

Emotional Wellbeing of Children, Adolescents, Parents, Teachers in the Era of COVID-19

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Abstract

The current outbreak of COVID-19 has a profound impact on psychological wellbeing of children, adolescents, parents and teachers. The closure of schools and the social distancing have prevented the children from interacting with their peers and limited their access to learning. This has become the main reason for children and teens to feel anxiety, stress, grief, aggression. At the same time, the higher levels of income loss due to lock down have affected mental wellbeing of adults in a negative way. However, staying positive, calm and with a daily regular routine of life help to combat the harsh difficulties of life.

Keywords: *emotional wellbeing, COVID-19, children, adolescents, parents, teachers*

Introduction

Dr. Marisa Navarro rightly says in her book “La Medicina Emocional” (Emotional Medicine)

“No one is safe from suffering this emotional state. It is a very serious problem that can result in constant states of anger, sadness, worry and even anxiety or depression”.

“Emotional wellbeing is indicated by the emotional quality of an individual’s daily experiences like of joy, fascination, anxiety, sadness, anger, and affection that make one’s life pleasant or unpleasant”. (Daniel Kahneman & Angus Deaton, 2010) According to Garry R. Lee and Masako Ishii Kuntz, emotional wellbeing is referred to a state of mind having inclusive feelings of happiness, contentment and satisfaction with the conditions of one’s life. The concept is usually used interchangeably with terms like morale and life satisfaction. (Lee R.G & Kuntz I.M., 1987) Characteristic mood and self-esteem are often taken as two important aspects of individuals’ emotional wellbeing. The affective evaluation of the self is considered as the component of self -esteem. It is seen that people who are able to understand and regulate their emotions experience better emotional health. (Schutte, Malouff, Simunek, McKenley, Hollander, 2002)

“The COVID-19 pandemic and the policy measures to control its spread— lockdowns, physical distancing, and social isolation – has coincided with the deterioration of people’s

mental wellbeing.” (Bertuol, T.M., Cheng, Z., Mendolia, S., Paloyo, R.A. and Savage, D., 2020).

To help slow the spread of the virus and prevent overloading the health care system, many schools moved children to online learning from home and at the same time many working parents were asked to work from home. But the real challenge lies in front of families as they have to take care of children while working and schooling at home without panic during this period.

If we want our children to feel safe, keep healthy routines, manage their behaviour and build resilience, then we have to keep a sense of calm. Though it is very difficult to show empathy and patience while staying calm during this unprecedented pandemic time. Compared to adults, children are more vulnerable to the emotional impact of this traumatic event of outbreak of COVID-19 as it disrupts their daily lives. In addition to physical health, emotional wellbeing of children is equally important.

As the young children were unable to identify these changes, may behave differently in reaction to strong feelings (e.g., fear, worry, sadness, anger) pandemic and related conditions. Social distancing from the loved ones like grandparents, friends, worship community, home confinement, closure of schools and child care centres may disturb the structure, predictability and sense of security sense of children. This may result in significant mental health problems including trauma related stress,

	Children with elevated emotional symptoms									
	Age 4-5 (2008)		Age 6-7 (2010)		Age 8-9 (2012)		Age 10-11 (2014)		Age 12-13 (2016)	
	%	CI	%	CI	%	CI	%	CI	%	CI
Maternal warmth										
High warmth	19.2	[17.6,20.8]	16.0	[14.4,17.6]	17.1	[15.6,18.6]	19.7	[18.0,21.5]	19.9	[18.0,21.7]
Low warmth	25.5	[22.2,28.7]	28.0	[19.8,26.2]	24.5	[20.3,28.7]	25.3	[21.6,29.0]	27.0	[23.0,30.9]
Total, N	3,796		4,152		3,940		3,610		3,220	
Maternal hostility										
Low hostility	17.2	[15.7,18.8]	14.0	[12.6,15.4]	15.2	[13.9,16.6]	17.8	[16.1,19.5]	17.7	[15.9,19.4]
High hostility	37.1	[32.7,41.4]	33.2	[29.0,37.5]	32.8	[28.8,36.8]	35.3	[30.7,39.8]	40.4	[35.3,45.5]
Total, N	3,784		4,150		3,939		3,610		3,219	
Maternal consistency										
High consistency	18.6	[17.1,20.2]	15.7	[14.2,17.2]	16.3	[14.9,17.7]	19.2	[17.5,20.8]	19.7	[18.0,21.5]
Low consistency	29.4	[25.6,33.3]	25.8	[21.5,30.2]	29.1	[24.9,33.4]	29.7	[24.9,34.4]	30.9	[25.9,35.8]
Total, N	3,781		4,150		3,939		3,610		3,215	

Notes: Chi-squared test significant for warmth, hostility and consistency at each age at 95% level. CI: confidence interval. Confidence intervals that do not overlap indicate a statistically significant difference between two point estimates. The cut point is different at age 4-5.

Source: LSAC Waves 3-7, B cohort, weighted

anxiety and depression. Here comes the role of parents and caregivers as from the birth children rely on their parents and caregivers to protect and care for them. Research done on children’s socio-emotional wellbeing due to parent behaviour shows that children who experienced lower levels of maternal warmth showed elevated levels of hyper activity. (Rioseco, P., Warren, D. & Daraganova, G., 2020)

Protective factors of well being

For children

Some of the protective factors that help children to restore good emotional health and wellbeing are as follows:

Open dialogue

One of the key factors for children and young people experiencing emotional difficulties is absence of someone they can talk to whenever they want, who is a good listener and is also available for them. A trustworthy relationship helps the children to regain their emotional wellbeing.

Boosting up child with low mood

Due to spending periods of time focussing on worries and negative thoughts during lock down period in the current pandemic situation, children may have long periods of sadness, tiredness, changes in sleeping and eating patterns, irritation, and tearfulness. This is the time for the parents to spend time with the child to reassure the safety and security of the child and also the loved ones.

Engaging the children in activities

Rise in boredom increases the levels of worry and disruptive behaviour. So, adults can provide opportunities for safe and joyful activities for children. These activities, planned according to the age and interest of children, may be the source of brainstorming other creative ideas.

Reading together

Liverpool reveals that reading increases personal confidence, reduces social isolation, improves power of concentration, fosters an interest in new learning, enhances self-awareness and the ability to articulate profound issues of self and being. (Billington, J., Dowrick, C., Hamer, A., Robinson, J. & Williams, C., 2010)

A good book is a good friend. Reading develops positive thinking, keeps the mind active and enhances creative ability. Reading a book helps to relieve stress, stimulates the brain muscles and keeps the brain healthy and strong. For younger kids, parents can provide audio books or recordings of parents reading the child’s favourite book.

“Every child can become a lover of books”- Michelle Martin, a professor at the University of Washington.

Delegating work at home

It becomes a challenge for parents working from home due to the spread of COVID-19, to keep their kids independently occupied so that they themselves can work. In this situation, parents may delegate some age-appropriate work at home like cooking, cleaning, dusting, watering plants, feeding pets, arranging things in an

orderly manner, setting dinner table etc. This provides an opportunity for children to learn through their own experience. For example, kitchen can be a learning hub for Science and Mathematics. Gardening and taking care of pets help children to develop their emotional quotient as well as learning of biology happens in a joyful manner.

Keeping normalcy for children

Parents should maintain their daily routine to assure children that nothing has changed and everything is normal as usual. So daily schedules can be followed like morning exercise/ yoga time, breakfast time, getting ready to work from home, then lunch time, break time, playing in the afternoon etc. This gives children a sense of security that nothing has changed and the world is not falling apart right now.

Connecting friends

Research done on effects of social support on wellbeing reveals that individuals with low social support show greater level of stress and vice versa. (Abbey, Antonia, Abramis, D. J & Caplan, R. D, 1985)

When children connect to their friends over phone or virtually, they feel excited and energetic. This helps them to get relief from stress. Parents may organise some fun activities like reading challenge, painting/ drawing, poster making, quiz with children of same age group. When children see their friends and get involved in activities with them, their anxiety level goes down, they feel happy to see their friends in good health, their confidence level increases, life force becomes strong, they feel more secured, they sense the presence of normalcy in their life. Their depression level goes down as they share their worries and problem with their friends, they become optimistic for life.

Educating parents regarding emotional wellbeing

In the Book- “The state of mental, emotional and behavioural health of children”, the following fact is shared for promotion of mental, emotional and behavioural health.

In another area promoting MEB health, Michigan State University’s Building Early Emotional Skills (BEES) Program 5 focuses on providing parent education for those with children ages 0–3. Data from this program so far

are very positive and suggest trends in the right direction, most especially an improved acceptance from parents of their children’s negative emotional behaviours. Under this program, knowledge about early social-emotional development increased, and parenting distress decreased following completion of the program. Results from the BEES Program suggest positive effects on parental functioning and overall quality of parenting.

For adolescents

Adolescent itself is an age of change which is considered to be the vulnerable time when a child can develop many behavioural issues like high level of anxiety, depression, mood swings etc. As being teenager is difficult, and at the same time corona virus disease is making it even harder. With the closures of school and cancellation of many events, most of teens are missing out important moments of their young lives as well as each day moments like hanging out with friends, participating with them in the class events. As a result, many teens may feel anxious, isolated, disappointed. But with a little effort they can practice self-care and look after their mental health.

Accepting anxiety as a normal behaviour during the lock down period

With every day’s alarming headlines, it is normal to have anxiety. Psychologist Dr. Damour says “Your anxiety is going to help you make the decisions that you need to be making right now — not spending time with other people or in large groups, washing your hands and not touching your face.”

Checking information through reliable sources

Reliable sources like WHO (world health organisation), UNICEF should be used to get information. Unreliable sources may not provide true, accurate and update information, rather may create confusion. It is better to avoid out of date materials, post from social networks and blogs which may lead to panic state.

Connecting friends

While practising physical and social distancing, teens can connect to their friends in various ways. When they share their feelings with their friends, they feel relaxed, anxiety level goes down. They feel happy. When they post the happy status in social media, it becomes contagious.

Knowing me

This is time to know about ourselves. Teens can spend this time in a productive way like doing some indoor activities such as playing instrument/ reading books/ doing fine art/ experimenting in kitchen with new innovated recipes/ taking care of plants etc.

“What psychologists know is that when we are under chronically difficult conditions, it’s very helpful to divide the problem into two categories: things I can do something about, and then things I can do nothing about,” says Dr. Damour.

Coping up with grief and loss during COVID-19 period

In spite of the devastating loss in life, running away and numbing oneself from feelings will not only create confusion while dealing with so many fused emotions, but can also affect emotional, mental and physical health. Rather feeling and experiencing the pain is the effective way of embracing the difficult motion. At the same time comforting, cuddling and consoling oneself will help to get relief from the pain and anxiety.

Sound sleep

Anxiety and depression can be a challenge to quality sleep in teens which can worsen both sleep and emotional wellness. Inadequate sleep can affect the mood causing irritability and exaggerated emotional reactions. However, the best idea to get adequate sleep is to clean all thoughts from mind before sleeping. After lying on the bed, making a conscious effort not to carry a conversation with the mind, and at the same time focussing on pitch black behind the eyelid while closing the eyes will help us to fall asleep.

Promotion of Social and emotional learning (SEL)

In the Book- “The state of mental, emotional and behavioural health of children”, the following fact is shared for promotion of Social and emotional learning (SEL). “There are opportunities for developmentally relevant promotion efforts like universal social and emotional learning (SEL) and adult development. Schools present a great platform to teach core competency skills around SEL and allow children to develop their own skill sets to

navigate relationships, work, and life in general”.

“A few participants suggested SEL as a key strategy for pre-K through adulthood because there are formal and informal opportunities at every level. One person suggested making empathy a skill that is a graduation requirement for high school. If children and youth can learn to demonstrate empathy, conflict resolution skills, interpersonal skills, and communication, they are likely to have better MEB health potential going into adulthood”.

“Simply having doctors and academics discussing it will not get the job done, but engaging social influencers can have a great impact.”

One example is “Talk, Text, Act”, a program designed to bring teens together to talk about mental health with peers and in their community.

For parents and teachers

Wheaton suggests that "instead of being stressful, life events may be beneficial by offering escape from a chronically stressful role situation, creating the apparent paradox of functioning as stress relief." (Wheaton 1990).

Managing anxiety

The effects of this corona virus pandemic have already cascaded into the financial, physical, and mental health of parents and teachers. Many families have reported relatively higher levels of income loss and food insecurity. This is the real struggle time for teachers to motivate the learners and for parents to get time to help them. In these unprecedented times, all have to work extra hard to manage emotions effectively. By seeing the daily headlines, it is natural to get panic and to feel anxiety. But if anxiety is managed properly, it can be a good thing. Staying calm and being engaged in normal activities will lead to hope and resilience all around despite of uncertainty. Making a list thing to focus on and things to let go will help increase in radical acceptance of the situations that are beyond our control.

Gratitude

A life filled with gratitude is a happy life. Gratitude stimulates the hypothalamus, the stress regulator and also activates ventral

segmental area that controls brain's reward system which produces feelings of pleasure.

"Building the best life does not require fealty to feelings in the name of authenticity, but rather



rebellling against negative impulses and acting right even when we don't feel like it," says Arthur C. Brooks, author of *Gross National Happiness*. "Acting happy, regardless of feelings, coaxes one's brain into processing positive emotions," explains Brooks. In other words, "fake it till you make it" works.

Interior gratitude starts with keeping a daily or weekly list of grateful things helps to harness positive health effects. Writing thanking notes or sending thank you messages or emails to friends, colleagues and family members for their support are a part of exterior gratitude. Expressing gratitude to every small thing happening in life irrespective of its value is best way to help the brain to process positive emotions.

Science reporter for The New York Times Heather Murphy writes, "After receiving thank-you notes and filling out questionnaires about how it felt to get them, many said they were 'ecstatic,' scoring the happiness rating at 4 of 5. The senders typically guessed they'd evoke a 3."

Getting hold of morning

Getting hold of morning help us to have a control of our lives. Cleaning the toxic feelings

from our mind in the morning before we start our day helps to develop our inner power.

Optimism

"Optimism is only one of two dozen strengths that bring about greater wellbeing"- Martin E.P. Seligman- Author of the book-*Authentic Happiness*. According to Seligman, optimism and hope cause better resistance during a bad event time. In his book '*Learned Optimism*' he shares about that 'Never give up' spirit can help break up depression, boost up immune system, better develop inner potential, and scale of happiness increases.

Opportunity

In this turbulent time everyone is suffering in different ways. The Chinese character 'crisis' comprises of danger and also opportunity. This indicates that even in the darkest phase of life, one can get the bright side of it.

Encouraging others

We all live for ourselves. Life becomes great if we encourage that one person who is right in front of us in this difficult time. In the process of encouraging others, our mental strength increases multiple times. As mind and body are related, it strengthens our physical strength as well as boosts up our immune system. Aspinwall says "If positive emotions broaden attention and cognition, enabling flexible and creative thinking, they should also facilitate coping with stress and adversity" (Aspinwall, 1998)

Conclusion

"Make joy your GPS"- Robin Sharma (Author of the book- *A monk who sold his Ferrari*)

Happiness is the state of mind that does not occur in the absence of difficulties and worries in life. Rather it is found in the courage to fight head on with the challenges of life with strong life force. Even the sages cannot avoid problems of life. So instead of avoiding the reality of the pandemic situation due to COVID-19, let's have a spirit to fight it with invincible and standalone spirit.

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