

# Leading by Example !

~ Saheli Sheth (Peoria, USA)

It was the first youth sabha of 2026, and we wanted to try something different. That day, three 10-year-old boys stepped into the role of youth leaders. The usual youth leaders became the students, following every activity the boys created.

During a game, one boy – now a “youth leader” – paused to remind everyone, “Remember, we’re here just to have fun. The point isn’t to win; it’s to enjoy ourselves!” The other youth leader and I exchanged amused glances. The boy was echoing something we often say!

After the activity, we “students” shared what we had learned. The boys came up to us afterward and said, “Great job sharing!” followed by high-fives. We were stunned – this was exactly how we usually wrapped up our sabhas with them. These seemingly playful kids were keenly observing our actions and absorbing far more than we realized.

That day reinforced a simple truth: *Kids learn by watching what you do.*

What if you tried a role reversal with your child and said, “You’re the parent for the day, I’m the kid”? **If they copied your actions exactly, how would that feel?** What do you think they’d do?

The following sabha deepened this lesson. We noticed a younger child mimicking a mischievous act of a 12-year-old boy. We gently reminded the older boy, “You’re a role model here. The younger kids see you and learn from you.” Later, during an activity where we took turns saying something positive about one another, I struggled to find something nice to say. My mind went completely blank. The same 12-year-old looked at me and said sarcastically, “You’re a role model here. We see you too and learn from you.”

His words stopped me in my tracks. They reminded me of the importance of actively seeking the good in others, rather than waiting for it to come to mind.

Guruhari Sahebdada models this idea of practicing what he preaches. When Sadguru Sant Pujya Manojdasji once presented a logo design for feedback, Sahebdada could have commanded changes. Instead, he gently suggested, “Ā aksharo thodā motā karie to?” [What if we make the letters a bit larger?] He could have said “Aksharo

motā karo,” but instead he chose “karie to”. A small difference, but he chose humility over authority, leading by example.

“Lead by example” is easy to say. Living it is much harder. Consider you’re driving and quickly glance at a text. If, days or years later, your child does the same, what can you say then? Where did they learn that was okay?

It can bring guilt when our actions don’t match the parent we want to be. A message I recently heard stayed with me: **“No one wakes up trying to be a bad parent.”** Read that again. No one starts their day thinking, *Today I’ll lose my temper*, or *Today I won’t be present with my kids.*

When guilt comes up, it helps to ask:

- Is this showing me where I want to improve?
- Is this revealing a disconnect between my actions and my values?
- If so, there’s something to learn.
- Or, is this guilt stemming from unrealistic expectations, like *I should always be available for my kids*, or *I should never take a break?*

If that’s the case, it may be worth letting it go and choosing more compassionate standards instead.

Across all ages, our children aren’t just children; **they’re sharp observers, listeners, and learners.** They learn the good and the bad. If we scroll our phones or watch TV while eating, they learn that. If we speak harshly or curse, they learn that too.

Guruhari Sahebdada shares a parable of a mother who tells her child to pray, but the child doesn’t listen. One day, the child finds the mother praying. The next day, the same thing happens. Soon, without being told, the child sits and prays. This is the quiet power parents hold.

This doesn’t mean parents are responsible for everything their children do; kids also learn from peers and the world around them. But parents do have an impactful opportunity to model positive behavior.

May we pause and become more aware of our actions, remembering our children learn not from our words but from our actions. How we handle our own anger, how we speak to ourselves after making mistakes, how much time we spend on our phones – our own actions teach them far more than words ever could. Our kids learn from **what we do**, not from what we tell them to do.