

Immigrant parents face challenge

BY LEEMA FARHA

CHILDREN in Canada are raised to think and act independently, encouraged to discover their self-worth, and to recognize and voice their rights, from a young age. These are not common practices for many cultures. A common attitude that many immigrant parents (including me) would harbour to this level of early independence is: “not while they are living under my roof.”

My own experience in raising my child has been challenging. The parenting culture of the migrated land is much different to the lands left behind. Again, not every immigrant parent is alike, but some of us are torn between upholding our own ethnic cultural roots and adapting to new ones. There are no right and wrong ways to parenting — but there are different approaches, styles, and practices.

I am a Muslim mother trying to raise my child to follow the Muslim faith. This comes with layers of complexities, defiance, and trials on things such as pursuing our religious beliefs, abiding the prayer rules (which is praying five times a day), reading the Quran, abstaining from any kind of sexual contact before tying the nuptial knot and honouring marriage as sacred, marrying into a Muslim family, eating halal meat, and so on.

For instance, some years ago halal meat was not common knowledge to many non-Muslims in Canada. In situations where halal meat was not served, I would strictly forbid my child to eat non-halal meat. My heart would ache since he was not able to eat his favourite protein, yet I could not allow him.

To some, I might be a mother who is teaching her child the values and culture of the faith and belief that she belongs to. The other worldview maybe that I am a mother who is thrusting her personal beliefs and convictions



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on her child, impeding them to make their own choices.

In my opinion, every immigrant parent is pleased and satisfied with the Canadian education system. However, there may be some debatable viewpoints. For example, sex education taught at a very young age in the school is not a practice many parents grew up with.

I recall, while growing up in Australia, my father refused to sign the consent form on sex education at school. Many immigrant parents are hesitant to talk to their child about sex, puberty, and relationships. It could be a taboo subject for discussion.

When it comes to career options, many — myself included — would offer our children choices, either to become a university professor, an engineer, a doctor or a lawyer. We do not encourage them to think or explore beyond the norm. My child wants to be a video game developer; my husband's response was, “how about becoming an engineer?” As someone who thinks and feels that I am open to new ideas and modern reflections, I promptly interject: “Yes, follow your dream to become a professor at a video game developing department in a university.” Has my thought process changed at all? I don't believe so.

As immigrant parents, we also face pressure from back home. After making the choice to immi-

grate and leave everything behind, we are determined to see our child shine in a hotshot profession and be economically successful. At any cost, I want them to realize that I have made the right choice in immigrating to a foreign land.

Educational and professional status is a big aspect of measuring success in many cultures. Having a PhD, a post-doctorate degree or working in an acceptable and prestigious profession lifts the social status. Parents get the bragging rights. I feel the disappointment from my father for not pursuing for a PhD. If only he could accept that I am not a PhD material, it would put to rest the agony, the regrets, and the heartbreak for both me as the child, and him as the parent.

Even today, I feel I could not live up to my father's expectation. The dilemma between meeting expectations of the parents and wanting to take their own decisions about their lives, wear out our children. This pressure has potential to lead to mental health issues for many children. The question for every parent, particularly, an immigrant parent is: “Where do we draw the line that, this is not parenting, it's suffocating?”

While, I am set in my culture, I am trying to learn and accept new social systems, and multiculturalism. Finding the right balance and accepting blended culture require a lot of effort. It will take time. It is a process.

However, as an immigrant parent, I will always crave that a part of my Bangladeshi-Muslim culture would live through my child.

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