

## Child depression and mental health - It is real!

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It was not long ago that we were kind of thanking the pandemic and lock down as it made us to stay at home and spend more quality time with our families. However, we fail to realize that when parents are spending quality time with their families, their children are learning about the latest technologies and exposed to the internet and social media more than ever before. Unfortunately, we could see the consequences now with more and more children are suffering from depression and poor mental health. This is a serious problem that needs to be addressed before we lose young and innocent lives. In relation to that, I would like to quote a recent interview with Dr. Abilasha, a popular psychologist from Tamil Nadu, India. It was a very informative interview where she pointed the important mistakes made by parents nowadays that lead to many problems that are arising among children and teenagers. These include stress and depression. Why young children suffer from depression and high stress levels which most of the time are not realized by their parents and teachers? We should not wait until we lose a life to learn our lessons. It is very critical that we should stop blaming on technology alone and start taking responsibilities as parents and teachers to raise them in the right way. I have highlighted some excellent takeaways from her interview which have been outlined for the guidance of everyone.

1. Do not assume that children and teenagers will not suffer from any problems or depression.

There are many problems and issues that they are very sensitive about in today's era, such as ragging, body shaming, bullying and sexual harassment. Teenagers will suffer in silence, process the problems themselves with the help of internet by reading irrelevant content online and acting according to their thoughts and judgements.

2. Teenagers are not used to hearing the word 'no'

Telling 'no' to them will cause anger and disappointment. and they will start processing issues sensitively. They might misinterpret that they are not capable enough to deserve a 'yes' and good for nothing. Gone are the days where 'no' is just an indication

that you will not get it now. Messages are taken too personally and relate to their personality and capabilities. Teenagers are not as open minded as those days.

3. Expose and educate children about challenges in life, do not promise them a luxurious life with no challenges.

There will be obstacles and bottleneck situations that they have to come across. Share with them how you have managed your challenges in life. Show them how and why they need to handle it. Children assume life will be like a cakewalk and no obstacles will be there for them. Even when there is, they believe their parents will handle it for them. Therefore, when they face challenging situations suddenly, they lose direction. They get angry and frustrated over those challenges without thinking how to solve them.

4. Addiction to gadgets

There has been excessive usage of gadgets among small children and teenagers ever since the pandemic. It was us who introduced the technology to them and encouraged them to use those devices for their online classes. That has resulted in them being addicted to it and has come to a stage where they can't live without it. They are highly dependent on these devices for them to function as normal. Active participation in social media and communicating with strangers happens with the usage of these devices. This does create pressure for teenagers when they are concerned about not getting likes for their status, getting affected by a comment, etc. More children will grow with narcissistic personalities who would love excessive admiration for themselves and long for praise and recognition from others. Narcissism can be said to be a personality disorder among teenagers and younger generations. Narcissistic personality disorder is a mental health condition in which people need and seek too much attention and want people to admire them. (Mayo Clinic, 2017) Parents do not have knowledge about the content that the teenagers are accessing and have no control over it. Most parents are not tech savvy either. This creates a gap between the parents and the child and probably allows easy entrance of a third person to handle the stress of the child.

5. Addiction to alcohol, tobacco and drug

Teenagers are getting easy access to alcohol, cigarettes and drugs. This behavior is not seen as wrong and no one tells them that it was wrong. Some parents smoke and drink in front of their children. Some parents even encourage their teenage children to drink and say there is nothing wrong with it. This sends a very strong message to teenagers that this is totally acceptable and be considered as a symbol of style and status.

#### 6. High favoritism in schools

The practice of favoring some children, giving special attention, unequal treatment and partiality are all happening in some schools. This includes choosing class leaders, giving opportunities to favorite and smart students. These practices may not go so well with some children. They will not be used to being rejected, being ignored and not recognized in comparison to their home where they are the most important person.

#### 7. Too much focus on marks

There is too much emphasis given to marks and not to other skills. The notion that you need good marks to survive and failures in exams are not acceptable will push any child into pressure. Children have to be exposed to life where marks are secondary and there are many others ways they can survive. They need soft skills such as ability to solve problems, creative thinking, communication, etc. We also need to focus on Adversity Quotients (AQ), Emotional Quotients (EQ), Social Quotients (SQ) and Intelligence Quotients (IQ). AQ is defined as the ability to withstand the challenges and adversities that life throws at you and how quickly you can get back on the horse, adapt, move on and get over it. (Hardwick, 2023) EQ measures an individual's ability to understand, empathize, and negotiate with others. (Vij, 2023) SQ is the ability to understand yourself and others. SQ develops from one's experiences with others and learning about successes and failures in social contexts. (HR Future, 2021) IQ is a measure of your ability to reason and solve problems. (Cherry, 2019)

#### 8. Children feel alone and isolated

Most parents are working and will not be at home when the children come back from school. Mostly, they are taken care by maids or servants. Parents have provided everything for them. They have gadgets, TVs, food, food can be delivered as well. but the absence of parents to share their daily stories or problems will cause the children to

suffer in silence. Parents' guidance is much needed in leading the child along the right path by advising them to be brave, help others, solve own problems, build a strong personality and so on. Knowing their children's strengths and weaknesses is important. Always remember that children who are smart in studies and good at sports are still prone to stress and depression.

#### 9. Depending too much on schools for life skills education

Parents who are too busy fully depend on schools to educate their children with life skills. Emotional intelligence and abilities to tackle challenges, analytical thinking about how their decisions will affect others and positive thinking should always start from the upbringing of parents and not in school. Sadly, many schools are focusing only on academic achievements.

#### 10. Relationship issues among children and teenagers

A lot of kids are waiting to mature early and want to have girlfriends and boyfriends. They do not know the nature of relationships and progress very fast. Furthermore, they have no knowledge of the consequences of those relationships and could not handle breakups and threats. This could also lead to early age depression.

#### 11. Aggression and frustration within a child

Children nowadays get angry and frustrated over small issues. Parents need to address these aggressions and try to calm their children down with various methods. This is a serious early warning that should not be ignored.

### **Few measures that parents should take to prevent children depression**

- Do NOT provide own room before 18 years old

Spend quality time with children. They are still small and need supervision. Let them sleep with siblings. Sleeping alone will give them opportunities and ideas to commit suicide. Parents need to know what the child is doing.

- Do not let children be isolated

Make them attend family functions and do not leave them alone. Encourage them to attend conversations and outings. A child that refuses might be experiencing problems. Always be alert and catch the clues for depression. Some children may utter words like "I do not want to live", "I am sorry if I have hurt you". Look for suicidal behaviors like self-harming, frustrated love, being alone etc. Do not take anything for granted, thinking all these are normal and will go away by itself.

- Do not discuss personal problems between parents in-front of the child.

Children who witness parents' fights and quarrels will easily give up in life. Children will always take parents as example and will try to do the same in their lives as well. Parents might forget what happened that day itself, but children will remember for lifetime. This may cause anxiety too. Be a good role-model.

- Do not over stress and over expect from your child

Do not torture your child with higher expectations of academic achievements. Let them grow up freely and enjoy their childhood without having to struggle to fulfil your expectations and requirements. Do not threaten them with goals and keep them busy like you. Teach them life skills.

- Do not use teenagers as sounding board

Do not share problems between family members (adults) with teenagers. Do not talk about any family members or friends. They might process it differently. Share only the positive things. This will cause them to lose hope about life and family constitution and relate their life with it. It was different ages ago.

- Maintain accessibility

Take note of who their friends and where they are at all times. Maintain a good relationship with their friends too.

- Do not provide irrelevant gadgets

Do not give any unwanted gadgets, especially to school-going children. A lot of parents think that their children should not suffer like them and provide them with a luxurious life. Children need to know the appropriateness of the gadgets based on their age. It is always advisable not to provide everything at a very early age. Children need to work hard to obtain something that they like. This will motivate them to think and generate life goals.

- Avoid pampering

No matter how rich you are, do not assure your children that they will get everything they wish for. Learn to say no and train them to accept nos. Children should develop the mindset that it is not easy to get certain things from their parents. Whatever they ask for should be reasonable and age appropriate.

We are in an era where everyone needs to have social responsibility to provide help and support to others, including parents, siblings, friends, schools and government. What are the measurements taken to create awareness about depression and mental health? We have no choice than to talk about this topic to a group who may be too young to understand what depression and mental health is. Schools need to be more responsible in teaching life skills to students and not always focus on the marks. Life skills seem to be more important and badly needed than academic excellence. If a child has a suicidal thought, it is a shame for people around him / her. Let's save our kids before it is too late.

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