



New-age
Parenting





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Preface

One of the teen characters in a Julian Barnes' novel comments to his friends, 'Our parents thought we might be corrupted by one another into becoming what it was they most feared. On our behalf, they dreaded the closeness of adolescent friendships, the predatory behaviour of strangers on trains, the lure of the wrong kind of influence. How far their anxieties outran our experience!' This sounds like a typical teenager's lament, doesn't it? But, do parental anxieties always outrun children's experiences really?

For every ten children who grow into happy, efficient, honest, contributing adults, there is at least one child who loses his way and is miserable. Who is to be blamed for this? Children or their parents?

Parenting is the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood. A tall order, indeed! If there is one job for which no formal qualification is demanded or expected, it is the job of a parent. And yet, it is the most challenging and life-impacting job on earth. Some say that parents learn on the job. When you learn on the job, it is a hit or miss situation. Where is the rulebook for parenting? And, do all rules work with every child? No. Each child is unique. Much as nobody wants to be made nervous about parenting, we can't deny the huge support that guidance and suggestions from experts can bring to young parents. This book is a small contribution to parents towards this cause.

Head - Product Development
Macmillan Education

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New-age Parenting





PARENTING

STYLES AND CHALLENGES

The Science and Art of Positive Parenting in a Changing World

Parents perceive giving birth to a baby, taking care of the infant, helping the child to make sense of the world around it, and finally seeing the child through to adulthood as formidable learning curves in self-growth. Being a parent is certainly a great experience, but undeniably fraught with challenges at every stage.

Parenting Styles

Research reveals that specific parenting practices are far less significant compared to broad patterns of parenting in ensuring the well-being of a child. Diana Baumrind, a renowned researcher, believes that primarily, parenting revolves around issues of control. Although parents may differ in the manner and the extent to which they control their children, it is largely assumed that the primary role of all parents is to **influence, teach, and control** their children.

There are four types of parenting styles:

1. Indulgent
2. Authoritarian
3. Authoritative
4. Uninvolved (Maccoby & Martin, 1983)

Parenting is the process of enabling and supporting the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood.

The rules for parents are but three... love, limit, and let them be. ~ Elaine M. Ward

Indulgent Parents

1

Indulgent parents are sometimes referred to as permissive parents or non-directive parents. These parents are more responsive and less demanding. Indulgent parents rarely discipline their children because they do not have high expectations of maturity and self-control from their wards. According to Baumrind (1991), these parents are non-traditional and quite lenient in their approach to parenting and often choose to avoid confrontation. However, permissive parents are generally nurturing and communicate well with their children besides often taking on the role of a friend rather than a parent. A typical example of the indulgent parent would be the one who, without anxiety, lets her or his children watch television when homework is yet to be completed. Such parents believe that children need to enjoy their relaxed childhood before preparing for adulthood.

Children and adolescents from indulgent homes

- demonstrate problem behaviour
- have higher self-esteem
- show better social skills, and
- experience lower levels of depression.

Permissive parenting often results in children who

- rank low in happiness and self-regulation
- have more problems with authority than many
- tend to perform poorly in school
- may become aggressive and uncaring.

They resist authority in the world outside as they haven't been taught to respect authority in their own homes.

Authoritarian Parents

2

Authoritarian parents are highly demanding and directive, but not responsive. They are obedience and status-oriented, and expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation (Baumrind, 1991). They expect children to strictly follow the rules set by them. Failure to follow rules usually results in punishment. These parents provide well-ordered and structured environments with clearly-stated rules. However, they fail to explain the reasoning behind the rules. If the child asks for an explanation, the parent might simply react, saying, "Because I said so." These parents have high demands, but are not responsive. Should we examine the rule regarding homework as an example, then "Turn off the TV right NOW, and sit down to do your homework, otherwise..." will be the typical response from an authoritarian parent.

Children and adolescents from these families

- tend to be average performers at school
- usually do not demonstrate problem behaviour
- have poorer social skills
- possess lower self-esteem
- exhibit higher levels of depression.

This style of parenting generally shapes children who

- are obedient and proficient
- are observed to be moody and irritable
- rank lower in happiness, social competence and self-esteem
- lack confidence in decision-making as adults as they've always been told what to do.

Authoritative Parents

3

Authoritative parents are both demanding and responsive. They do establish rules and guidelines although when their children fail to meet the parental expectations, they react in a more nurturing and forgiving style rather than showing a punishing response. Authoritative parents are clearly more democratic and less authoritarian. Dealing with the situation of homework which we have been citing as an example, authoritative parents would negotiate with their children on the promise that they would be allowed to see the recorded version or the second run of the programme once they complete their homework.

Children and adolescents whose parents are authoritative turn out to be

- ❑ socially adaptable and instrumentally competent

This parenting style tends to result in children who are

- ❑ happy, capable, and successful
- ❑ content, confident, responsible and independent

Uninvolved Parents

4

Uninvolved parents make very few demands on their children. They have low responsiveness and little communication. While these parents fulfil the child's basic needs, they are generally detached from their child's life. In extreme cases, these parents may even reject or neglect the needs of their children. In the same situation we have been examining, such parents would let the child do what he/she wants and may tell them directly or indirectly not to bother them.

Children and adolescents whose parents are uninvolved

- ❑ perform poorly in most domains
- ❑ may rank lowest across all life domains
- ❑ lack self-control and have low self-esteem
- ❑ could be less competent than their peers
- ❑ may become hostile, insecure and rebellious.

The Challenges of New-age Parenting

It is difficult to disagree with the notion that we are now living in a society where people have become more individualistic and self-concerned. It is often bemoaned that the 'me-generation' has fallen in standards of morality, manners, values, and personal behaviour. Children increasingly seem to be concerned only about themselves, and less able to cope with discipline, disappointment or challenges.

New-age parenting requires from parents a clear understanding of how they want their children to be. In effect, they should have a clear vision of how they want their children to shape up. Do they want their children to lead a morally, socially and personally fulfilling life? Is employability and material success more important to a parent than the child's happiness and contentment? Children invariably learn from observing parents more than listening to them, so parental behaviour is a significant contributor in shaping the child's value system. 'Do as you say' is directly responsible for the level of your child's fulfilling your expectations.

Having said that, parenting varies not only from parent to parent but also from one culture to another. The direction that the individual takes will be dictated by the expectations of his community and society as well. It is important to remember that it is not necessary or possible to decide exactly how the child should behave in every imaginable situation. Parents with sound or impaired value systems often pass on their own feelings and convictions on a range of issues to their children.

The top half of the page features a vibrant sunset scene. The sky is a gradient of yellow and orange, with a large, bright sun partially obscured by a white circle. Silhouettes of several children are shown in various playful poses: some are jumping, some are running, and one is performing a handstand. The background includes silhouettes of trees and flying butterflies, creating a joyful and active atmosphere.

The Power of Positive Parenting

Positive parenting essentially aims at meeting the child's basic needs and giving it the right direction towards leading a meaningful life.

Some of the strategies which are in tune with the philosophy of positive parenting are listed below.

- **Provide unconditional love and acceptance** to the child even when unapproved behaviour is being demonstrated. While this does not mean parents condone socially unacceptable behaviour, it clearly underpins the expectation that parents separate the child from his or her behaviour. It is the behaviour which is bad and not the child.
- **Treat the child with respect and dignity**, that is, treat the child as a 'real' person. Rule out communicating to the child that 'We think we know better just because we are older'. Good parent-child relationships are about listening to what the child actually has to say and about respecting the child's views. Treating the child like a person directly communicates to the child that appropriate behaviour is expected of him/her.
- **Provide structure**, that is, ensure that children understand how the world works and what to expect, as it prepares them and makes them feel secure. An important part of raising responsible children is encouraging them to take on a degree of responsibility for the choices they make and the consequences they must face.
- **Nurture a child's self-esteem** as parental words and actions have a tremendous effect on a child's developing self-esteem. Being generous with rewards – love, hugs, and compliments can work wonders and are often rewards enough in themselves. Appreciating children's achievements will make them feel confident; allowing children to work independently on little activities will make them feel capable and strong. By contrast, belittling comments or comparing children unfavourably with others will make them feel worthless.
- **Make time for children** as children who do not get enough from parents, are often hyperactive or misbehave because they are longing for attention and being naughty is one way of being noticed.
- **Be a model of desired traits** as young children look at their parents as role models and imitate parents' behaviour. The younger the child is, the more he or she tends to imitate the parents. The importance of teaching by example in parenting cannot be overstated.
- **Be aware of one's own needs and limitations as an effective parent** for it is essential that parents recognize their strengths and weaknesses and attempt to work on the latter. Having realistic expectations from self, spouse, and children is a must for positive parenting. Parents do not and need not have all the answers. Do not set unachievable standards either for yourself or your children. Aim at manageable parenting and focus on the areas that need the most attention first rather than addressing everything all at once.

The “3Fs” of Effective Parenting

- 1 FRIENDLINESS**
Use a friendly but firm communication style.
- 2 FIRMNESS**
The punishment should fit the crime.
- 3 FAIRNESS**
Consequences should be clearly stated.

While parenting is a source of great pleasure and self-fulfilment, it is a complex process which has more responsibilities than merely giving birth to a new life. Helping children grow up and become well-adjusted individuals requires nurturing of their social and emotional development. Positive parenting has an indisputable role in impacting and ensuring the development of a well-rounded personality of children.

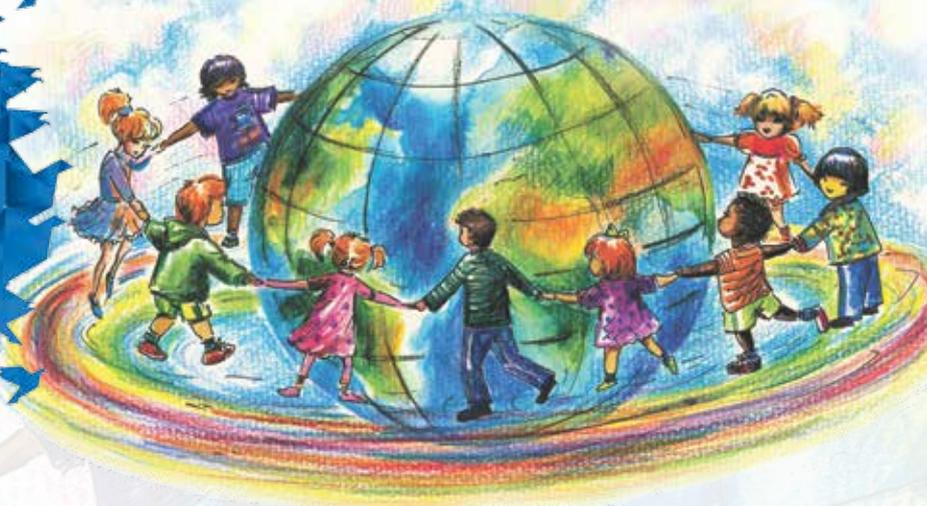
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A large number of schooling systems in the country regularly seek technical expertise for their advocacy, research, training and enrichment programmes from this team. Dr Jitendra Nagpal is a recipient of the ‘**Delhi State Child Welfare Award**’ for distinguished services in Child Development by the Department of Social Welfare, Govt. of NCT of Delhi. He has supervised post doctoral researches in behavioral sciences and is the **Program Study Centre Incharge at Moolchand Medcity** for the **Master of Science in Counseling and Family Therapy {M.Sc (CFT)}** course launched by the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) at study centre of Moolchand Medcity, New Delhi. Dr Jitendra Nagpal has been recently conferred the excellence award for ‘School Healthy Heart Initiative’ in India.



IMPORTANCE

OF LIFE SKILLS IN EDUCATION

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines skills as the ‘Abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life’ (1997). These skills have been broadly classified into five areas:

Self-awareness and empathy

Creative thinking and critical thinking

Decision-making and problem-solving

Communication and interpersonal relationships

Coping with emotions and coping with stress

Why do we require training and a license to drive a car but have so little regard for preparing students to be parents, workers, or family and community members? ~ Marilyn Swierk

There are various aspects of child development such as physical, mental, emotional, social, moral and spiritual as well as self and identity. Each child moves through these various dimensions of his or her growth at an individual pace. Parenting, upbringing and experiences at school contribute largely towards the life skills a child acquires and develops.

Select dimensions of child development

One of the most important things we can do as parents is to help our children develop positive feelings about themselves. Children with self-esteem are more likely to grow into happy and productive members of society.



Providing a warm, nurturing and loving relationship with support, encouragement and interest in the child helps them feel good about themselves.

Formation of a child's identity and building self-esteem

The identity of a child begins to form between one to two years of age and continues to develop well into adulthood. What children think of themselves, how worthy they feel, and how confident they are, gives them a sense of self-esteem. According to psychologists, self-esteem depends on how well we perform in the following eight areas:

1. Academics
2. Athletics
3. Physical appearance
4. Social acceptance
5. Friendships and relationships
6. Romantic appeal
7. Behavioural conduct
8. Job competence

All of the above (except romantic appeal) are a part of a growing child's life. No one is perfect in all of these. Children will necessarily face success and failure in some areas or the other, and their self-esteem can suffer at such times. Adults can help children build their self-esteem.

Principles of adult-child day-to-day interaction (behaviour and communication) that help to develop a child's self-esteem

Principle 1: Appreciate effort

By appreciating the effort that children make, rather than focusing on and appreciating only the end result, we can help them to value themselves as people who are capable of making an effort. Focusing only on the end result negates all the effort that children make in producing that result.

Appreciation is different from praise. Appreciation is specific, authentic and about something that children do (it may appear to be small or insignificant by adult standards). They find it genuine and feel good, recognized, and appreciated. This develops self-worth and they learn to look inwards for self-esteem, rather than seek external rewards to feel good.

Principle 2: Avoid comparisons

We can help children feel good about themselves, by themselves, and not in comparison to someone else. When children are treated as individuals and their skills, behaviour and efforts are appreciated, they become aware of their individual gifts and abilities irrespective of how they 'rank' with respect to others. Their self-esteem develops. They try to do better each time, until they feel they have reached their full potential. This builds self-motivation.

Comparison only adds to the inherent competitive nature of children and builds up high levels of stress which ultimately results in either poor performance or emotional trauma, or both. Children are competitive and have a natural desire to do their best. They perform best when they set their own targets or goals and work towards them with interest and energy (self-motivation). Encouragement, appreciation and support from significant adults in their lives help them reach their goals.



Principle 3: Avoid labels

Create opportunities for children to explore different behaviours. By labelling, they feel that they are expected to always behave in a particular way. Children who are constantly labelled as smart and intelligent, may experience stress out of fear of not meeting the expectations of the teacher or parent. Children who are called ‘lazy’ may not feel motivated to do any work since no one expects them to do anything anyway. The so-called ‘good’ labels can be as constraining to a child’s development as the ‘bad’ ones.

Principle 4: Avoid criticism, create limits

Criticism or negative inputs make children feel rejected or dejected and do not motivate them to improve. This does not mean that adults should not express their unhappiness when children’s behaviour is unacceptable. The correction in behaviour can be done in a non-judgmental and affirmative way, rather than with criticism.

Maintaining discipline by creating limits for behaviour

When a child’s behaviour is found to be unacceptable, the adult can discuss the errant behaviour and also explain why it is unacceptable. The child’s character need not be denigrated or labelled. Only the behaviour or action should be condemned—not the child.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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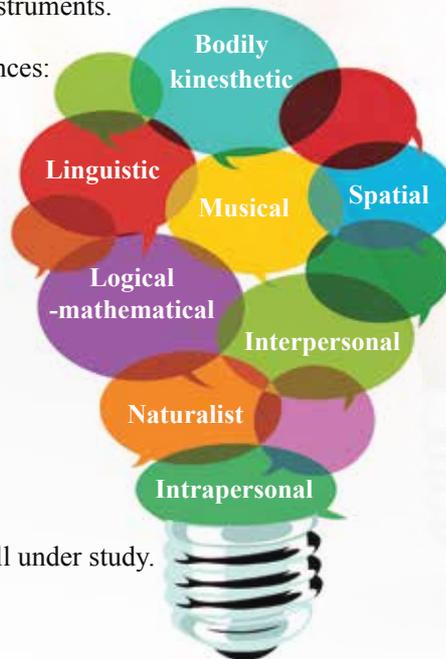


MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

Children's sense of self-worth depends on what they think of their abilities and intelligence. When a group of children were asked to raise their hands if they considered themselves to be intelligent, only a small percentage of the students did so. As adults, we can help children understand that there are many types of intelligences.

Howard Gardner, a psychologist and the John H. and Elisabeth A. Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education is best known in educational circles for his theory of **multiple intelligences**, a critique of the notion that there exists but a single human intelligence that can be adequately assessed by standard psychometric instruments.

He formulated a list of eight intelligences:



The ninth, spiritual intelligence, is still under study.

Children in a family are like flowers in a bouquet: there's always one determined to face in an opposite direction from the way the arranger desires. ~ Marcelene Cox

Each learner has a unique blend of intelligences. As parents, we can help our children realize their intelligences. We can encourage them to explore their unique blend of strengths and skills. We can also emphasize that examinations are not necessarily the only way of evaluating one's capabilities.

You can assess yourself on the following parameters and determine your own unique combination of intelligences. A teacher or guardian can ask the child to do the same. Chances are that the blend of intelligences will be different. What comes easily to one individual may not be so easy for a child with differently developed intelligences.

Linguistic intelligence

- Books mean a lot to me.
- I enjoy word games like mastermind, crosswords.
- I enjoy puns, palindromes, homonyms, antonyms.
- I use unusual and difficult words in my writing /speech.
- I find history, social studies, English easier than maths or science
- I write stories, essays or poems.
- I prefer to hear or read about an event rather than see pictures of the event (for example, I prefer to read the newspaper rather than watch the event on television).
- I can learn a new language easily.
- I like debating and extempore talks.



Logical-mathematical intelligence

- Maths and science are my favourite subjects.
- I enjoy mental mathematics.
- I am interested in scientific discoveries.
- I like to look for explanations for what I observe or read.
- I enjoy puzzles that require logical thinking.
- I like to look for sequences and patterns in things around me.
- I enjoy doing research and finding out information on topics.
- I prefer things around me to be organised, classified, and in order.
- I like to measure and weigh things and make lists.
- I like questions that have 'If, then what.....,' patterns.



Spatial intelligence

- I love jigsaw puzzles.
- I like to draw or doodle and make posters.
- I find it easy to read maps and find my way in a new place.
- I find it easy to read graphs and pictorial charts.
- I like books with plenty of illustrations.
- I can imagine clear pictures in my mind.
- I prefer geometry to algebra.
- I can visualise how things will look from different directions.
- I love keeping scrap books.





Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence

- I like to learn poems by using actions.
- I like to take part in dance and drama.
- I use my hands and body while talking.
- I like activities where I work with hands—making models, craft, knitting, sewing, cooking.
- I enjoy outdoor games.
- I learn more by doing and touching rather than by reading or observing.
- I get new ideas when I am physically active like walking or jogging.
- I find it boring to sit still for long periods of time.
- I like to track the lines I am reading with my fingers.

Musical intelligence

- I like learning poems by singing them.
- I play a musical instrument or sing.
- I listen to music often.
- I can tell when a musical note is off key.
- I like to make my own music by tapping or humming.
- I often sing a tune to myself while reading or walking.
- I can pick up musical beats, tones or pitch in sounds made by equipment like a mixer grinder, vacuum cleaner, motor vehicles.
- I turn to music to release my anger, stress or tension.
- I like creating songs and jingles to summarise concepts and ideas.



Interpersonal intelligence

- I enjoy being with friends.
- I enjoy team sports like cricket or basketball to solo sports like high jump or gymnastics.
- I prefer attending parties over spending an evening by myself.
- I actively participate in functions organised at home or at the workplace.
- I like to study, do projects in a group, discuss and debate concepts with friends.
- I talk about my problems with my close friends or family members.
- I can easily make out when my friend is feeling very sad.
- I like to cheer up my friends.
- I enjoy teaching a skill or topic to another person.



Intrapersonal intelligence

- I like to study on my own.
- I like to sit alone and think about various ideas, concepts.
- I like to sort out my feelings and problems by myself.
- I have a favourite place in my house where I like to sit or read.
- I think I am independent and strong-willed.
- I can motivate myself.
- I don't usually need to be told to do my work.
- I like to set my goals and work by myself to achieve them.



Naturalist intelligence

- I enjoy being outdoors.
- I can identify plants/ birds /insects easily.
- I like to look after pets and plants.
- I like to visit places like forests and mountains that are untouched by human activity.
- I find natural surroundings very relaxing.
- I like camping, trekking, nature walks, eco-tourism.

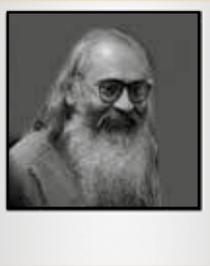


Using Multiple Intelligences (MI) to help children

A child with particular strengths learns most effectively by using those intelligences. For instance, a child who has strong bodily-kinesthetic intelligence would learn best by miming, moving around, and acting out the concepts.

The following list shows how MI can be used to help children learn a topic, for instance, the sun.

1. **Linguistic:** Ask children to write a poem or story about the sun.
2. **Logical-mathematical:** How many earths can fit inside a sun? How big is the sun? Why is the sun hot?
3. **Musical:** Set a poem about the sun to a tune; sing a song about the sun; look for songs about the sun.
4. **Spatial:** Make a model of the solar system using materials found in the kitchen.
5. **Bodily-Kinesthetic:** Ask children to show by their body movements the interior structure of the sun. Let them demonstrate the planets in the solar system and their varied movements.
6. **Interpersonal:** Make a greeting card with the sun as a theme and give it to someone you like or someone you wish to thank.
7. **Intrapersonal:** Use sunlight to practise positive visualisation. Ask children to imagine that the sunlight is entering their bodies and spreading its energy to every part of the body, healing them and keeping them healthy. Ask them how they feel after the exercise.
8. **Naturalistic:** Ask children to observe the plants that have flowers and the trees that have shed their leaves in the season, the flowers that bloom during the day and the ones that bloom during the night. What does sunlight provide?
9. **Spiritual:** Ask children to close their eyes and breathe deeply. With each breath, they should imagine sunlight pouring through their bodies, creating energy and making the body and mind healthy and happy.



Dr Shekhar Seshadri

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UNDERSTANDING

LEARNING STYLES

A learning style can be described as the favoured way in which a person ‘absorbs’ information. In more technical terms, a learning style is the preferred way in which an individual attends to stimuli, processes information, stores the details, and also recalls data over time.

In the early 1970s, Richard Bandler and John Grinder, who developed Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), used the words sub modalities to describe the way people take in and process information. Bandler and Grinder coined the terms **Visual**, **Auditory** and **Kinesthetic** for the sub modalities.

Learning Styles –

An Overview of Visual, Auditory and Kinesthetic Learners

Everybody knows how to raise children, except the people who have them. ~ P. J. O'Rourke

1 Characteristics of Visual Learners

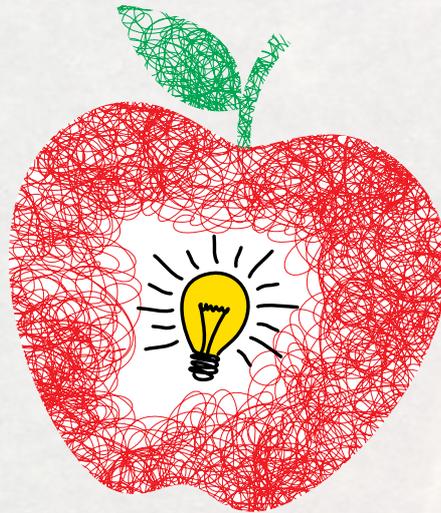
- ❑ Visual learners use the sense of sight more often and predominantly while absorbing information.
- ❑ They pick up, process, and remember visual cues more—like colour, shape, size and position.
- ❑ They process information as pictures, patterns and processes that have no words.
- ❑ They have excellent eye-hand coordination and excel at most activities that involve fine motor coordination.
- ❑ They love to often remain silent and observe things and people around them and are often found to be the best ones to describe situations, people and places in details.
- ❑ They are the ones that love looking at colourful pictures and are attracted to puzzles, blocks, cutting and pasting, drawing, sketching, board games, models and crafts, art projects, calculators, computers, television, video games and gazing at things.
- ❑ These are individuals that read words as pictures instantly and are very good at identifying pictures and patterns.
- ❑ They are the ones that pay a lot of attention to the way they look and dress. They ensure that they are well dressed.
- ❑ Visual learners make few friends but maintain good relationships with them.
- ❑ They often use cue cards, mental maps, images, pictures and flow charts to process or to remember information.
- ❑ They are often very well organized, use visual planners, and keep to deadlines.
- ❑ When learning, they benefit from visual support like the board, a power point/flash presentation, bullet points, highlighters and materials that have been highlighted, flash cards, charts, maps and colourful pictures.
- ❑ While playing, they choose all materials that are colourful and construction materials like blocks, jigsaw puzzles, and picture books. They like to imitate what they have seen.
- ❑ When they communicate, they often use a lot of ‘seeing’ words. For example, they may say “I see where you are coming from”, “Show it to me in black and white”, “Let’s see eye to eye”, “That’s a bright idea”, and so on.

2 Characteristics of Auditory Learners

- ❑ Auditory learners prefer sounds, words and music when absorbing information. They process information as words and sounds.
- ❑ They learn new words and languages very easily and have a vast and elaborate vocabulary.
- ❑ They love singing, working with words, puns, word games and puzzles, recitation, elocution, debating, dramatics, poetry and reading aloud.
- ❑ They can use speech very well and so have many questions, explanations and arguments and are clear/precise when they use words to describe situations or people. They are great at conversations, marketing, acting, making presentations, presenting lectures and music.
- ❑ Auditory learners can also be good listeners since they process information through their ears. They follow instructions with ease and can also give very clear instructions themselves.
- ❑ They love listening to music and also to recorded speeches, poems and audio books.
- ❑ They love the company of others and need to always be around people whom they can talk with or share hobbies like music or poetry with.
- ❑ As learners, they enjoy listening to the teachers and can almost always remember what they have heard and repeat it as it is. They excel at phonetics and also enjoy working with words, rhymes, homophones, homonyms, puns and vocabulary activities. They learn when they record their own voice, hear something that is read out to them or use acronyms.
- ❑ They love listening to and creating stories and spend hours in dramatic play. While most children have a stage of fantasy play, the auditory learner is the one who delivers long dialogues and speeches while doing that. They also end up making rules for others to follow. With the complex vocabulary they have, they are often able to convince others to follow them.
- ❑ When they communicate, they often use a lot of ‘listening’ words. For example, they may say things like “I hear you loud and clear”, “Let’s tune into what is happening”, “That rings a bell”, “I am turning a deaf ear to all this information”, and so on.

Characteristics of Kinesthetic Learners or Movers

- ❑ They are tactile learners and so learn hands-on while doing something.
- ❑ They have well-coordinated bodies and excel at tasks like sports and dance that involve the large muscles in the body.
- ❑ They are restless and fidgety and need to ‘do’ things all the time.
- ❑ They love climbing, jumping, cycling, swimming, dancing and moving about and so need wide open spaces and opportunities for full body expression.
- ❑ They express emotions easily through actions or gestures and often experience emotional highs and lows. They get frustrated easily too.
- ❑ They have difficulty in finding the right words to say and so rely heavily on gestures and actions while communicating.
- ❑ They remember actions, emotions and moves more often than pictures and words. They do not form visual images or record words in their minds and so have difficulty remembering facts.
- ❑ They have difficulty keeping up with deadlines.
- ❑ They can come up with brilliant ideas, solutions and thoughts while walking, running or moving.
- ❑ As children, they reach all motor milestones faster, keep moving and do not particularly enjoy books or pictures unless they can move them around; they take to songs and rhymes that have actions or routines to follow or those that they can dance to.
- ❑ When they communicate, they often use a lot of ‘move’ or ‘feel’ words. For example, they may say “It feels good to me”, “I catch the idea”, “Let’s meet on common ground”, “I want to be in touch with you about something”, and so on.



Facts to Remember

- ❑ Learning styles are what we are born with and can be identified as early as three months of age.
- ❑ The style that is encouraged or nurtured more is likely to develop more. Over time however, children are likely to revert back to what is more dominant in them—if not, they remain frustrated and tend to underachieve.
- ❑ No one learning style is better or worse than the other. Each style is suited for a particular task, vocation or subject. Irrespective of the outcome, the dominant learning style is special to the individual and if well stimulated, can help the child realize his/her true potential.
- ❑ Gender has no influence on learning styles.
- ❑ Every classroom will have a mix of Visual, Auditory and Kinesthetic learners. Effective teaching and opportunities for learning are created when the needs of all three types of learners are addressed.
- ❑ Working with learning styles helps reduce stress because children absorb information in ways that are comfortable for them and this, in turn, maximizes learning.

Simple Tips and Activities for Parents

	Visual	Auditory	Kinesthetic
Pre-school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colourful blocks, puzzles and building sets will be essential. • Art materials of every kind will help greatly. • Picture books, flash cards and simple sight words are helpful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrating stories and leaving out bits of information for the child to fill in or create works well. • Play with rhymes, poems, stories, words, puns and words as often as you can. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open spaces to play in every day are essential. If there is access to a sand pit, even better. • Encourage dancing to music as often as you can. • Simple basketball net, sports equipment like bats, balls, etc. will be extremely useful.
Kindergarten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple puzzles • Making scrap books and photo albums • Connect-the-dots books, colouring books, colour by number books and origami are excellent. • Simple picture-matching games and Pictionary can also be encouraged. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tongue twisters, word games, singing, creating stories, speaking out can be encouraged. • Selecting books that are slightly higher for the child will stimulate different ways of thinking and talking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start simple skills like skipping, football, basketball, etc. • Give plenty of opportunities for gardening.
Primary School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in a simple microscope and a magnifying lens, periscope and funny mirrors for visual learners can spend hours with it. • A visit to simple exhibitions of photographs, the planetarium and museum will be very beneficial. • Opportunities to use and express oneself through drawing, painting and craft are to be encouraged. • Encourage making model planes, houses, etc. all build-and-create sets will be suitable. • Encourage the study of maps and charts. • Play or set up simple treasure hunts with simple visual clues using flash cards, colour cues and arrows. • Encourage the use of the highlighter when reading. • Introduce cooking, baking, photography and hobbies like philately. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start playing vocabulary games like 'word a day' and encourage your child with many opportunities to speak to relatives and friends. • Introduce poetry, stories, phonetics, music and dramatics gradually. • Encourage reading and attending concerts and plays. • Work on simple themes that a learner can develop into stories, poems or even books. • Introduce activities like making pen pals or joining a dramatics troupe or a choir. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce skills like kite making and flying, nature experiments like setting up a bird bath or feeder. • Taking care of a pet or an aquarium will help them get organized and also be emotionally supportive. • Introduce dance, learning organized sport and martial arts. • Take the learners to amusement parks and also to the zoo and wildlife sanctuaries. • They can also run little errands for you. • Make sure you have at least one holiday a year when you take your child outdoors for hiking or trekking. • Introduce more complex concepts (for a child) like grafting and allow them to work more in the garden. • Make sure that the child has many opportunities to explore wide open spaces.
Adolescents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage hobbies like astronomy, art, photography. • Make vacations fun by visiting places that have great architecture, museums or art on display. • Visual teenagers may not have a large peer group. They may want to spend more hours indoors with video games, computers and the television. Set rules and be supportive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage dramatics, debating, public speaking, debating, creative writing and music/singing as hobbies. • Visits to music concerts and also literary fests and conclaves or leadership seminars will be beneficial. • The auditory teenager needs to be around people, stay on social network sites, and make many more phone calls. Set the boundaries and be supportive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage sports and competitive participation. • Take your child out to matches and tournaments to also observe and learn. • Have vacations closer to nature with many opportunities for adventure sports and physical activities. • Encourage dance classes and performance. • The kinesthetic child may have a good peer group and may want to play more outdoors. Set rules and be supportive.



Though there are not many empirical studies yet to provide statistical evidence on the effectiveness of addressing individual learning styles in the classrooms, parents and teachers who have, in the past twelve years, worked along with me in their homes and classrooms have reported the following:

1. Children take less time to grasp concepts, understand information, recall information, perform on tests and most importantly, apply the information in real life situations effectively.
2. Children remain motivated and focused longer on what is being taught when they are supported in their dominant learning style. This sustained interest and motivation makes a huge difference for the child as they choose to spend more time on things that would have earlier been frustrating and stressful.
3. Parents who become aware of their own learning styles also make conscious efforts not to impose their own strengths on the child and expect unreasonable outcomes from the child. This insight naturally improves communication and understanding between the child and the adult working with them.
4. Respecting learning styles within the classroom and home environment make children comfortable and confident as the stress and frustration are considerably removed from the process of learning and academic achievement.
5. The use of learning styles while constantly motivating, encouraging and supporting children makes a huge difference in the psyche of the child as it contributes to healthy 'being' and 'doing' states within.

In the words of Goethe, "Treat people (children) as if they were what they ought to be and you help them to become what they are capable of being." The understanding and use of learning styles will undoubtedly get us closer to that vision of the ideal.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



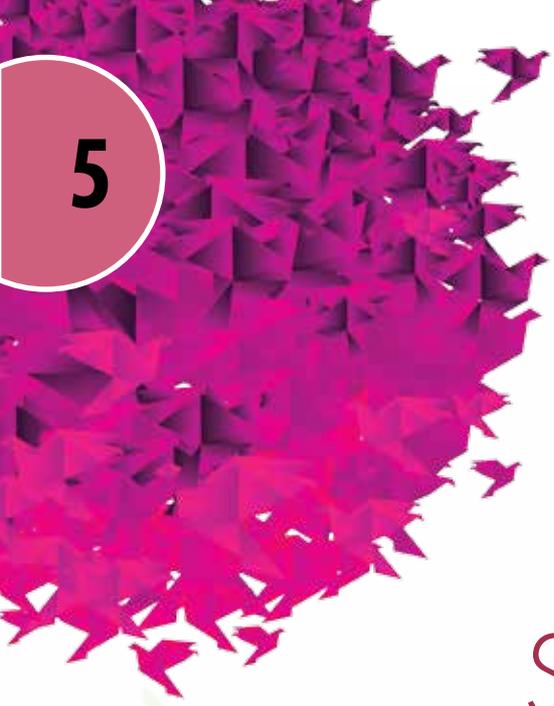
Aarti C Rajaratnam

Aarti C Rajaratnam has a Masters in Applied Psychology with specialization in Clinical Psychology - Childhood and Adolescent Mental Health from the University of Delhi, South Campus. She completed a special 14-month internship at the prestigious Rajkumari Amrit Kaur Child Guidance Centre at New Delhi. She is a Master Practitioner and Trainer in Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) and is also trained in Transactional Analysis (TA), Dream Analysis and Counselling.

She is an Innovative Curriculum and Education Design Consultant and has been instrumental in designing innovative classrooms and curriculum models in India and abroad. She has set up schools for children in the rural areas of India to cater to the needs of first generation learners to ensure that their educational and nutritional needs are met. This model of education has increased retention rates and reduced dropout rates, truancy and delinquency among children. She helped rehabilitate over 7500 children in the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu after the tsunami in 2004 along with partner NGOs and teachers working in local schools. She developed and implemented a model of reaching out to children affected by the disaster through art, music, play and drama.

Aarti is the Director of Kriti Play School, a preschool in Salem, the focus of which is stress-free education for children through an eclectic model specially designed to nurture young minds through a thorough analysis of learning styles. In addition to this, she has a special therapy centre for children with developmental disabilities and pervasive developmental disorders like autism. She has a child guidance centre and a counselling clinic where she uses a combination of therapies from the west and the east, to touch the lives of children with varying degrees of psychological and educational problems. She also counsels adults with problems and mental illness.

Aarti has trained teachers, professionals, parents, students and HR teams on a wide range of topics and issues, and has truly left a mark on every project that she's worked on.



SPECIAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN

When a Child Doesn't Learn

Watching a child grow and learn is one of the most gratifying experiences for parents and teachers. But what happens when a child falls behind peers or beats to a different drum? What should a parent or teacher do when a child is facing difficulties with learning? As learning is a complex process that involves myriad factors, the adult may first observe the child closely without being judgmental. While children can fail to learn for a number of reasons, the typical difficulties that present themselves in mainstream classrooms can be divided into five types.

TYPE 1

First, a child can have a specific learning disability in either reading and spelling, or mathematics or handwriting. In these cases, the child may have difficulties in one or two specific skill areas but may be fine in others. The cognitive profiles of these children are highly uneven with clear areas of strengths and weaknesses.

TYPE 2

A child can also fail to learn due to issues of inattention and impulsivity. If a child has trouble staying focused on tasks, following instructions, and keeping irrelevant thoughts from interfering with the work, then she/he is likely to need help with building focus and controlling impulsivity. While all children (and adults for that matter too!) exhibit some amount of inattention, it needs to be addressed only if it seriously impedes the child's ability to function at home or school. Around 5% of children in a class are likely to have a specific learning disability or problems of inattention.

TYPE 3

A child may also struggle with academics if he has difficulties with comprehension or understanding. These children tend to have suppressed performance across different academic subjects.

TYPE 4

Children may also experience a sudden dip in their academic performance and this may be a reflection of some emotional difficulty that the child is grappling with. A parental divorce, birth of a sibling or unreasonable expectations from parents can cause a child to go through emotional angst. In these cases, the academic difficulty is secondary to the emotional problem, which has to be tackled first.

TYPE 5

Lastly, and especially poignant in the Indian context, a number of children fail to learn due to poor quality of instruction, lack of environmental stimulation and inadequate exposure to the medium of instruction. Children from low-income homes who tend to attend sub-optimal schools often do poorly for no fault of their own.

If a parent or teacher feels that a child is failing to learn for one of the above reasons, it is best to intervene as early as possible. For the first four cases, the child may be taken to a special educator or a psychologist who can work on enhancing the child's specific academic skills or help the child iron out the emotional issues he is battling with. For children who struggle with comprehension despite receiving intervention, a more flexible curriculum and a lighter load may be required. Finally, for the last group of children, we as a society must do our best to enhance the quality of instruction in all schools, especially those catering to poor children.

We must also be tuned to the idea that more than one difficulty can be present in a child. In these cases, a child may require support for each type of difficulty she presents. For example, Deep, a fourth-grader, was a very slow reader who misspelled even basic words. In addition, he was extremely fidgety and was unable to focus on academic work for more than five minutes at a stretch. Further, the two problems seemed to exacerbate each other. His inattention partly stemmed from his inability to read and his reading difficulties were compounded by his impulsivity to guess words based on their first letter. After receiving systematic instruction in phonics, long vowel patterns and sight words, his literacy skills improved. Further, the child was able to attend for longer durations when a task was broken up into shorter, more manageable segments and he was rewarded with a star for completing each section within an allotted time. Thus, with appropriate intervention and emotional support, all children can learn and grow to his or her potential.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Aruna Sankaranarayanan

Aruna Sankaranarayanan, the founder and Director of Prayatna, was motivated to start a center for children with learning difficulties in India while she was an undergraduate student at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts. While doing a summer internship, she found that most Indian schools did not provide any additional facilities for children with learning disabilities. She then equipped herself over a period of six years with the necessary knowledge and experience to start a centre in Bangalore. Aruna completed her doctorate in developmental psychology at Harvard University.

Besides assessing children and providing remedial instruction, Prayatna conducts parent and teacher training programs, sets up resource rooms in schools, and develops innovative teaching aids for enhancing academic skills (www.prayatna.org.)



IMPROVING MEMORY

You Too Can Have a Great Memory

Of all the mental faculties of humans, the faculty of memory has been the most enigmatic from time immemorial. Most of us think that if a person is born with a good memory, he is lucky. We tend to categorize people into two segments – those with a good memory and those with a poor one. To set the record straight, every single individual on this planet has a fantastic memory power. Not being aware of this innate capability and lack of knowledge on how to put it to use (shall we say—no user guide?), we often tend to conclude that we lack a good memory.

Memory is needed every single moment of our lives. If there were no memory, each one of us would end up re-inventing the wheel on a daily basis, making it impossible to progress. Good memory is an essential ingredient to success and conversely, if one can achieve good memory by some means or other, one can succeed in one's chosen field of activity. Fortunately, there are very powerful techniques which help people to improve their memory power phenomenally.

The Three Rs of Memory

Human memory is a simple process consisting of three stages, viz., **Registration**, **Retention** and **Recall**, or the 3 Rs of memory. How long the data is retained and how effortlessly it is recalled is directly proportional to the quality of registration. Whenever we forget any data, it happens only for one reason and that is – improper registration. In other words, it may be called lack of attention.

If you did all the things you are capable of doing, you would literally astound yourself. ~ Thomas Alva Edison

How can we become more attentive while learning something in order to achieve longer retention and recall at will? The simple answer is ‘mnemonics’. As per the Wikipedia, a mnemonic (pron.: /nɪməːnɪk/, with a silent ‘m’), or mnemonic device, is any learning technique that aids information retention. Mnemonics aim to translate information into a form that the human brain can retain better than in its original form. The easiest and most natural way of manipulating data is to convert it into pictures – because the brain understands pictures better and remembers them longer. The science of mnemonics is so versatile that any information can be converted into pictures. Once you replace any info with a series of pictures, start connecting the pictures in a funny way.

This process may seem very cumbersome. An elaborate explanation on the greatness of memory techniques is not really needed. Instead, a case study would convince us better as to the wide variety of information that can be meticulously memorized and the vast quantities that one can take in one’s stride. The case study relates to one of my students.



A Case Study

Saswat Satapathy was a student of Delhi Public School, R K Puram, Delhi. Around the time that he was in class 7, he approached me at the end of my short talk on memory mechanics (which also included a couple of memory demos) to query whether he could also instantly memorize strings of numbers and words. I explained to him that any person can do so with proper training and some practice. The boy and his father, who was also there, immediately decided that Saswat would undergo training from me. I started giving him two-hour sessions every Sunday at my Delhi residence. We were also frequently meeting on Skype to further strengthen the communication.

Within the first two months itself, Saswat had achieved tremendous improvement in the areas of memory and learning fast track study skills, thereby giving him greater leverage on the academic front. He had started gaining popularity in the school and among friends and relatives by virtue of his new-found skills of remembering around 100 digit numbers, lists of around 50 names of random objects in a surprisingly short time. It was at that point of time that, I, Saswat and his father decided to take the training to the next level and initiate Saswat into memory championship training. I introduced some specialized techniques to help Saswat participate in memory championships both at the national and international levels. In the world memory championship, there are 10 disciplines comprising remembering numbers, binary numbers, sequences of playing cards, abstract images, imaginary dates and events, and names and faces. The major events have a duration of one hour for memorizing and two hours for recall. The speed events have durations of five minutes and 10 minutes respectively. The huge volumes of data to be memorized calls for very powerful and fail proof techniques.

He made his first ever appearance in memory championships in the year 2010. In that year, he secured the 3rd rank in the Indian National Memory Championship (Hyderabad) and the 11th rank in the World Kids’ Memory Championship (Guangzhou, China). In 2011, he secured the 13th and 11th ranks respectively. In the 2012 National Memory Championship at Hyderabad, Saswat emerged as the overall winner (first rank) and became the Indian National Memory Champion. He was declared the youngest ever national memory champion in the entire world by the World Memory Sport Council (WMSC, HQ: London). In the same year, he also clinched the worldwide 2nd rank in the World Junior Memory Championship. Apart from memory championships, Saswat was sponsored by his school to participate in and represent India at the World Mathematics Championship in Germany.

Saswat is a boy of varied interests. He is a good swimmer, an ardent fan of football—being a good player himself, plays golf, has achieved remarkable expertise in Vedic Mathematics and also makes handsome profits in the stock markets. As I look back I think that undoubtedly, Saswat was an intelligent boy even before he met me for the first time. But surely, on that day he was himself unaware of all that he is capable and proud of today. Memory training has done immense good to him and helped him excel at whatever he took up.

In conclusion, I would like to peep into the future of Saswat. A rare distinction of becoming the world's youngest Grand Master of Memory is awaiting the young, energetic and ambitious boy, that is, Saswat. Out of the three norms laid down by WMSC for granting the title of Grand Master, Saswat has already fulfilled two – firstly, memorizing the sequence of shuffled deck of (52) playing cards under 2 minutes (did it in 56 seconds at Hyderabad 2012) and secondly, remembering at least a 1000 digit number in one hour (did 1080 digits at London 2012). He is all set to cross the third barrier of remembering at least 10 decks (520 cards) of shuffled playing cards in one hour at the World Memory Championship 2013 to be held again at London. That day will swing him into the prestigious club of Grand Masters of Memory. He will be the youngest ever Grand Master in the world. And he also becomes the only 3rd Grand Master of this great country, that is, India. Out of the other two GMs, Nishant Kasibhatla is also my student (and my son as well). Nishant is the first Indian to have participated in the World Memory Championship and the only International Master from our country.

It is only a question of time that Saswat will become the World Memory Champion.

If a person has achieved something which is seemingly very difficult or impossible, we have to draw the conclusion that every other person on earth can also do it, provided one knows the technology behind it and is willing to practise till perfection is achieved.

Dear Readers, if you have the inclination and drive, you too can possess a great memory. If winning championships is not what you aim at, you can, with your phenomenal memory, excel in every pursuit of life—be it studies, a profession, an occupation, or a business.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Venkat J C Kasibhatla

Mr Venkat J C Kasibhatla is the founder-CEO of Memory Vision. He is an international trainer, speaker, writer and motivator. Memory vision is a training company specializing in workshops on topics like Peak Mental Performance, Memory Improvement, Fast Track Learning, Speed Reading, Mind Mapping, Vocabulary Building and Memory Championship Training. Memory Vision has its presence at New Delhi, Visakhapatnam, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. Since inception 17 years ago, Memory Vision has trained more than half a million people from all walks of life, across 14 countries in 4 continents. The participants of the workshops include students (from class VI to PG & professional courses), job seekers, competitive exam aspirants, executives (from freshers to CEOs), professionals, businessmen, teachers and parents.

He is the memory and mind-power consultant to the Limca Book of Records. He acted as an arbiter at the World Memory Championship 2010 at Guangzhou, China. He is the person who brought memory training to India. What he started decades ago as a personal hobby has now become the profession of his family. He encouraged his two sons – Nishant and Anant into becoming memory trainers when they were in their mid-teens. Both of them are now internationally known memory trainers working from Singapore and Kuala Lumpur respectively. Both of them are featured in the books of records like Limca and Guinness. Nishant is the first Indian to have participated in the World Memory Championship and clinched the titles of Grand Master and International Master of Memory. All these achievements were made possible because of the training, guidance and mentoring provided by Mr Venkat.



CHALLENGES

FACED BY CHILDREN

Adolescence... the charm and the challenge

What is adolescence? . . . A time in a life span when children realize who they are and what they would like to be. It is a time to forge an identity, career choices to be made, meaningful relationships to be formed and sustained, technological advances tackled, attitudes and roles chiseled. Isn't this process of transition fraught with trials and tribulations? Information overload, mixed messages from media, press, teachers, family and society at large add to the complexity and confusion already present in young boastful minds. It is the charm and challenge and a subtle chaos too.

A vital stage of growth and development marks the period of transition from childhood to adulthood. Adolescence is also the stage when young people extend their relationships beyond parents and family and are intensely influenced by their peers and the outside world in general.

Adolescents, the generation that belongs to the 10-19 years age group, account for one-fifth of the world's population and nearly a quarter of India's population. They have very special and distinct needs, which can no longer be overlooked. By addressing their needs one would not only be contributing to the socio-economic development of the country but also in other societal concerns like social harmony, gender justice and population stabilization.

The Period of Storm and Stress

These are truly the years of creativity, idealism, buoyancy and a spirit of adventure. But these are also the years of experimentation and risk-taking, of giving in to negative peer pressure, of taking uninformed decisions on crucial issues, especially relating to their bodies and their sexuality. How adolescents cope with these challenges is determined largely by their environment. Adolescence is thus a turning point in one's life, a period of increased potential but also one of greater vulnerability.

Train up a child in a way he should go -- and walk there yourself once in a while. ~ Josh Billings

One's changing body size and configuration evoke a new set of reactions and expectations from parents, peers, and society. Hormonal fluctuations precipitate new feelings and emotional responses, and may take the adolescent by surprise, giving rise to doubts about normalcy, self-discipline, or social acceptability. Societal and intrapersonal pressures to individuate from parents are counterbalanced by recognition of vulnerability. The rights of adulthood are enticing, but the responsibilities may seem oppressive. There is a need to be recognized as a unique individual, yet a fear of being 'different' exists too. Forcing oneself to sit down and study is difficult when there are so many new urges, interests, options, and potentials to explore.

Adolescents want to taste and test the world, often coming into conflict with parents, teachers, or societal rules that attempt to curb their impulsivity or remind them of consequences.

Tackling Adolescents

Parents should be concerned and worried about what their children are up to, what kind of education, guidance and how much freedom they need. Parents need to understand, guide and deal with them tactfully. Excessive freedom may spoil the child whereas no freedom may also prove equally harmful. While rules are essential, their implementation should not make the teenager feel like an outcast amongst his friends. Therefore, parents need to handle them with care.

Many changes and adjustments are required to be made in their relationships with parents, friends and themselves. Patience, openness, and an understanding attitude on the part of parents can make this phase less confusing.

Parents need to tackle children in a much more efficient manner today. It calls for a thorough understanding of the transition a child goes through during this period, exercising utmost restraint, guiding and advising in a friendly manner, not being overambitious or pressurizing the child too much on the part of parents.

Various factors have conspired collectively to designate adolescence as a discrete age stage. First, children inevitably became more separated from adults as society moved from a rural to an urban environment. Second, as a culture became more complex, the stages became increasingly refined, with a definite step-like transition from infancy to adulthood. While some societies ritualize the shift from youth to maturity, those lacking such rites have instead, a youth culture or institutionalized adolescence. Against this background, various stage theories have evolved, all commonly portraying childhood, adolescence, and adulthood as relatively distinct stages that can be identified sociologically, physiologically, and psychologically.

Hope and Vision

For teenagers, coping with stress in a changing world is an uphill task. Any help for many or majority of challenging or distressing states should not be denied or condemned within the family or social context.

Development stress, emotional distress, academic pressures, physical stress, economic stress or social distress—where do we begin? Is there time left for us to hold our little ones by their hand and straddle them through the 21st century as happy and responsible citizens? The tasks are many but the bottom line is that we should be able to reconcile and accommodate different realities—for the young are indeed the role models of tomorrow.



Dr Jitendra Nagpal

Dr Jitendra Nagpal MD, DNB is a Senior Consultant Psychiatrist at Moolchand Medcity, New Delhi. He is also the Program Director *Expressions India* – The National Life Skills Education, School Health & Wellness Program.



PEER PRESSURE

Adolescence is an age of transition when children no longer want to be treated as children anymore. They wish to experience a new kind of freedom – emotionally, physically, socially and intellectually, similar to that of adulthood. Not necessarily a form of rebellion, this phase of transition is in fact a natural process that every teenager goes through. It is accompanied by physical, biological changes in the body that are tangible and other intangible changes in the form of cognitive, moral and social development that guide new thought processes and behaviour.

Given this understanding, adolescence can be looked at as a stage of weaning off from parents that is coupled with a desire to discover the world on one's own while still being protected and cared for. The separation tends to be more psychological than physical. It exhibits itself in the form of questioning family rules and values, seeking approval, giving more importance to friends and groups one belongs to, other than the family, observational learning from role models and social comparison with peers with regard to fashion, music, phones, gadgets, holidays and lifestyle. Additionally, teenagers tend to be inquisitive and explorative and often get involved in romantic relationships, risk-taking behaviours and experimentation with new and different things.

These new behaviours and changes that we observe in the growing teens frequently occur because of the way in which adolescents influence and are influenced by their peers. This 'peer pressure' or influence has been one of the single-most recognized and accepted factors across communities to impact adolescent behaviour, thoughts, ways of connectedness and communication, interpersonal relationships, and their own sense of self and self-esteem.

The stress of resisting unhealthy peer pressure can be buffered by good family relationships and a high self-esteem, and it is often those adolescents with neither who succumb to unhealthy pressure from their peers. ~ L. Eugene Arnold

The Role of Parents

Children and adolescents are often unaware of the influence others have on them since the pressure is implicit in everyday interactions. As a child, if I have a group of friends or a role model that I look up to, I will imitate their behaviour whether it is in the form of thought or action. For instance, previously, if I was educated that 'smoking is bad,' I may change my opinion about it if I find a favourable peer or role model doing the same. The positive association with the person gets generalized to a positive association with the person's behaviour as well. Children may then feel that it is okay to do the same. This is where the role of adults comes into play—who, through their association and interactions, need to play the role of a sounding board to help children and adolescents recognize the fallacies in their thought processes.

The Impact of Peer Influence

Children and adolescents are often most deeply impacted by their closest friends and associations. The negative impact may not even be realized in such cases since they frequently either lack the maturity or the awareness to be critical of one another's actions. Often, the fear of isolation or not being liked for one's views leads to a 'giving in' and to eventually following the more dominating influences within a group. The pressure to conform to the behaviour, attitudes, and personal habits of 'the group' is what peer pressure truly is.

The ability for abstract thinking is a new development at this age –this implies hypothetical thinking; 'What if' questions, generalizations -'If a friend dislikes my dressing sense, he/she dislikes me as a person' and idealizations – overestimating an admired attribute of another while ignoring their deficiencies. Therefore, a young child at this phase in her or his life is found questioning, seeking approval, and forming his or her own social judgment of right and wrong.

While academics and extracurricular activities become priority for caregivers, at a social and emotional level there is so much more that is taking place in a child's mind and within his environment which one needs to be cognizant of.

Peer pressure, besides being a source of negative influence, can, in fact, be of a positive kind where a child is motivated to perform well and excel based on healthy competition or exploration of new avenues. This could be in the form of pursuing hobbies like reading books, sports, music, debating, art, volunteering, etc. Positive peer pressure can be a source of motivation and drive as well, propelling adolescents to do things such as exercising together, studying together, being honest, respecting others, encouraging more positive behaviours, reducing aggression, and bullying, to name a few.

There are various reasons for peer pressure finding its way into an adolescent's life. This includes the following:

Experimentation

Curiosity of the unknown—adolescents like to try out new things that they see their friends or other adolescents doing. It stems from the feeling of wanting to 'fit in', relating to other friends, not feeling left out, and knowing what the experience is like. It is almost inevitable that children will experiment either with or without our knowledge of it.

Social Learning

This refers to observational learning that occurs socially by observing or being in the vicinity of others. This is not a conscious effort to emulate people but is a form of sub-conscious learning that unknowingly affects one's thoughts, attitude, actions and even behaviour. It occurs in adults too, but children may be more vulnerable to the same.

Social Identity

To form a sense of belonging with a group that one aspires for or is a part of, gives children a higher self-esteem and confidence. But often what that leads to is conformity. It has two effects –

- 1) Doing what others are doing, and
- 2) Not doing something they usually would do if they were to think independently.

The former can lead to loss of creativity and uniqueness while the latter leads to the loss of constructive habits and diffusion of their true self.

Stress and Coping

Dealing with stresses of academic pressure, poor grades, isolation, inability to prioritize, and indecisiveness can make a child frustrated and miserable, especially if he is unable to share his frustration with someone. In many such cases, children resort to escaping their situation by withdrawing themselves or taking to other risk-taking behaviours when they are unable to cope. If they find friends who do the same, they get swept into it easily. It doesn't resolve the problem yet provides the illusion of a solution because of the temporary relief it offers. Parents and teachers need to be in touch with the child's reality and treat him and his problems as important, giving attention and being in sync with the child's emotions at all times such that it provides him the space to be able to communicate freely about the things that are disturbing him.

An integral aspect is knowing what one can, and should do. Here are some suggestions that would help to make this journey a smooth sail for parents and teachers alike:

Developing a strong self-concept in your child

Developing an identity for oneself and establishing strong interpersonal relationships is what makes us feel worthy and adds meaning to our lives even as adults. At an impressionable age, it becomes really important to teach children how to appreciate and respect differences, emphasizing on the uniqueness of every individual including themselves.

Establishing open communication and trusting relationships with children

This is the most fundamental aspect that allows being a part of the child's growth and new thought patterns. Forming secure attachments enables children to venture out on their own yet be grounded in their relationship with parents by sharing experiences and making them a part of their lives. It is a delicate balance between being a friend and a trusted advisor. The way to master it is by not letting your own past childhood experiences guide your reactions but by giving your child the space to discover life in these new times and subtly guide his judgment based on reason and logic rather than personal emotions. There must be importance given to the child's opinions and providing room for dialogue to discuss and reach a fair decision.

A positive body image

Teenagers tend to be particularly self-conscious and this phase in their lives frequently brings out insecurities about their physical appearances. Our society holds features such as thinness, fairness and beauty in very high regard. Television advertisements, movie stars and celebrities reinforce the same and children get influenced easily, believing that they would be appreciated and approved by others only if they too had those features, thus they practise maladaptive measures of getting there. As parents and teachers, our role is to help the child establish a strong sense of self that is grounded in intrinsic factors such as personal values, having reasonable self-expectations, self-appreciation, awareness of one's strengths so as to not be swayed by idealistic portrayals.

Assertiveness Training

The art of saying 'no'. In a culture like ours that is driven by inter-relatedness and collectivism, families, teams and social groups are given a lot of importance. There is little time to actually be alone and do your own thing. Social

obligations have become a part of our lifestyle. At times, to move away from these social structures may give rise to conflict. For some it becomes hard to say 'no' even in adulthood. The important thing to teach our children is that they should be guided by their own instilled values and be able to say no to things, people or situations that cause cognitive dissonance—thoughts that are contradictory to their own belief system.

Responsible Media Exposure

Monitoring the websites, TV shows, books and movies that your child is exposed to can help you indirectly monitor the kind of influences/inspiration you would like your child to have and those which you'd rather have them stay away from. This is a small measure but goes a long way in making children aware, sensitive, mature, honest, knowledgeable and compassionate individuals—traits that become even more valuable in adult life.

Peer Education and Experiential Learning

This can be developed as a curriculum or small group workshops for lower grades to be conducted by senior students. The focus would be on helping young people identify peer pressure and the various forms it may manifest in. This can prove effective since it instills responsibility in high school students to serve as role models and also to share their own experiences from which the middle school students can learn.

As parents and teachers we need to aid children and adolescents in developing self-efficacy and a strong self-concept, so that they can be guided by their own belief system and develop a mind that is critical of negative influences while being open to positive ones. We can have a psychological influence on them by the way we interact and the expectations that we build. Educating them about peer pressure is just as important so they can identify and relate to it when it happens to them. Lastly, an open channel of communication that is honest and non-judgmental will help children seek your trust and value your guidance as well.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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One of the leading academic experts in the field of Mental Health, Dr Parikh undertakes academic training programs and courses with doctors, psychologists, and other allied specialties in mental health.

The 'Fortis School Mental Health Program' is a specialized programme for schools across the country, through which various seminars and workshops are conducted under Dr Parikh's guidance. He conducts academic and training programmes for parents, counsellors and teachers and takes sessions for students. The team also conducts the 'Fortis Prosocial Peer Moderator' program, where students are trained to conduct life skills programmes in schools as role models.

Dr Parikh has spoken at various corporate enclaves and he conducts a mentorship programme for business heads. He is a well-known speaker at national and international healthcare conferences as an expert on healthcare management due to his comprehensive experience in the field of clinical and community mental health.

Dr Parikh is associated with academic institutions as an expert and conducts internship courses for psychology students. His studies have been widely published in the media and have helped the community get an insight into mental health issues. He has a very prominent presence in the media, with various columns in newspapers and on television channels and websites to his credit. He has played a key role in enhancing the image of mental health in the country and his views are widely appreciated by people. He has also been featured in international media for his views on mental health in India.



MEDIA STRESS

In our media-saturated environment, every individual is bombarded by thousands of media messages each day with instant messaging, social networking and television perpetually jostling for attention and mind space. Often referred to as 'screenagers', adolescents today are the single largest consumers of the new media, spending about 6-8 hours on multimedia each day.

The Role of Media

Whether the media plays any role in spreading exacerbating aggression and violence has been an intensely-debated subject for decades now. Media and culture share a dynamic and reciprocal relationship. It would be naïve to believe that the media simply represents our reality; in truth, it goes a long way in shaping our reality too. In an environment where school shootings and copycat crimes are more common than ever, the possible contribution of the media can't be ignored. Analysis of television content has found that about 50-60 percent television programmes contain violence. This aggression is not restricted to crime shows or horror films; it finds its way into seemingly harmless videogames and cartoons, catering almost singularly to the child and adolescent population. References to violent films and video games have surfaced time and again following every school shooting incident anywhere in the world. What is more worrying is that research has estimated that a preschooler, a child of about 3-5 years of age, who watches about 2 hours of cartoons each day would be exposed approximately to 10,000 violent incidents per year.

Children seldom misquote. In fact, they usually repeat word for word what you shouldn't have said. ~ Unknown



Portrayal of violence

Media portrayal of violence is grossly skewed; far removed and greatly dramatized in relation to real life violence. Not only is violence depicted more frequently in the media, a majority of aggressive acts are depicted to be committed by perpetrators who are attractive and idolized. It's not just the 'bad guys' who turn to violence; even the 'good guys' resort to violent means to resolve the problem at hand. As is seen in many cartoons and slapstick films, aggression is often juxtaposed with humour; and more often than not, the portrayal of the consequences of aggression is ominously absent.

To add to it, aggression in the media is not limited to obvious acts of physical violence. Other forms of aggression make their presence felt through the media in a more insidious manner. Dressed in the garb of harmless entertainment, thousands of aggressive media messages are absorbed unchecked and unfiltered. Aggressive acts are glamorized and viewed positively when carried out by idolized sportspersons. Healthy competition is replaced by outright hostility with reality television encourages youngsters to use abusive language to gain popularity and stardom, making it the norm. A careful attention to music lyrics and videos will reveal the extent to which the average adolescent, swayed by the popular music of the day, is exposed to violent, aggressive, and hateful messages.

Intent and interpretation

So what is it about the media that enthral us and influences us the way it does? The concept of hyper-reality has been proposed as a hypothetical inability of our consciousness to differentiate reality from fantasy. The manner in which a single message is perceived, interpreted and assimilated varies from person to person, based on their social background, psychosocial experiences, cognitive abilities, and most importantly, their age. The ability to distinguish between fact and fiction is not a given feat; rather, it is a developmental feat, one that most pre-schoolers have not yet attained. Therefore, even while most media messages possess no intent of propagating or encouraging violence, they are often misinterpreted by naïve and impressionable children.

That humans learn through imitation and observation has been widely established over decades of research. Albert Bandura, a pioneer in the field of social psychological research found that children who view aggressive acts are more likely to behave aggressively themselves. Taking it a step further, it has been noted that this kind of observational learning is influenced by the consequences of the viewed aggression, i.e., if children observe negative consequences being meted out for an aggressive act, they would be less likely to imitate the same. What is unfortunate, then, is that most violence in the media is not followed up by a depiction of its consequences – the aftermath of violent situations depicts no remorse, guilt, or penalty for the perpetration of violence. Neither do they show non-violent alternatives to resolving the same problems.

Desensitization against negative effects of violence

The second aspect related to violence in media is the effect it has on children. Typically, viewing violent acts leads to some amount of psychological and physiological arousal, and this sense of arousal is usually undesirable and



a source of discomfort. What has happened now, however, is that with the repetitive viewing of violent acts, this arousal has weakened. Children have become increasingly habituated to violence, desensitizing them against its negative effects. The media has made violence usual and mundane. Very often, violent situations in the media present no harm to the victims and many depict no pain. Put these two together, and the situation that arises is a lack of empathy and relatedness for the victim of any kind of violence.

Our role as parents, educators and citizens

Today, the media has created a culture that normalizes aggression and glorifies violence. Violence and aggression in the youth is no longer a far-away, nebulous concept but a stark reality that begs our attention and a serious re-examination of our social and educational fabric. The media has made many positive contributions to society. The media is extremely powerful and is guided by principles of profitability. And the media is a reality that we can't escape. It's not just children who get swayed; look within and we realize that even as intelligent and responsible adults, we too get swayed by media messages – we all get taken in by what we otherwise know are unrealistic promises of fairness, good health and popularity. The media, we all know, is a powerful force. It is then up to us, as parents, as educators and as responsible citizens, to help children learn the skills necessary to navigate through today's media influence, to filter the good from the bad, and to grow up to be responsible adults themselves.

Media isn't all bad; there is a lot that students can learn from media exposure. However, the problem that has arisen is that while media and technology are bringing about societal changes at a pace that is difficult to keep up with, we have not equipped today's generation with the skills necessary to cope with the changes and challenges these developments bring forth. The need of the hour then is to make children and adolescents media literate. Media literacy is a relatively new concept that is increasingly gaining popularity. Central to the concept of media literacy is the ability to think critically. Media messages are tailored to appeal to our biases and our gaps in processing. Media literacy is the ability to reverse this natural and instinctive human thought process – to encourage children to stop and think about what is really being communicated – consciously or subconsciously. Rather than being passive receivers of unprocessed and unfiltered information, encourage children to take a step back and ask themselves some questions. Who produced the message? What is the purpose of this message? Who might benefit from this message? What might be the gain? Are all reports unbiased? Is it possible that different people might perceive this message differently than I might? What stereotypes does this kind of media promote? What kind of lifestyle does this media message encourage? Media literacy is not necessarily about having all the right answers, but instead, about asking the right questions.

Parents often complain that their children spend too much time in front of the television, playing too many videogames or spending too much time on the internet. As a potential solution, parents may impose a ban on watching certain kinds of television programmes, or maybe ban viewing television altogether. The problem that arises with this technique is that it isn't possible to monitor a child 24 hours a day. Added to that, banning

one particular show is only going to add to the child's curiosity and desire to watch that programme. Instead of imposing restrictions, a better idea would be for parents to watch such programmes with their children and use otherwise objectionable scenes as learning moments. Be it in a cartoon or a film, it's important for parents to talk to their child about what they're watching. Encourage them to think about the consequences of aggression. Ask them to think about how they would feel if such a thing were done to them. Engaging the child in this manner can help the child appreciate the complexity of aggression, understand its adverse conflicts, both for the perpetrator and the victim, and eventually foster empathy and relatedness towards others.

Imparting appropriate skills

At the same time, it's essential for parents to impart skills of healthy conflict resolution. Through the modelling of appropriate behaviour in the home environment and by discussions around viewed experiences, children can be taught the difference between communicating and behaving assertively as opposed to aggressively. The ability to tolerate frustration, to navigate differences in opinion, to reconcile interpersonal conflicts and to express one's feelings and concerns without resorting to aggressive or violent behaviour are all skills that children can be taught through healthy media exposure.

At the same time, media literacy must be introduced as a part of school curriculum across the board. It would be a good idea for teachers to take some time out of their packed academic schedule to discuss what children watch on television and what they hear on the news. Children need to be given hands-on experiential training on how to critically analyse media messages, to weigh the pros and cons and to make active and informed decisions. This kind of training can only be effective if it's practical, application-based, grounded in the experienced reality of the youth.

We have been conducting workshops on media literacy as a part of our Peer Moderator workshops, and have seen adolescents been keen to learn this, and enjoy becoming more 'media literate'! I believe the media literacy work needs to be done with schools across all segments as we need to empower the youth with skills to be able to prevent the harmful effects of the media and at the same time, learn to pick up the beneficial aspects.

A need for change

To tackle the problem of growing aggression in children and adolescents, the change has to be brought about at every level. We need to introduce workshops and interactive discussions on the subject in schools, and in the community at large. A particularly effective strategy is for students themselves to be transformed into effective role models for their peers and juniors; to encourage pro social attitudes and behaviours. At the same time, change can only come about if parents and teachers come together to lobby against current social media practices. What we need is stronger censorship and what we deserve is more sensible content.

What is most important to remember is that aggression is a learnt response. Children do what children see being done around them. What children need are positive role models. If the media can't provide today's youth with such role models, social responsibility of being effective role models falls on each and every one of us.



Dr Samir Parikh
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CHILD NEGLECT

Child abuse is a much spoken-about topic today; horror stories of child abuse flood television and print reports every day. What often goes unnoticed is a quieter, more insidious kind of abuse—child neglect. Abuse is active, characterized by aggression and exploitation, making it easier to identify and easier to capture. Neglect, on the other hand, is more passive, and often very difficult to recognize. Unfortunately, child neglect has become one of the most pervasive forms of child abuse in the world these days; it's as prevalent as physical abuse, if not more, and its long-term consequences can be equally damaging. Knowing about the symptoms of neglect is important—for the teacher and parent community to be able to recognize symptoms of neglect can go a long way in identifying such children and ensuring that they receive timely help.

Understanding neglect

Child neglect is characterized by a pattern of repeated failure to provide for a child's basic needs. A child's basic needs are not simply food, clothing and shelter. What is equally important is a caring and nurturing environment. Child neglect is therefore found in many different forms, it can be physical, educational, or emotional – each of which can be detrimental to the healthy growth and development of the child.

Neglect can occur when a parent abandons the child or simply does not have enough time to spend with the child leaving the child all to itself. Physical neglect is the failure to provide food, shelter, clothing, medical care and supervision. It's important, however, to distinguish between a failure to meet these needs due to poverty and a lack of resources or neglect. Parents who physically neglect their children do have the resources to care for them but are still either unable to do so, or choose not to do so. Educational neglect involves permitting regular absenteeism from school, failure to provide basic educational opportunities and not paying attention to a child's special educational needs. Of all the various forms of neglect, emotional or psychological neglect is the most difficult to identify. These are children who are constantly being threatened, ignored, belittled or insulted, isolated and rejected by their care-givers. Ignoring a child who is feeling anxious, stressed or fearful after they experience a quarrel is one such example of emotional neglect.

There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children. ~ Nelson Mandela



Why it happens

Child neglect can happen in any kind of family, even one that looks prosperous and happy from the outside. Child neglect is a complex issue, and no one factor can completely explain why it happens. Parenting is not an easy task; especially in today's fast paced socioeconomic and cultural environment. Bringing up a child is a hands-on, time intensive, and difficult job. Additional challenges such as financial difficulties, relationship problems and inadequate social support from friends and family can lead to a parent neglecting some, if not all, basic needs of their child.

Living with an alcoholic parent can lead to neglect as well. Parents who are inebriated can have a tumultuous home environment with frequent domestic disputes and incidences of rage. Such parents are often unable to care for their children, spend quality time with them, or make appropriate parenting decisions. Substance abuse is particularly dangerous because it can lead not only to neglect but physical abuse as well.

Parents who suffer from a mental illness such as depression or anxiety may appear to be distant and withdrawn from their children. Over the years it has also been seen that very often, parents who neglect their children may have experienced neglect or some other form of abuse themselves. In such cases, parents may simply perpetuate the cycle of child neglect, not having learned the skills necessary for parenting. They may have incorrect or inadequate information about the kind of care that babies need, along with inappropriate expectations from their children. They may be overwhelmed by parental responsibilities and see the child as a burden. Within a society like ours, unfortunately, gender attitudes and stereotypes also play a role wherein the girl child, deemed unworthy, is often the victim of neglect.

What neglect can do

We are all aware of the dangers of physical neglect and its adverse impact on brain development. If a baby is malnourished then neural cells in the brain can become weak or damaged causing lowered brain function, thus effecting their intellectual and academic functioning. Essential deficiencies can lead to a myriad of physical and psychological difficulties such as tiredness, weakness and emotional mood swings. Medical neglect can lead to persistent infections and lifelong ailments.

The most severe case of development is when it begins early in a child's life. The impact of neglect is not very easy to notice at an early stage but this neglect can have harmful and long-term effects on children and may even get worse as the child grows older. Common physical and psychological reactions to neglect include stunted growth, chronic medical problems, inadequate bone and muscle growth, and lack of neurological development that negatively affects normal brain functioning and information processing. Neglected children might have poor language abilities and may lead to difficulties in attention and concentration. Such difficulties arise when children are not provided exposure to languages and are given fewer opportunities for their cognitive growth. Where there is no medical or health reason for faltering growth and development, neglect should be looked into as a potential factor.



The consequences of emotional neglect on a child are as detrimental, if not more. Neglect has can have severe consequences for the child – both short-term as well as long-term. It can affect all domains of development, be it physical, psychological, intellectual, behavioural or social.

Emotionally, neglect can have far-reaching consequences on the well-being of the child. Children are extremely sensitive to both verbal and non-verbal cues in their environment. Healthy development requires for the child to be able to form a secure relationship with the care-giver. Doing so allows the child to form a secure base from which he can then explore his environment. The first two years of life are also when children establish a basic sense of trust. A lack of this basic trust is bound to create a sense of insecurity, anxiety and primal fearfulness within children. In the formative years, neglect conveys to the child that he or she is worthless, flawed, unloved, and unwanted. It depicts a sense of emotional unavailability, unresponsiveness, and withdrawal of attention. Children growing up this way therefore tend to have a poor self-image, cognitive delays and difficulties, problems with coping, and difficulty forming meaningful relationships, or connecting with others.

In fact, studies have shown that children as young as three years of age can suffer from depression and withdrawal symptoms as a result of neglect. Although the visible signs of neglect in children can be difficult to detect, the hidden scars resulting from it manifest in numerous behavioural ways, including destructive behaviour, angry acts (such as fire setting and animal cruelty), withdrawal and poor development of basic skills.

Neglect is also likely to influence the manner in which these children form relationships with other people throughout their life, alter the way they behave and perform at school and interact with other children, and how they would parent their own children. When children grow up in an environment where their needs are not met, they have not acquired effective parenting skills from their caregivers. They may not develop appropriate social skills and may feel hopeless, helpless and mistrustful. They may even have substance abuse problems, experience domestic violence and engage in criminal behaviour. Neglected children may experience attachment problems, regressive behaviour, learning difficulties, somatic symptoms, bedwetting, and juvenile delinquency in later years.

Troublesome behaviours may persist long after the neglectful environment has changed. As children grow older, feelings of being unloved and unwanted can lead to running away, antisocial behaviour, self-harm and suicide. Neglect in the early years also has consequences for later life – many young adults who have been neglected suffer from a recognizable psychiatric illness by the age of 21. They exhibit many problems, including depression,

anxiety, eating disorders, and suicide attempts. Other psychological conditions associated with abuse and neglect include panic disorder, dissociative disorders, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, and reactive attachment disorder. Even through their adult lives, they may have difficulty forming secure and healthy relationships and unstable job histories. Where neglect is chronic, the effects of it on the mental health of a child can be drastic.

Recognizing the Signs

Teachers are perhaps in the best position to identify children suffering from neglect at home. Recognizing the signs is important to ensure that such children receive early intervention in order to minimize the damage. It's important to keep in mind that neglect is not the same as poverty. It's not only the poor who get neglected; even children who have all their material needs met can feel psychological neglect if their basic emotional needs for care remain unmet.

Children who are physically neglected might appear to be perennially tired or listless, often falling asleep in class. Remaining consistently hungry and malnourished, these children might steal food or beg for it from their classmates. They would typically be dressed in ill-fitting clothes with poor physical hygiene and frequent illnesses. They might skip school frequently and in the adolescent years, might drop out altogether. Engaging in self-destructive behaviour is also a warning sign of physical neglect.

Emotional neglect is a little less obvious to identify, but even emotional neglect can manifest in physical indicators. Difficulty in expressive language, speech disorders, delayed physical growth, and frequent illnesses are all indicators of emotional neglect. Habits such as sucking and rocking, disruptive and aggressive behaviours, lack of remorse, and difficulties in sleeping might also hint towards emotional neglect. Such children might also harbour a pervasive sense of distrust of adults and might express reluctance to go home. These children experience difficulties forming friendships and relationships and often assume the parental role themselves. Substance abuse is also common amongst emotionally neglected children.

Summary

As a parent, it's not easy to bring up a child. Facing the crunch of both time and resources, parents are caught in a dilemma of whether to provide for their family or to spend quality time with them. Parents might compensate for their absence at home by showering their child with gifts and yielding to their every material wish. Chronic stress at work, or interpersonal difficulties at home might cause a parent to be irritable and dismissive of the child's emotions. Striking the right balance is not always easy.

It's important, therefore, to keep in mind that a child's emotional needs for warmth and attachment are as important as their need for safety and nutrition. Neither can be compromised for the sake of the other. All children need acceptance, love, encouragement, discipline, consistency, stability and positive attention. Parents might not always even realize that their child is being neglected in some way. Recognizing this neglect is the first step. Get help. Support is available for families at risk of emotional abuse through child welfare associations, NGOs, physicians, mental health practitioners and schools.



Dr Samir Parikh
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CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

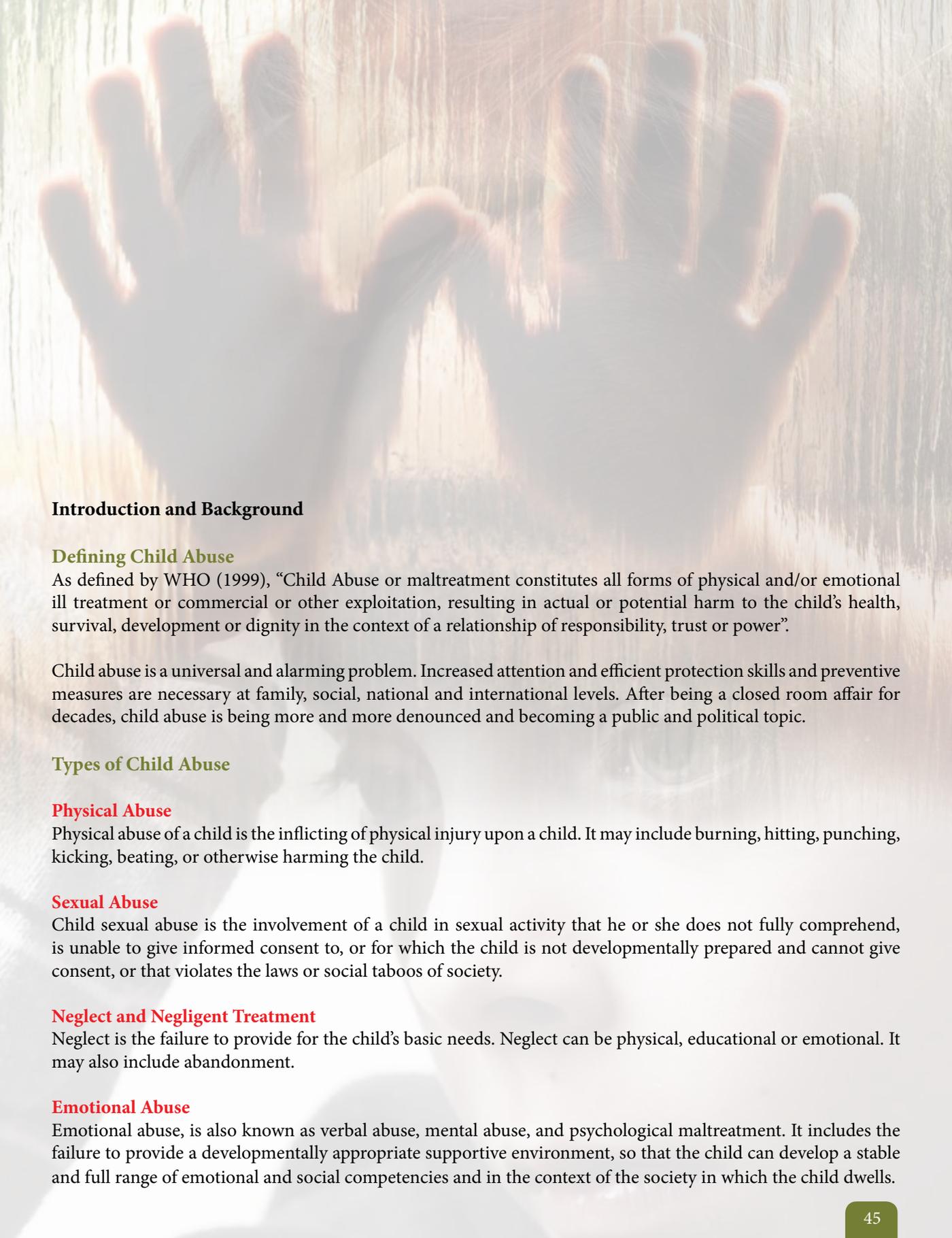
WHAT TO DO?

I asked you for help, and you told me you would
if I told you the things, he did to me.
You asked me to trust you, and you made me
repeat them to fourteen different strangers

I asked you for help and you gave me
a doctor with cold hands
Just like my father.

I asked you for protection
and you gave me a social worker.
Do you know what it is like?
To have more social workers than friends?
I asked you for help
and you forced my mother to choose between us.
She chose him, of course.
She was scared, she had a lot to lose.
I had a lot to lose too.
The difference is, you never told me how much.
I asked you to put an end to the... abuse
You put an end to my whole family.
You took away my nights of hell
and gave me days of hell instead.
You have changed my private nightmare
Into a very public one.

—A fourteen-year-old girl



Introduction and Background

Defining Child Abuse

As defined by WHO (1999), “Child Abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power”.

Child abuse is a universal and alarming problem. Increased attention and efficient protection skills and preventive measures are necessary at family, social, national and international levels. After being a closed room affair for decades, child abuse is being more and more denounced and becoming a public and political topic.

Types of Child Abuse

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse of a child is the inflicting of physical injury upon a child. It may include burning, hitting, punching, kicking, beating, or otherwise harming the child.

Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society.

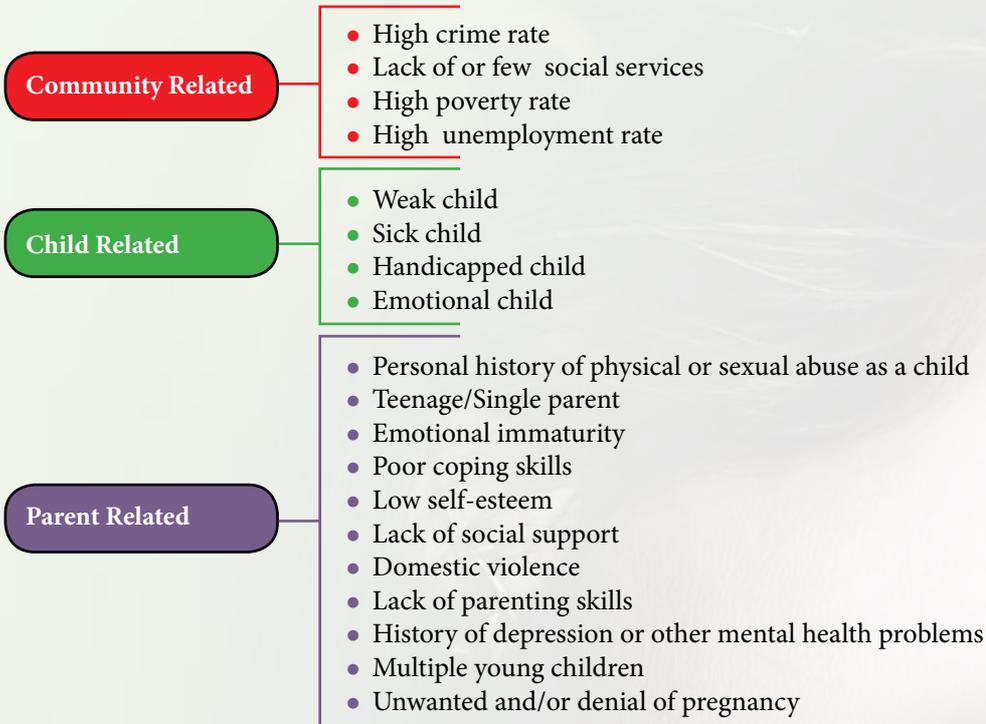
Neglect and Negligent Treatment

Neglect is the failure to provide for the child’s basic needs. Neglect can be physical, educational or emotional. It may also include abandonment.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse, is also known as verbal abuse, mental abuse, and psychological maltreatment. It includes the failure to provide a developmentally appropriate supportive environment, so that the child can develop a stable and full range of emotional and social competencies and in the context of the society in which the child dwells.

Risk Factors for Child Abuse



Child abuse is a ruthless combination of sexual abuse, of emotional abuse and of physical abuse. The child victim of abuse may show a cluster of physical, behavioural and emotional changes listed below:

Physical Signs	Behavioural Changes	Emotional Changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bite marks • Unusual bruises • Lacerations • Burns • High incidence of accidents or frequent injuries like swellings on face and extremities • Discoloration of skin • Sleep, speech disorders • Complaints of pain upon movement or contact • Bedwetting • Recurrent abdominal pain • Constant throat and urinary infections • Irritation in throat and in anal and genital areas • Sexually transmitted diseases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoids physical contact with others • Avoids certain adults • Wears clothing to purposely conceal injury, i.e. long sleeves • Gives inconsistent versions about occurrence of injuries, burns, etc. • Often late or absent from school • Comes early to school, seems reluctant to go home afterwards, negative statements about self • Lack of concentration in school • Compulsions, obsessions, phobias, hysterical reactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apprehensive when other children cry • Depression, anxiety • Seems frightened by parents • Has difficulty getting along with others • Deep sense of isolation • Little respect for others • Overly compliant, shy, passive, withdrawn, gives in readily • Plays aggressively, often hurting peers

Role of Teachers and Counsellors

- ❑ To assess the psychological, social, physical and medical impact of abuse on the child and its family
- ❑ To consider the current and rehabilitation needs of that child
- ❑ To understand that it is best to listen to the child and consider the child's needs prior to taking any precipitate action

Response of Teachers and Counsellors

- ❑ Communicate your understanding to the child by taking seriously what the child is saying
- ❑ Assure the child that they did the right thing by telling you.
- ❑ Tell the child that they are not to blame for sexual abuse.
- ❑ Encourage the child to participate in games to remove feeling of isolation.
- ❑ Do not make false promises to the child.
- ❑ Never imply that the child should forgive and forget the abuser in order to heal.
- ❑ Protect the child and reassure them that you will promptly take steps to see that the abuse stops.
- ❑ Don't hesitate in reporting such matters to the police.
- ❑ Consult with the family physician immediately.
- ❑ Take the child for psychiatric evaluation.

Consequences of Child Abuse

Every child is vulnerable, dependent, innocent and needy, be it a boy or girl. So when they are sexually abused, there is almost simultaneously, violation of physical, emotional and mental state forcing the child to struggle through the survival cycle.



A vicious cycle sets in as the child feels shameful each time he/she recalls the abuse. The child experiences a sense of helplessness/powerlessness. The child with his/her feelings all locked up, grows up physically and displaces some of the sleeper effects of child abuse, which then have long-term consequences.

Preventive Measures Parents and Teachers Can Take

- ❑ Remember that child abuse is a crime in which the fact is known only to the abuser and abused, where the abuser enjoys the advantage of age, relationship and prestige.
- ❑ Establish a free atmosphere at home that encourages children to disclose anything and everything.
- ❑ In simple language, initiate the child's understanding of his/her own body and explain child abuse to the child without misleading him.
- ❑ Teach the child the difference between 'good touch' and 'bad touch'.
- ❑ Do not force the child to hug and kiss others, if he/she is uncomfortable.
- ❑ Teach them not to go near strangers or being friendly with them, even if they offer gifts or chocolates.
- ❑ Be familiar with your child's friends and daily activities.
- ❑ Initiate an understanding in the neighbourhood children to keep an eye on one another.
- ❑ Have faith in all what your child tells you and be alert to small changes in his/her behaviour.
- ❑ Be observant of any child/adult paying unusual attention or affection to your child.
- ❑ Equip your child with emergency telephone numbers.



Addressing Common Teen Problems

I am a 15-year-old preparing for the 10th exam. I am completely confused about the choice of stream to take up in class 11 and tend to become very agitated and impatient with family members very often. My friends at school also keep warning me of my anger attacks and call me a frustrated teenager. What to do? Is my career choice in conflict with my moods? Please help.

Anger is a completely normal, usually healthy, human emotion. But when it gets out of control and turns destructive, it can lead to problems – problems at work, in one’s personal relationships, and in the overall quality of one’s life. Like other emotions, it is accompanied by physiological and biological changes. When one gets angry, the heart rate and blood pressure go up, as do the levels of energy hormones, adrenaline and noradrenaline. As you are preparing for your 10th exam, it sounds like you’re in a situation where the pressure feels like it’s coming from all sides. As a result you have started remaining extremely restless and annoyed. This can make it hard to focus on schoolwork and parents and teachers might pressurize you for not doing your best. You may feel at times that no one really understands what you’re going through. But letting anger and frustration build up can affect your mood, happiness and ultimately your decision regarding choice of career.

You should discuss this issue with your parents and school counselor. They can guide you on the basis of your interest, ability, aptitude and attitude. Anger can be powerful and managing it can sometimes be challenging. It takes plenty of self-control to manage angry feelings. And these skills take time to develop. When you’re feeling angry or frustrated, channelize it by going for a run or engaging in any other physical activity. No matter what kind of day you’ve had, make time to relax and laugh. Find a friend or two to hang out with, even if it’s just for a few minutes after school and have a conversation with them regarding the various career options. Taking these steps can help you override stress before it gets too much. The idea is to deal with the situation so that stress doesn’t pile up and affect your mood and happiness. Keep your cool, do your best, reach out to positive people — and don’t let anger and frustration ruin your day and decision.

I am 17 years old and very occupied with the plans for my coaching classes and 12th class preparation. I'm facing constant peer pressure and feel compelled to deviate from studies. I'm also scared of getting influenced by behaviour which may put me into risky situations. Please guide and help me deal with this situation and learn to believe in myself with firmness.

During adolescence, one experiences pressure from many sources. However, peer pressure has a unique way of influencing them. It can be described as the influence felt from the peers and may have both desirable and undesirable outcomes. Highlighting its positive dimension, peers can motivate members of the group for higher academic performance or toward achievements or co-scholastic activities. Researchers indicate that direct verbal pressure on teenagers to perform risky behaviour is not common. More often, the peers use more subtle ways to put pressure. For example, the group is not likely to force alcohol, etc. but the teen will drink so that he gets approval and acceptance from his group. It could also be to demonstrate 'loyalty' to the group. These adolescents attach a lot of importance to the association with the group and do not want to disturb the relationship. As a result, the adolescent may lose the sense of right and wrong.

It is also said that it is normal for adolescents to feel the need to expose themselves to novel experiences and unsafe environments. Among the behaviours they can engage in can vary from a relatively minor unhealthy practice of smoking to more serious anti-social activities such as committing crimes or acting against the law. Therefore it is necessary to make realistic choices. A balanced approach towards being adventurous, seeking approval from peers on one hand and not losing the strings of one's own life and being focused on the other hand, is crucial. You will feel much in control and won't have many regrets later. Good luck.

I am a 17-year-old girl studying in class 12. I have always been a bright student and I wish to follow the same path for my future. Recently, I have not been able to concentrate on my studies due to the marital conflict between my parents. Now, I am left with very few friends and feel that nobody understands me. Please tell me how I can maintain my self-esteem.

You certainly know the reason behind your feelings and can work towards coping with them. You just need to have a strong opinion about yourself and positive thoughts that will make you rise in your life. If you think that marital problems between your parents are the main reasons that are affecting your studies, you can help them understand this. Tell them how it is affecting your life and studies. Help them resolve their issues without jeopardizing the relationship within the family. If required, seek professional help. You can even consult a professional counsellor.

As far as your social interaction is concerned, it would be helpful if you understand that you are not alone and that many others also go through these situations. You can start out by making new friends and joining new hobby clubs that will help you to give vent to your suppressed emotions and fears. Sometimes, with the help of little communication, children too can help in resolving matters of elders. Go ahead and speak to your parents and they will surely listen. Career choice is indeed a matter of interest, aptitude and your developing personality traits. A conducive family environment is indeed an essential ingredient for overall harmony for your choices ahead.