educators of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as to how to help them upbringing their children and assist them in developing a morally fortified intelligence base for the generations to come.

**Keywords:** moral intelligence, need, hour and 21st century, upbringing

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## Introduction

*“There are some things that money cannot buy, like manners, morals and intelligence”*

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed a transitional shift from the traditional educational, cultural, social and economic system, to a more modern and technology based lifestyle that has impacted the society in both positive and negative ways. However, during this transformation the present generation has been a direct witness to both the ups and downs that underlie their upbringing and holistic growth and development.

Research indicates that present day children are being consumed by the impact of the present culture and technological advancement. It has been indicated that new habits that are being developed have led to a limited interaction with parents, peers and the closest environment.<sup>1</sup> It has also been found that since children have an easier and faster access to information from the virtual world, they are less likely to show empathy, compassion and extend help towards others and exhibit pro-social behaviour.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, increased use of computer games and video games have further led to increase in aggression and violence amongst children and decrease in development of empathy and pro-social behaviour among young people.<sup>3-5</sup>

The impact of such a change has been grave and has further contributed to a significant decrease in morality and related behaviour such as a decrease in respect for parents and other people.<sup>6</sup>

Since, childhood is an impressionable stage of development that is marked by a child's intellectual, social, exploratory and moral potential,<sup>7</sup> moral based upbringing becomes not just a luxury, rather a necessity, if we expect them to develop into fully blooming personalities.

Taking this backdrop into consideration, the aim of the present paper is to highlight and discuss the role and contribution of a moral based upbringing in the rather fast evolving 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Developing moral intelligence based upbringing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

*“Moral intelligence today is not just a matter of choice, rather a necessity if the human race has to survive for generations to come”*

Moral intelligence is the ability to distinguish right from wrong, where moral convictions push the individual to act in a morally correct manner. These include capabilities such as awareness of others pain, control of self and of negative emotions, and being fair and objective in passing judgements and challenging injustice and treating one and all with respect, appreciation and dignity.<sup>8</sup>

According to Lennick & Kiel<sup>9</sup> moral intelligence is the mental capacity to determine how universal human principles- like those embodied by the Golden Rule should be applied to our personal values, goals, and actions. It is indicated that an individual grows, there is also growth in his/her moral rules both in quality and quantity.<sup>10</sup>

Moral intelligence consists of the following four principles/competencies as per Lennick & Kiel<sup>9</sup> which are as follows:

- (i) Integrity
- (ii) Responsibility
- (iii) Forgiveness
- (iv) Compassion

**1. Integrity:** Integrity refers to acting in accordance with one's own rules, values, and beliefs. It means telling the truth, keeping promises and not compromising with one's values.<sup>9</sup> According to Beheshtifar et al.,<sup>11</sup> Children can be taught integrity through accepting the truth as it is, without giving them any other alternatives. This can also be taught through verbalization and role modelling, in which the adult always picks up the truth, generating a domino effect, since youngsters are good at imitating what they observe. Furthermore, according to Clark & Fujimoto<sup>12</sup> a person's integrity is developed by the decisions they take amongst many alternatives. This can be developed through mentoring to

always speak up for the truth and by letting the young minds and exposing them to the harsh realities of life.

2. **Responsibility:** Responsibility refers to taking responsibility for oneself and others and being honest to and accepting one's failures and mistakes.<sup>9</sup> According to Gigerenzer<sup>13</sup> it is important to train a child towards accepting full responsibility for one's actions while keeping in mind that convictions precede actions. This can be developed in children through demonstration (where congruence is felt between both words and actions)<sup>14</sup> and making them understand the concept of cause and effect that helps in better decision making, fosters accountability, and assists in using morally sound approaches to handle situations shaping a positive character.<sup>15</sup>
3. **Forgiveness:** Forgiveness is the ability to develop tolerance towards mistakes committed by oneself and others.<sup>9</sup> According to Lennick & Kiel,<sup>9</sup> forgiveness is of two types: one is to forgive those who have wronged us, and the other is to take a more personal approach in which one is able to forgive oneself despite self-evaluation and discovery of inequities. According to Piaget,<sup>16</sup> if forgiveness is taught to children in early life, it to a large extent will determine the kind of life they will lead ahead. Research indicates that forgiveness can be developed through mentoring young minds to embrace forgiveness in a world full of imperfections and disappointments. This not only reminds them about constantly learning from their mistakes, but also fosters better communication, creativity, critical thinking, open-mindedness and a better ability to resolve daily challenges.<sup>13,16</sup>
4. **Compassion:** Compassion refers to developing a loving and caring attitude towards others.<sup>9</sup> It is suggested that compassion is an important dimension of moral intelligence from the standpoint of two perspectives: Firstly, it demonstrates humanity, where the need to learn about others are going through leads to further estranged morality revision and secondly, furthermore, compassion entails expressing patience in reasoning and in being ready to leave at any time because no one is ever guaranteed to return.<sup>17</sup> By having an understanding about this, society has the opportunity to model morality based upright citizens who believe in fellowship in times of crisis and still being there for each other.<sup>18</sup>

Research conducted by Borba<sup>8</sup> indicates that moral intelligence essentially consists of seven moral intelligence based virtues that every child should develop and cultivate which are as follows:

1. **Empathy:** Empathy is the individual's ability to identify with the problems of others that goes beyond pity, where other people's problems become a part of the person who feels compelled to intervene.<sup>8</sup>
2. **Conscience:** Conscience can be defined as recognizing the right and correct way to do something and actually doing it.<sup>19</sup> Borba<sup>8</sup> suggests that introducing role behaviour guidance for children based on distinguishing between right and wrong, can go a long way in strengthening conscience based frameworks and positive character building in children.
3. **Self-control:** Self-control is the practice of training one's mind to stay in control and refrain from choosing pleasurable options that may later result in negative consequences.<sup>17</sup> Research indicates that when children are taught to make use of exciting options, using logical and critical thinking and rational decision making for which they are solely responsible, this, in turn helps them to foster better self-control.<sup>8</sup>

4. **Respect:** It refers to giving value to everyone, regardless of their age and stage.<sup>8</sup> Research conducted by Coles<sup>14</sup> suggests that respect can be taught to children three different stages which are: First, to help a child understand the concept of respect through both teaching and modelling. Second, through maintaining a child's respect for authority and third, by strongly opposing impunity manifested through rude behaviour.<sup>14</sup>
5. **Kindness:** Kindness means caring for the happiness of others by helping them to achieve their goals, understanding their needs and working to meet those needs as much as possible.<sup>20</sup> Research suggests that kindness can be developed in children through implementing reward mechanisms, where children are rewarded for exhibiting acts of kindness, through modelling acts of kindness and purchasing of books on kindness to be given as gifts to children.<sup>17,18</sup>
6. **Tolerance:** Tolerance refers to open-mindedness towards the beliefs and opinions of others, the respect of human dignity and humanity and the respect of the beliefs of others regardless of race and religion.<sup>20</sup> Tolerance in children can be fostered through inculcating in them the "live and let live" approach and through the use of non-participant observation method to identify the non-tolerant behaviour of children and then make use of role play and modelling to cultivate tolerance based moral intelligence.<sup>8</sup>
7. **Fairness:** Fairness is defined as choosing open-mindedness, which leads to acting fairly and justly at all times.<sup>8</sup> In other words, it is giving others their rights and dealing with them with integrity without discrimination.<sup>20</sup> Research suggests that setting a good example for your children as a parent or educator, treating young people fairly and also teaching children to behave fairly and mentoring them as and when they deviate from the same can go a long way in shaping children's personality towards being just and fair.<sup>11,15</sup>

Research conducted by Elliott et al, quoted by Al-Adwan<sup>20</sup> confirm that the school and parents should make moral behaviour as an integral part of their child's life, and the school should follow-up on what the family offers to the child in developing their moral intelligence and the dilemmas they face with them.

Patel & Patel<sup>21</sup> conducted a study to find out the moral intelligence on 240 students (120 boys and 120 girls) of grade 8<sup>th</sup> selected from Gujarati medium upper primary school of Kheda district of Gujarat (India). Results indicated that boys were found to have higher moral intelligence than their girl counterparts.

Furthermore, a research was conducted by Al-Adwan<sup>20</sup> to explore the level of moral intelligence and social skills, and the relationship between the two variables among 214 kindergarten children (124 females & 90 boys) in Amman. Results indicated that both boys and girls had moderate level of moral intelligence and social skills. However, there existed a strong positive correlation between moral intelligence and social skills among kindergarten children in Amman. Based on the study it is suggested to expose children to real life situations to further enhance their moral intelligence.

### Boosting moral intelligence among children:

Taking the above backdrop into consideration here are a few research based tips that can be incorporated by parents and educators to boost the moral intelligence of children (component wise) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Mentioned in Table 1 below):

**Table 1** Indicating tips to boost moral intelligence among children

Dimensions of moral intelligence (MI)	Tips to boost moral intelligence in children
<b>1. Integrity &amp; fairness</b>	<p>Use role play and story-telling using positive moral behaviour.</p> <p>Reward &amp; reinforce your child for showing honesty, integrity and fairness.</p> <p>Teach them through audio-video method, games and creative activities on trust and honesty (such as a trust or integrity collage).</p> <p>Praise them for displaying acts of fairness through taking turns while performing games such as building blocks, board games etc.</p> <p>Be to the point with your reasoning through experience sharing.</p> <p>Create an environment of trust and encourage your child to speak what is right.</p> <p>Encourage your child to speak, ask questions and reason with them.</p> <p>Expose your child to real life situations and encourage team games.</p> <p>Give clear and to the point instructions of what is expected of the child.</p> <p>Role model behaviour that is responsible through modelling, acting and visually.</p>
<b>2. Responsibility</b>	<p>Let your child make his/her own time table and responsibly take charge of it.</p> <p>Give them a chance to explore and learn, since one learns best through committing mistakes &amp; owning them.</p> <p>Reward and reinforce for completing a task responsibly.</p> <p>Be rightly assertive and set clear boundaries while talking to your child once a mistake has been committed</p> <p>Use language that is accepting &amp; forgiving.</p> <p>Make use of compassion, kindness, empathy and healthy communication.</p>
<b>3. Forgiveness</b>	<p>Give your child a fair chance to be heard and rectify their mistake &amp; develop a new connection.</p> <p>Encourage a child to express forgiveness verbally or through art work such as a sorry card, forgiveness poem.</p> <p>Through Role modelling, demonstration, mentoring and story-telling.</p>
<b>4. Compassion, kindness &amp; empathy</b>	<p>Help children understand their feelings and that of others through creative activities such as compassion collage, group activities and visit to old age homes, orphanage etc.</p> <p>Reward them for exhibiting compassion and empathy towards others such as feeding pets, poor, needy and disabled.</p>

Develop a strong child-parent and teacher bond.

Talk it out, share it out and discuss it out.

Make them aware of the fact that when something wrong has been done, without hesitation and fear apologise.

Make use of moral based stories, mindfulness, and reflection based techniques such as focussed breathing, feeling your senses, how much do you know yourself.

Delay reward and gratification and give them alternatives to choose from.

Be a role model and encourage good behaviour.

#### 5. Conscience

Help them to manage their emotions and stress through talking, laughing, crying and writing it out.

Make them us a healthy routine between academics and recreation (diet, music, creative activities, games and sports, picnics etc).

Be a good role model showcasing respect towards others.

Be rightly assertive (be firm, yet polite in your tone and conversation).

Communicate both sides of the coin for every situation to the child (Good and Bad).

Be a good listener and reinforce and reward polite and respectful behaviour.

Encourage active listening, empathy, compassion, gratitude and conflict management skills.

Set goals that are clear and once achieved reward the child for their patience and commitment.

Make use of role modelling, storytelling, creative activities through gradual progression and mindfulness.

Delay gratification, reward and reinforcement where needed. Let them work hard and get rewards.

#### 6. Self-control

#### 7. Respect

#### 8. Tolerance

## Conclusion

A number of psychologists such as Freud, Adler, Piaget, Levinson and Kohlberg have talked about the various stages of development of children and the important role each stage of development plays in the healthy and enriching personality shaping of children that ultimately continues through adulthood. Since the world is ever changing, that has both positive and negative impact on the growth and development of children in the technological jet age. This throws a number of challenges for the parents and educators of today, as to how children can be reared up being a part of this constantly evolving social milieu, where the drain of moral values has become rather integral. This paper was an attempt to draw attention of parents and educators of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as to how to help them up-bring their children and assist them in developing a morally fortified intelligence base for the generations to come.

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## Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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