



# Lone matters

Have you decided to raise an only child? **Arundhati Nath** tells you how you can nurture him without making him lonely, spoilt and self-centred

**AS** more and more parents are determined to bring up an only child for several reasons, they constantly battle the guilt of raising a lonely and selfish child. However, experts feel that this is a baseless fear. Though growing up with a sibling has its own advantages, you need not feel a single child has anything to lose. In fact, there could be better bonding with the parents, lesser conflict and fewer expenses

**Connect with your child:** Parenting expert and co-author of *Parenting: Innocence to InnerSense*, Aarti C

Rajratnam feels that parenting remains the same whether the child is raised alone or with siblings. A child will always make many friends in life but will have only one set of parents, she says. "Parents need to rise up to the role and help children explore the world within a clear structure which will help them balance freedom and responsibility," Aarti says. Parents therefore, need to play their roles, set clear structures for behaviour and habits, encourage two-way communication and above all, make space for social interaction with children and adults of all ages. This should be the primary goal in every single-child family.

**Get social:** Aarti observes that many parents make the mistake of trying to be a peer. This becomes very dysfunctional as children need better interactions with the actual peer group, especially in the absence of the safety net called siblings. "Make spending time with friends or extended family a priority," says Aarti. "Spending time with other kids is a real need for your

## FAMOUS ONLY CHILDREN

- ◆ Indira Gandhi
- ◆ Daniel Radcliffe
- ◆ Maria Sharapova
- ◆ Queen Victoria
- ◆ Elvis Presley
- ◆ Franklin. D Roosevelt
- ◆ John Updike

child. Arrange meet ups, play dates and picnics occasionally with your child's friends and their families. Let him spend at least an hour each day playing with friends." Monika Magoo, mum to an only child Sargam, says, "To make sure that my child is social, I pay attention to small details like the way she behaves in public or in front of strangers. I encourage her to greet neighbours, play with other kids and most importantly, share her toys with her friends."

A child who is brought up without a sibling needs to understand the necessity of friendship. "Modeling is an excellent way to show your child that friendships matter. Let your child see you making plans with your own friends and relatives, and valuing their company," advises Eileen Kennedy-Moore, parenting expert, author and creator of the video series, Raising Emotionally and Socially Healthy Kids.

**Be Creative:** Though a single child socialises with peers and other adults, he often has to spend time only with his parents. We need to teach our kids to use this time meaningfully. Get them interested in a hobby. It could be learning to sing, play the violin or a sport. Time spent on a hobby like reading, painting or writing could be rewarding as well as fun. You can also have your child help you in household chores like dusting the chairs, laying dinner or cooking a mini meal.

**Banish loneliness:** Aarti feels that the epidemic of loneliness is not purely because of single-child family dynamics but a cumulative effect of a very poor lifestyle filled with gadgets, technology, unhealthy school systems making unrealistic demands on the child and

the lack of play. Due to this, children are deprived of natural play in the absence of competition. "Parents can set this right by ensuring that their kids have an hour of play daily where they get the opportunity to engage in age-appropriate, non-competitive play where the rules will be made, broken and amended by the children and not a coach or parent," she says. Moreover, children should spend more time away from addictive gadgets and actively indulge in conversation with peers and adults. Rules like having at least one meal together as family can be of help here.

**Share and care:** Children learn by example. If they see that their parents are caring towards other people, they'll do the same. Encourage them to share their toys or candies with their friends, not you. This will teach them to be kind, understanding and co-operative towards others in the social circle.

**Do not over pamper:** In a fear that a single child would miss out on companionship, parents often try to overindulge the child. "Don't

feel like you have to be your child's entertainment director, providing a non-stop flow of fun activities. That's neither realistic nor desirable. Learning to entertain themselves is an important skill for children," says Eileen. So, be firm with a single child when you should be, and don't give in to every whim or demand. Getting all the attention could make him pampered and secure in the feeling that he can always have his way. Connecting with your child is important, but being over protective and interfering too much is not good either. ■

## GREAT REASONS TO RAISE AN ONLY CHILD

- No sibling rivalry
- She bonds better with her parents
- Gets all the love and care
- Economically sound idea
- More focused parenting
- Develops better hobbies and interests

