



NEWSLETTER

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Children – Architects of Future!

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Children are very dear to all. They give us lots of joy and happiness, at the same time their day-to-day activities demand care and caution from us. Especially if it is a girl, parents have butterflies in their stomach till they settle in their life. Challenges are many, which requires a detailed study. I am trying to elaborate on three key aspects related to raising children:

1) Technology Addiction 2) Super Kid Syndrome and 3) Physical Safety.

It is up to the parents to judiciously select the points applicable to their children and invest time to raise them to become responsible and respectable adults.

1) Technology Addiction

Our children are growing up in a world that's completely different from what we lived in 15 years ago. These are the 'digital days' where even toddlers seem to know how to use smart phones before they can talk. But what happens when our children have uncontrolled access to technology? Their health begins to deteriorate. Yes, technology can hurt our children, beyond what we can imagine.

How does technology harm our children? : Spending prolonged hours on the phone/ tablet can have adverse effects on a child's physical and mental health. Worldwide researches have proven that technology addiction can affect and delay the development of children by limiting their creative, imaginative and physical challenges to achieve optimal motor and sensory development. It

also makes them extremely restless, resulting in behavioral issues and problems at school.

Effects on mental health:

Addiction: According to child health experts, technology addiction is the latest health problem in children. Gadgets like smart phones open a whole new world of visual entertainment to children. It captures their interest in an instant and can keep them hooked for hours end. But the real problem arises when their interest turns into addiction. It becomes impossible for them to spend a day without gadgets and worse, may exhibit extreme withdrawal symptoms.

Recent researches on brain imaging shows that technology influences the brain's frontal cortex (the part which controls executive functioning including impulse control) exactly the same way as that of cocaine. Technology is so hyper-exciting that it increases the dopamine levels (the feel-good neurotransmitter that plays a major role in addiction), making the child crave for more and more stimulation.

Technology induced autism: Too much technology can make children lonely. Happy or sad, they prefer the company of their gadgets to friends and family. They disconnect from everything and prefer to be in a world of their own. This deteriorates their social and communication skills, so much so that they don't even establish eye contact while talking to people.

Neurological problems: Heard of Electronic Screen Syndrome? It's an unrecognized, modern day disorder caused due to overuse of gadgets. ESS is essentially a 'deregulation' disorder or the inability to modulate one's attention, mood or level of arousal in a manner that's appropriate to the environment. Interaction with electronic screens shifts the nervous system into 'fight-or-flight' mode, causing the child to

become over stimulated. This leads to symptoms like extreme irritability, depression, excessive tantrums, frustration, poor self-regulation, disorganized behavior, defiance, poor socialising skills, refusing eye contact, alteration in sleep cycle, learning difficulties and bad memory. Too much technology can also lead to dangerous conditions like psychosis and neurosis.

Insomnia: Spending time with gadgets can gradually extend to late nights, depriving the child of essential sleep time. Besides, looking continuously into the screen prevents the brain from resting, resulting in insomnia and disruption of the normal sleep-wake cycle. Lack of sleep can lead to several health problems, including depression and hallucination.

Social Isolation: Unfortunately, children are finding it more fun to play on their mobiles than with real friends. This leads to social isolation – the child becomes a loner, an introvert who does not like to make friends or socialize with people. An extremely dangerous condition, social isolation can cause anxiety, depression, distrust in others and suicidal tendencies.

Effects on physical health: Technology can cause multiple health problems in children including:

- Dry, weak eyes as they stare at the screen for hours.
- Continuous headache.
- They bend their head while looking into phones or tablets, which puts excess pressure on the neck, head and shoulder. This causes several back and neck issues including spondylitis and back pain.
- Most of the time, they sit with their backs bent or lie down on the bed with head elevated – this causes postural problems like hunching.
- Continuous movement of fingers and wrist leads to injuries like the 'texting thumb'.
- Addiction to gadgets forces them sit at home, which means less outdoor play and physical activity. Their bones and muscles become weak due to reduced physical activity
- Physical and mental development issues

So what can you do about this? : It's not practical to deny technology, but it's possible to limit the use of technology.

Limit the screen time: Children don't need to spend hours on gadgets. Limit the phone/ tablet/ computer time to 30 minutes or so every day. And

that too, under your strict supervision. If you feel that your child is too enamored by technology, it's advisable to do a digital detox. Take off everything that's got to do with technology – phones, tablets, play stations, laptops for a few days. There might be strong resistances and tantrums initially, but don't lose heart. Make him or her understand that the reason why you are doing so. After everything is settled, train your child to use technology judiciously, under supervision.

We know that children turn to addiction when they feel bored, lonely, alienated and purposeless. The solution is to help them to connect to meaningful real-life experiences and relationships, and extend them unconditional support.

2) Super kid Syndrome

Haven't we all, at some point in time, wished we were a kid again? To go back to those beautiful, precious days when we fluttered around like a butterfly, without any stress or tension? But will our children, after many years, be able to recollect their childhood with so much of fondness? Maybe not.

We live in a world where only success matters. All of us are in this constant race, striving to outdo the others. And we drag along our children too, expecting them to run at the same speed. We want them to read and count before they can walk; become class topper even in kindergarten; become disciplined, self-sufficient and productive even before they can speak for themselves; excel in every activity understand every single subject the moment it is taught and score 100% in every exam. Put simply, we want them to be "super kids" and not "normal kids".

According to leading mental experts, such unrealistic and undue pressure causes extreme stress in children, which can have devastating effects on their physical and mental health.

Stress in children can be categorized to three:

Positive stress response: This is an essential and normal part of healthy development, characterized by brief elevation in the heart rate and hormone levels.

Tolerable stress response: A result of more severe and long-lasting difficulties like loss of a loved one, trauma etc., this activates the body's alert systems to a greater degree. Tolerable stress

becomes tolerable when family members and friends help them overcome it.

Toxic stress response: This occurs when a child is subject to persistent, strong and high-levels of stress. Prolonged activation of the stress response systems can hinder the normal development of brain architecture and also other organ systems, leading to stress-related diseases and worse, cognitive impairment.

Continuous toxic stress can cause permanent damage to the child's physical and mental health and cause multiple complications including developmental delays, heart diseases, diabetes, anxiety, depression, behavioral problems, insomnia and substance abuse.

So what should you do to make your child perform well?

Let children be children: Children are more likely to perform well academically if they are not hurried through their childhood by parents who overestimate their competence and expose them to extreme academic pressures.

Identify their talents: Children are born talented. If one is good at academics, the other might be good at singing. It's important that you identify their talents and tastes, and encourage them to do what they love to do.

Children are not means to realize your dreams: Most often, parents see children as the means to achieve what they could not. This attitude can spell doom for the child. Each individual has his or her talents, capabilities, dreams, aspirations and a mind of their own. Remember, they are your children, not your replicas.

Realize the fact that children are not super kids: No one can excel in everything. The same applies to children as well. It's fine if they can't perform well in certain areas. You can always encourage them to do better.

Low grades don't decide the future: It's fine if your child can't score a centum in every single subject. Low grades don't mean lack talent. Instead of demotivating and telling them off, encourage and support them to perform better. Never compare your child with other children. Would you appreciate being told that you're not good enough?

3) Physical Safety

Not a single day that passes by without us hearing about heinous sexual crimes against children. Sexual predators are on the prowl and you need to be extremely cautious when it comes to your child's safety. Because, unfortunately, in most cases, the offender is someone who is well known to the child.

So what can you do to protect your child against the dangers lurking around? Simple. Become proactive and careful.

Here are 8 proactive and practical ways to tackle child sex abuse.

Build a bond of trust with your child: "We're there for you, no matter what" – when children are given unconditional love and support by their parents, they become mentally strong. They will not think twice before confiding their deepest secrets to you.

Remember, most offences never come out in the open because children fear that their parents will get upset and blame them for the incident. Hence it is extremely important to build a strong, deep bond of trust with your child.

Empower your child to speak openly: It's very important that you empower your child to speak openly to you about anything under the sun. Don't shy away from delicate topics like sex and 'boundaries of touch'; they will open up to you only if they have comfortable equation with you.

Make them aware: Explain in detail to your child about the dangers that are lurking around. It's very important for them to know that even those who are well known (family members, friends and acquaintances) might cause harm. Instruct them not to get into a conversation, take lifts or accept any gifts/eatables from strangers.

Good touch and bad touch: Children should know and understand the difference between good touch and bad touch. They need to know that it is not right when someone touches them on the lips, chest or private parts without their permission. Empower them to say "No" and call out loudly for help, without any fear.

Learn the facts: It's crucial to know and understand the facts about child abuse. The information can be extremely disturbing, but it will give us a better understanding of the issues faced by children.

Minimize opportunities: Avoid all possible chances of your child being left alone or in the company of people who you don't know. Keep a sharp eye on children, especially in places like parks and malls.

Don't let your child go out alone until he or she is old enough to handle tricky situations.

Look for signs: If you feel something isn't right, go by your gut feeling – it might turn out to be true. The child may not say anything, but it's important that you monitor his or her behavior, expressions and conversations closely. Most of the time, children go quiet after such incidents primarily out of fear. They also become aloof, detached, stubborn, depressed and irritable.

Physical signs of abuse include:

- Redness, rashes or swelling in the genital area
- Urinary tract infections
- Physical problems like stomach pain or headaches, caused due to anxiety
- Sexual behavior and language that are not age-appropriate

React responsibly

If you suspect or come to know of an incident from the child, react responsibly. It's natural to feel extreme anger, shock and sadness, but you need to calm down and think, react and act responsibly. Confront the offender and make sure that he or she does get away with it. Never hide these incidents fearing the society, as it will only encourage the offender to commit more crimes. Speak up for the child and him or her unconditional support, love and care. Make sure that they heal completely, physically and emotionally. Ensure psychological support through expert counseling. Reassure them that you are there for them and it's a nightmare they need to get over.

Conclusion

Parents have the final and foremost responsibility in monitoring the children. Raising them with values, civic sense and rational thinking is key to their success. We should be their best friends, and should remember that motivational communication will be more effective than stale advices. We should help the children to set their goals, but never insist on choosing one out of peer pressure. Let's hope every child gets the best advice and companionship which will naturally bring out the best in them!

Children are architects of future

Mr. John F Williams, Friend, FRNV

Indeed, our young Children are the Architects of the Future of this country and the world.

You never know who can be among them our President/ PM/ Speaker/ CM / Political Leader/ Top Bureaucrat/ or a CEO of a leading multinational company or a leading international bank.

It will be only possible when the child is groomed, educated, trained to reach any of the above stages in their future .This exercise starts with Parents and later with Teachers. They have to sincerely work hard in order to realize their dreams.

For these young children, every experience or encounter presents a learning opportunity. They learn from everything they see, do, hear, feel, smell, and taste; everyone they interact (talk, play, and laugh) with; and everywhere they go.

It is believed that Pre-school children learn best when they interact with their peers, receive kind treatment from their parents and educators, and don't feel pressured to learn. They are inclined to be curious and interested in discovering new things. Children who receive quality early childhood education are reportedly more confident and curious, which causes them to perform better. Children learn how to manage challenges.

High quality early childhood education preschool programs can help to set up the young child for future academic, social, and emotional success.

Girls and boys, who learn to read, write and count will provide a better future for their families and countries. With improved education, so many other areas are positively affected. In short, education has the power to make the world a better place.

For several decades, children in villages, especially girl children, were never encouraged by their parents to attend school, with the result our country remained backward in Literacy. Parents wanted their daughters to work only at home while their sons to support them in the field / business. Etc.

It is only now that people have realised that an educated girl is not only an asset to her Parents but that she would equally enrich her family after marriage.

Education is an important tool that enables children to participate in decisions that affect their lives and in improving their social status. Once a child is well educated he / she has self confidence, decision making quality, increase in income and better health too.

In our country, the HRD Ministry, Govt of India introduced an Act, namely, Right to Education ACT, 2009 to provide free and compulsory education to all the children of the age of six to fourteen years.

This Act makes education a fundamental right of every child between the ages of 6 and 14 and specifies minimum norms in elementary schools. It requires all private schools to reserve 25% of seats for the poor and other categories of children. Children are admitted in to private schools based on caste-based reservations. However in 2014, the Supreme Court of India ruled that Right to Education Act is not applicable to Minority Institutions.

This Act also prohibits all unrecognized schools from charging any donation or capitation fees and interviews of the child or the Parent for admission. It also provides that no child shall be held back or expelled. There is also a provision for special training of school drop-outs.

A report on implementation of the Act was released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development admitting that 8.1 million children in the age group 6-14 remain out of school and there's a shortage of 508,000 teachers country-wide. It suffers from shortage of teachers and infrastructural gaps. There are also frequent allegations of government schools being riddled with absenteeism and mismanagement and of appointments made on political convenience.

As per the recent survey conducted and reported by media on Primary Education, the standard of our village schools was so deplorable that about 46 % of Class V students couldn't even read Class II text. Further, students are losing interest in Mathematics. A Class V student is unable to solve very simple division sums. Most of the students of Class I could hardly identify numbers between 1 and 9.

It will not be out of place to quote that the interest taken by the Primary Govt Teachers in villages in particular, is very poor. First of all their appointment is itself defective. They are appointed under Political support/pressures and, at times, through corrupt practices. Therefore, a teacher doesn't take much interest/initiative to educate the students. In some villages, teachers are not paid salaries; therefore they could not be expected to be sincere in their duties.

Late coming and absenteeism of village teachers is a very common practice. Poor infrastructure is yet another drawback. Students in some schools sit on the ground and under leaky roofs during rainy season. There is hardly any good drinking water & proper sanitation.

Undoubtedly, the ministry of Human Resource Development is implementing schemes to upgrade infrastructure and ensure timely payment of salaries to teachers, but these can be only succeed in case proper/ sincere efforts are made to monitor them.

Children can only attain their goal once we, as parents ensure that each and every child attends the school regularly and we keep a watch on their daily activities. This would ensure that the future of our country would be prosperous and safe and it would be force to be reckoned with in the world.

NEWS & EVENTS

❑ *FRNV has prepared a teachers' manual for class 1-3 to guide teachers how ethics, values and principles have to be transferred to the young minds. We realise, manuals alone will not enable teachers to accomplish this. The teachers themselves have to be trained and oriented towards this noble mission. This is FRNV's first attempt. Based on the experiences gained from the field we have to modify and enlarge the scope of this manual.*

If any of you are interested in reviewing the manual , please write to us and provide us with your valuable feedback.

❑ *On June 9, 2019, FRNV will complete 11 years of its existence and we are planning to celebrate our 11th Foundation Day to mark the occasion at Metro Bhawan, Barakhamba Road, New Delhi. All the details regarding the Foundation Day will be shared soon.*

Dear Readers,

FRNV invites stories from its readers on deep-rooted values that have helped us in our everyday lives. Some of these stories will be featured in the next issue of our newsletter. So put your thinking caps on, recall the values integral to your life which you cherish and write to us at shilpi@valuefoundation.in.