

# The Root of All Evil

Nazia Zafar

During the four years that I have been a teacher at the Sohan Center, a center of non-formal learning for children from the deprived community, I have consistently faced one challenge: teaching basic manners to the new comers.

One such child was Abdallah. It seemed as if Abdallah was sick of his life, or that he was seeking some kind of revenge from everyone around him. Using abusive language, hitting other children, stealing their things and then lying with perfection were some of his routine behaviours. His father was a drug addict and a rag picker who spent most of his time outside the house. Abdallah seemed to have some of these habits too; he too was a bit of a wanderer.

A little attention and love may work with some children but not Abdallah. I would tell him to work like the good boy that he was. His reply would be, "But I am not a good boy; I am rude and obnoxious." I kept trying to befriend him, to crack a joke with him as soon as he would enter class, or modify my lesson plan based on what I thought he might respond to better. Slowly he became regular. One day he was absent. I asked him the next day what the matter had been.

His father had hit Abdallah so he had run away from home for a day. That is why he had been absent from school. He then told me the gut-wrenching details of how this father beat his own son. Tied with chains. The father would come home and beat Abdallah and his mother. This time it was because there had been a petty theft in the market and someone told the father that Abdallah was behind it. The father did not pay

any heed to Abdallah's pleas that he was innocent. He kept him tied in the heat of the sun for five hours. Without water. The mother who tried to intervene was also beaten black and blue. That is why Abdallah was sick of his life and even wanted to end it.

Abdullah had confided in me. He had found an adult whom he could trust, and he was now willing to give school a chance. He now started to respond well to the little things I did to make him feel loved and cared for, like I would ask him to write something on the board or encourage him to participate in extra curricular activities.

He was now living to his potential. He worked hard and soon met the standard to be able to join a regular school, which is where he is studying now.

My student Abdullah is clear proof of how adults, especially parents distort a perfectly pure and innocent child and turn him into a 'problem-child.'

*The author is a teacher at he Sohan Aagahi Center for non-formal learning, Idara Taleem o Aagahi, Islamabad*