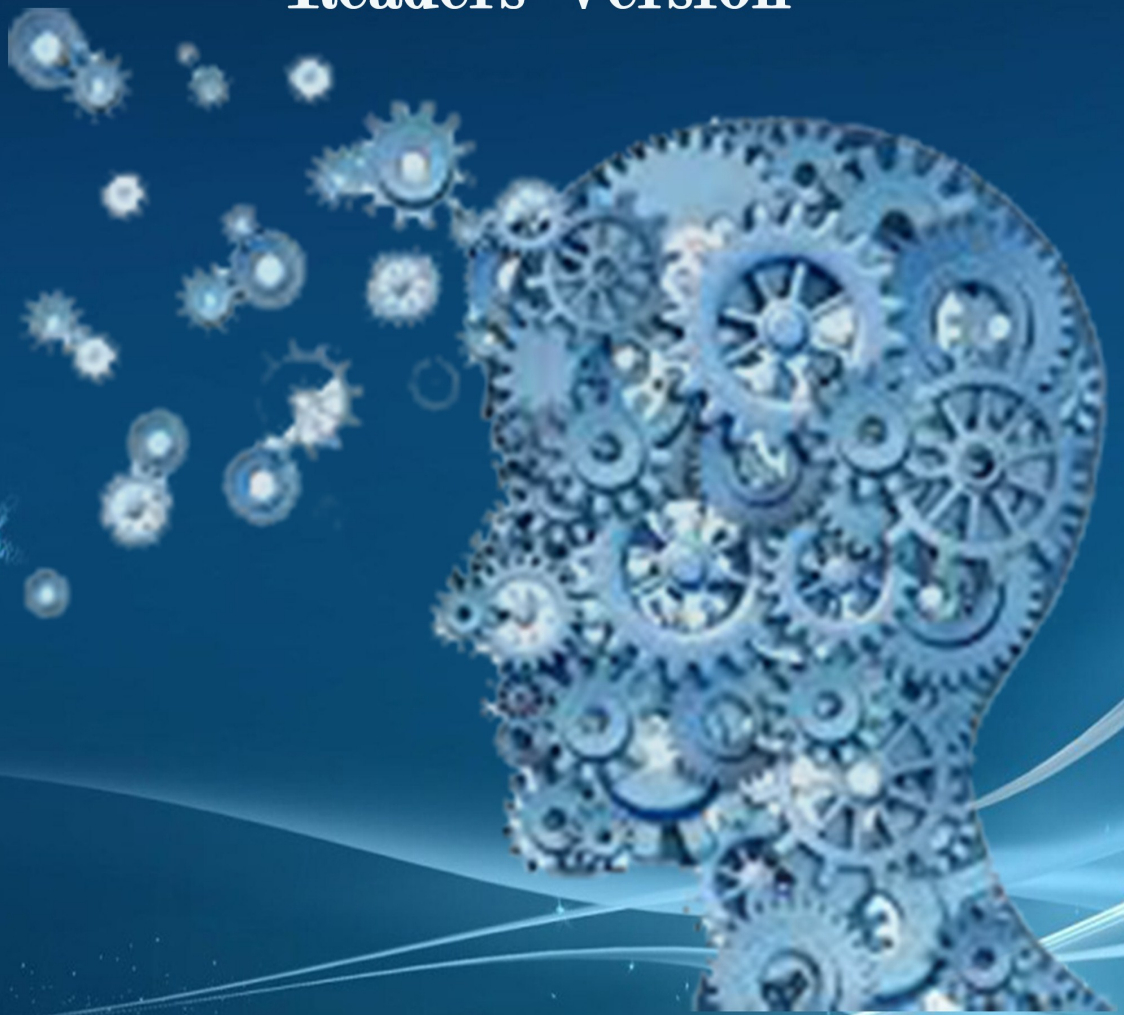


# Colombo Journal of Psychology & Counselling

Readers' Version



Colombo Psychological Services (Pvt) Ltd

Vol 01 Free Distribution

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## **Message from the chief editor.**

Colombo psychological services (PVT) Ltd, expects to popularize knowledge and applied services of psychology in Sri Lankan community. Readers' magazine is an attempt to achieve this objective via distributing knowledge on how the science of psychology can be utilized in day-to-day living and problem solving.

This first volume expects to freely share the psychological bases of parenting with the general public. Especially during and aftermath of COVID pandemic, tension and stress around parenting has increased. Therefore sharing scientific knowledge on parenting principles, we believe will benefit the larger society. We fervently hope the ultimate beneficiary of this would be the children of our nation.



**Tina Solomons**

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## **A health psychological intervention in the physical health development of children in the covid 19 pandemic**

The 'child' can be described as one of the most beautiful and unique creations of mankind. The child is also the deciding factor in determining the future of mankind.

Although there are different definitions of child by legal definition, every person under the age of 18 is defined as a child. The child can also be identified as a person who is not physically and mentally mature.

During past years we have had to deal with a variety of disasters such as war, floods and landslides and tsunamis and the covid 19 epidemic is one of the worst in recent times. In the face of such a devastating epidemic it is very important to focus on the physical, mental, social and spiritual development of children.

According to the World Health Organization, an epidemic can be abbreviated as 'the spread of a new disease worldwide.' When the majority of people do not have the immunity to face this new disease, it spreads rapidly to a large number of people.

Accordingly, the epidemic has a negative impact on every aspect of our physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing. A person's psychological factors also directly affect his or her physical health. These statements are also true for the child.

**E**nvironmental stress over time can damage a person's health. Behavioural factors directly affect health.

We can point to the child as a group who has become a direct victim of these negative influences.

For example, certain behaviours can be damaged over time.

E.g. A habitual activity becomes an addiction

Thus, it can be pointed out that the promotion of a child's health is not only the result of a biological process but also a product of thoughts and beliefs, behavioural (habits) and social process.

The child is spontaneously playful and active person. But in the face of covid 19 epidemic and isolation the child's usual behavioural patterns change rapidly and are confined. Activities also underwent rapid changes and limitations. As a result, the child may be tempted to use a variety of mechanisms to cope with their stress and anxiety.



## **1.Overeating/skipped meals**

In addition to the three main meals they may become addicted to fast and junk foods and skip the three main meals while getting use to these snacks. Unnecessary weight gain, Obesity ,increased body shape and size, malnutrition and developmental problems can be identified in children.

## **2.Addictions**

Addiction to mobile phones, the internet and online video games can be caused by a child's limited physical activity and the distance of social interactions.

## **3.Sleep related problems**

Excessive sleep, late sleep,intermittent sleepiness and sudden changes in sleep related patterns can be seen.

## **4.Complaints about various physical ailments and complications**

This can lead to headaches ,fever, muscle aches ,stomach aches and eye problems that the child may constantly complain to parents.

The child may also have anxiety and stress,depression ,aggression ,attention deficits, loss of self confidence and guilt.

## **5.Domestic violence and abuse**

Outbreaks appear to be exacerbated by the loss of jobs,severe economic hardship and other illness, mental illness as well as an increase in alcoholism due to stress and anxiety ,children will become an inevitable victim here.

There is also a high risk of children being abused at home and over the internet during the covid pandemic .

In this case ,the child will continue to be a victim of domestic violence and abuse due to being trapped inside the home,not being able to release stress due to skipping school and their peers,and losing opportunities to seek relief services.

In this,it is possible to clearly identify how these mental problems of the child affected the psychal health of the child and the psychal problems affect the mental health of the child.So it is important to understand our role as parents and adults and to act accordingly to decrease those impacts.

## **1. Identifying the needs of the child and meeting those needs.**

It is important to meet basic needs, including food and nutrition, to provide health care, including immunizations, to promote safety and care, to recognize and appreciate the child's talents, and to provide opportunities for them to develop those skills.

## **2. Providing more opportunities for children for indoor sports**

Children can be given the opportunity to play more indoor games to avoid the stress and anxiety that can occur in a child. If all the family members can participate in these games, then the children can also get rid of the anxiety that can be caused by missing out on their peer groups. These games are also important for developing self-confidence and self-esteem in the child.

## **3. Role play and role model.**

Role play is important to increase the self-esteem and self-confidence of the child, to develop life skills in the child, to avoid negative emotions, to develop problem solving and decision making skills. Children are constantly tempted to imitate their parents and adults. This is why positive examples from parents and adults are so important to children.

## **4. Assignment of responsibilities**

Children can be assigned responsibilities such as cooking and food preparation, money management, first aid learning, bedroom preparation and house cleaning, laundry and



## **5. Gardening and landscaping**

This is a great physical and mental exercise for a child who spends a lot of time on mobile phone and computer due to online education and anxiety and stress. The natural green color of the environment is also a very good natural remedy for the tired eyes of a child. It is also a good relaxation exercise to relieve mental fatigue and is a very good physical exercise.

## **6. Different personal activities**

Here, children can be directed to indoor activities such as exercise, drawing, listening to music, dancing and reading books.

## **7. Development of positive behaviors in children**

Instead of constantly admonishing children on what not to do, a friendly discussion with children on what to do can make a positive difference in their behavior.

## 8. Encourage children to work on a schedule

It is also important for children to work on a schedule to manage their time and manage stress.

## 9. Educating children about the covid 19 epidemic

Children may think that confining themselves to one place and social exclusion, having to use masks, etc. is a very unfair process. Therefore, it is important to educate children about the epidemic.

Fun hand washing games with rhythms and music

Fictional, harmless stories related to the covid 19 plague

Drawing and coloring related to the epidemic

Have fun cleaning and disinfecting the house

Overall, the covid 19 epidemic has resulted in the death of parents and guardians, loss of parental employment, inadequate food and nutrition requirements due to economic hardship, loss of protection and care, abuse and abuse, and disruption of schooling. Children around the world face many tragedies, such as being and avoiding and becoming child laborers.

It is the responsibility of all of us to give the best to our children in swearing "the best is for the children".



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**It's not only children who grow. Parents do too. As much as we watch to see what our children do with their lives, they are watching us to see what we do with ours. I can't tell my children to reach for the sun. All I can do is reach for it, myself. - Joyce Maynard**

Parenting is a deliberate act which demands enormous skills and energy. Parenting an adolescent is rather challenging (WHO) defines an adolescent as any person between ages 10 and 19. This age range falls within WHO's definition of *young people*, which refers to individuals between ages 10 and 24. Why is it challenging? Because it is a period of storm and stress.



They have their unique sets of problems some time resolve over the time or needed special attention and intervention. Parents are demanded to stretch themselves to accommodate the unpredictable

behavioural issues of adolescents.

Being an adolescent is difficult no matter what, and the COVID-19 is making it even harder. With school closures and no entertainment, many adolescents are missing out on some of the important moments of their young lives as well as everyday moments like chatting with friends and attending in classes. This unfavourable situation leads to sever psycho-social issues in adolescent or teens.

This article elaborates some common challenges faced by adolescents especially during the covid 19 pandemic and how parents should tackle these issues. It is also expected to discuss what skills they should possess to face this challenge effectively.

### **1.Fight for freedom**

Teens value their psychological and physical freedom. Usually, they spend lots of time out from home in a normal circumstance. But during lockdown and social distancing they can't go out. When there is no opportunity go out and mingle with friends or engage in any hobbies, they become bored and frustrated. This usually spill over parents. However small or cramped your home, try to find a space for your teen to feel that they can own. If they have their own bedroom, allow them more privacy than normal circumstances. If a separate room cannot be given, divide your bedroom at least using a curtain and assign it to your teen. Advise the little fellows at home not to barge into teen's personal space unnecessarily. Even when you enter to his/her space as a parent you should excuse and enter.

### **2.Let them learn the life**

Giving freedom doesn't mean they should be left alone to mind their own business all the time. Teens have lot of energy in their bodies and there is no way to use them in this lockdown pried with all the restrictions. Thus, this is the best time to get their involvement in household activities and decision-making process at home as appropriate with their development stage.

Parents are in a wrong belief that they should allow their children to only engage in studies and extracurricular activities. This is wrong. They should also learn how to live which is not covered by their school curriculums. Therefore, you as responsible parents delegate your responsibilities without any hesitations. Convert this difficult time period to a very positive and productive period though education activities are limited. One day, they need to learn them anyway. You and your teen will never ever get a free time like this in a normal circumstance. Teach them your family business or industry, how to wash your car or bike, how to cook, bake, clean, and do some gardening. They will find it interesting to learn all these. But keep in mind they might do it their own way. You need to be flexible to watch it and tolerate it if at the end of the task it meets the purpose. They are not a copy of you to exactly follow what you do. Teens become very oppressive when you criticise them for what they have done in their own way. They have their own brain, mind, and body to think and act. Appreciate their work without failure as they still value your positive feedback. However kindly explain them your budgetary limitations so that they won't ask for unaffordable things from you which ultimately make you feel guilt for not being able to afford for it.

### **3. Teach them to work on a schedule and structured routine**

Despite their online school or tuition schedule they should have a structured routine to spend the day from the time they way up and go to bed. Don't let them sleep until 11am and have their own routine for meals and other activities which you should do together as a family. Parents should be able to show their authority here in a firm but kind manner. Teens can incorporate their hobbies and entertainment activities to schedule as they wish. Minimise the time spent on the bed and bedroom.

Plan some family games like badminton, carrom, card games, monopoly games to spend time together. When you are together tell them your stories as appropriate to the context. This is a good way to teach them problem solving skills you have gained through your valuable experience. Then they learn to respect you and understand an individual become an adult not just because of they reach the age. You can't demand for respect, but you can command it with your character.

### **4. Screen time**

When there is no interaction, it is inevitable that teens spend more time on screen. This has become parent's one of the main concerns now a days. Before covid, we all were very strict about screen time. But now screen is the main way of schooling and studying parents got to persuade their children to be online and be in front of the screen. Most of the parents are also working online, so they can't stop paying wi-fi bill. We are all connecting online. Teens need all the contact they can get with their friendship network. However, some kids and teens also can get addicted to screen in a pathologically. Especially gaming and social media are highly addictive. This will reduce their academic performance, physical activities, poor sleep, poor hygiene and may lead to mental and physical health issues. Depression and screen addiction has a positive correlation. There are recent research findings to prove that screen addiction lead to obesity. Therefore, parents need to strike a balance and keep your eye on their screen time to see whether they show any addictive symptoms such as teens neglect their meals, hygiene and schoolwork and other activities which they



If they get angry and violent when you remove their mobile device, it is an indicator of addiction. They may start avoiding schoolwork and spend that time also on gaming or social media. Your teenager also can be a victim of cyber bullying and inappropriate sexual activities with or without their consent.

Watching pornography and masturbating is not unusual or abnormal at teen ages. They need reasonable freedom for that. However, this behaviour also can be an addiction if they don't have a control over it. If this becomes an addiction you will see that teen spends considerable time for these activities and try to lock themselves inside the room. As any other addiction this may take most of their time which important activities such as education and sports. On the other hand, which masturbating, they might behaviour and for not have lead to a psychological communicate to your teen masturbate but it is probably directly or indirectly. As education at school, it is appropriate sexual education access to such education material before it is too late to find they reach inappropriate material out of their curiosity.



they can invest in other as education and sports. On engaging excessive have a guilt about their ing control over it. This may problem. You can that it is normal to lematic to get addicted to it they don't get formal sexual your duty to give tion to your teen or give

If you have a concern about any of the above behaviour, talk with your teenager about what they are doing online. Open communication is important. Parents should keep an eye open, but also allow more freedom than would be the case in normal times. If you can offer some alternative activities in which they can involve will be a good preventive. mechanism for internet addiction. You need to ensure they take enough sleep and go to bed on time. Talk to their tuition masters to monitor their timetables. Be assertive to tell your teen that they can't use addictive games and if you detect such behavioural change you take the authority and have your say. You can ask them to disclose their friend lists to you to make sure they are in a safe circle.

It is good practice to have a house to rule to switch off all mobile devices and laptops after 10pm and limit access to wi-fi. If they have tuition after 10pm you may monitor what they are doing during the class.

## 5. Substance misuse

It is not uncommon to see that teens use legalised or illegal substance as a habit or as a coping mechanism to their stress. Parents need to be alert about your teens suspicious behaviour and people they associate. Especially who visits them for short time what purposes need to be monitor closely. If your teen start to visit new friends, ask who they are and why they visit the. If they avoid such questions or get angry when you question them in a non-threatening friendly manner it indicates something not right is happening. You can confront your teen in such situations.

In this article we discussed few challenges related to parenting of teens during covid 19. These are considered as common issues faced by most of the parents not even during a pandemic period but can be alarmingly increased uncontrollable during a such period. However, some teens may demonstrate psychological and behavioural changes not that common and can be identified as psychological disorders. Thus, parents should keep an open eye on them to detect them and help them before they get worse. Among such psychological disorders depression, anxiety related disorders such as social anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) etc. If you notice that your teen has disturbed sleep (over or under sleep not due to game addiction or and other screen addiction), changed appetite (over or under eating), excessively expressed anger towards others or towards self (engage in self- cut or any other self-harm activities), isolating self and withdraw from others and other activities which they used to enjoy. These could be indicators of psychological issues which may need professional help to bring them back to normal behaviour. Our normal advising, preaching would not help such a teen and instead it can make the situation worse as they don't opt to behave like this, and they are also struggling with those behaviours. If you notice such behavioural change you can talk to a counsellor, psychologist or consult your doctor early as possible. Sometimes your teen will ask for help or it might be difficult to convince your teen that he/she has a psychological problem. Whatever the situation parents should bear in mind that you cannot force them for treatment, and you cannot deceit or cheat them to bring to a therapist or a doctor. You should always tell the truth and try to convince them. Dignity and recognition of their self as it is very important for teens. Thus, parents should bear this in mind which will reduce conflict between parents and teens and make parenting teens a pleasurable experience.



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# When to seek professional help for children

As parents, sometimes it is hard to be sure if your child's behaviour is normal or not. Occasionally, we might wonder whether they have emotional and behavioural issues that are suggestive of mental illnesses. So, let us discuss some common red flags that need attention of a mental health professional. We will be focusing on Autism, Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, bed wetting and depression.

Autism is a disorder that needs early attention of a child and adolescent psychiatrist. If your toddler avoids eye contact and if it is hard to make him or her look at you, you need to be concerned about it. Look for other features such as speech delay, not responding when someone calls their name and not sharing warm, joyful expressions. They may not greet or wave goodbye when you leave home. These kids may also have hand flapping, twirling or other repetitive movements. Some may be interested in only a part of a toy, for an example, a wheel of a car. And also, a small change in the daily routine may cause tantrums.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is one of the common psychiatric illnesses of the childhood. A child with ADHD will have difficulty in sitting still; they will wriggle and squirm in their seats. Will repeatedly get up and wander about when they should be seated. They will be always "on the go". There will be problems in maintaining attention, and they are easily distracted. These children will show impulsivity; they act without thinking and may sometimes involve in dangerous behaviours. They will have problems in waiting for their turn.

However, there is nothing to worry about if your child is hyperactive only in just one setting, for example, being active at the playground is acceptable but if he or she is hyperactive both at home and school, that is significant. Usually, preschool and primary teachers notice these changes and child has to be seen by a child and adolescent psychiatrist if there are such concerns.

Now let us look at the features of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). You might notice that the kids touch, tap, or step in unusual ways, arrange things over and over, repeat words, phrases, or questions, have many doubts, and have trouble making choices. They might wash or clean more than needed and take a long time to do things like get dressed, shower, eat, do homework. This is because, in OCD, unwanted thoughts or images keep on coming to mind and these thoughts make you do unnecessary behaviours over and over again. If you notice such behaviour, talk to your child in a supportive way, listen to their concerns and book an appointment with a mental health professional.

Sometimes parents are worried about bed wetting of their child. Many children under the age of 5 wet the bed and it is normal in young children. When they become older, bed wetting can be embarrassing to the child. You can try few remedies to see whether it improves. Make sure your child goes to the toilet regularly, including just before bedtime. Agree with your child on rewards for positive actions, such as a sticker for every time they use the toilet before bed. Give your child enough water to drink during the day but try to avoid them drinking lot of water immediately before bed. Do not punish your child; it is not their fault and can make bedwetting worse. If these remedies don't work or if your child has started wetting the bed again after being dry for more than 6 months, it is time for you to see a mental health professional. If the child has tummy pain or pain when passing urine along with bed wetting, they have to be seen by a doctor without delay, as those symptoms are suggestive of a urinary tract infection.

Depression is a common psychiatric illness among adults. It can be seen in older children and adolescents too. You would notice symptoms like, getting angry easily, bodily complaints like abdominal pain and headache, refusal to attend school, loss of interest in studies and activities that they loved previously.

They will also have reduced sleep, reduced appetite, feeling low and feeling hopeless and guilty. They might express suicidal ideas too. In that case, they need to be assessed by a child and adolescent psychiatrist without delay.

We need to keep in mind that disorders of mental health are treatable if you connect with the mental health services early.



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## Dealing with difficult behaviour during the pandemic

The pandemic has been a difficult time for both parents and children alike. Schools have been closed for extended periods of time, resulting in children having to be confined in their homes. Their daily routine has been disrupted and opportunities to interact with friends and engage in play has been limited. In addition, they have had to adapt to online learning without any prior preparation. This has led to a rise in mental health and behavioural problems in children worldwide. Loss of interest and motivation to engage in online education, excessive use of electronic media, sleep disturbances, irritability, worries, fears, depression and anxiety are some of the mental health and behavioural problems that are commonly described in children during the pandemic. This has also led to increased levels of stress among parents.

Parents are the persons who spend the most time with their children and have the greatest opportunity to create a positive home environment to help children with their emotions during this difficult time. Some of the measures parents can take to promote psychological well-being and to minimize behavioural problems in their children during the pandemic are described below.

### ***Have a routine at home***

Having routine and structure is important to make children feel secure, to reduce stress and to reduce behavioural problems. The daily routine should include time for structured activities such as learning and for free time as well. Have a regular bedtime and a regular time to wake up. Remember to include time for physical activities as well. Make sure to involve your child in making this routine, as if children are involved in making their routine, they are more likely to comply with it.



## ***Spend quality time with your children***

It is important to spend at least 20-30 minutes of quality time with your child. The child should be given the choice to select what they want to do during this time. Some activities that can be done during this quality time include playing a game with your child, listening to songs or singing with your child, reading to your child, watching a movie together or cooking a meal together.

## ***Support their learning***

Create a positive learning environment at home. Discuss with your child and decide on the best time to do their educational activities. Younger children learn best through activities and play. Therefore, they may have poor interest in learning online, especially if there is no interaction

with the teacher. Young children also have limited attention spans and may find it difficult to concentrate for long periods.

We therefore, make sure you give adequate learning breaks during activities. We have seen that some parents engage their children in online learning late at night and early morning. This interferes with their sleep, which is essential for a child's psychosocial well-being. Therefore, make sure that the educational activities do not interfere with their much-needed sleep. In addition, keep in touch with the child's teacher and communicate the difficulties your child is facing and discuss possible solutions.



Therefore, we have seen children in

## ***Set limits around screen time***

Make sure that your child does not spend too much time online. According to the current recommendations, children under the age of 18 months should not spend any time on electronic media. Children between 18 months and 5 years should spend no more than 1 hour on electronic screens including television, mobile phones, computers and tablets. Screen time in children between 5-12 years should be limited to a maximum of 2 hours per day. Make sure that your child does not use electronic screens 1 hour prior to bedtime, as it can interfere with their sleep. Encourage children not to use electronic media during meal times. Talk to your children about the dangers of online media and take precautions to ensure they cannot access harmful content online. You can talk to your internet service provider for special precautions to limit inappropriate content for children. Periodically check what applications they have downloaded and check the browser history to see what material has been accessed online. As a parent it is important to acquire sufficient compute literacy to be able to monitor what your children are accessing online.

## ***Have realistic expectations***

Remember that the pandemic is just as hard for children as it is for the parents. Therefore, parents need to adjust their expectations accordingly. For example, it is not fair to expect for a child to have the same level of interest and motivation to online studies as for in-person learning. Similarly, it is not fair to expect a child to be quiet and calm when they are confined to the house 24-hours. Due to the stress generated by being indoors most of the time, the children may become anxious, uneasy angry etc. When this happens, it is important the parents remain calm so that the child is able to calm down modelling the parents' behaviour.

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## ***What to do when children misbehave***

Detect early signs of stress or restlessness and direct the children to alternative activities before they start to misbehave. For example, if you see that things between your two children are starting to heat up, intervene before it leads to a fight by removing one of them from the situation and directing to an alternative pleasurable activity. Use consequences to teach your children about responsibility for their actions. For example, if your child does not stop playing the video game when you ask him to, limit the time he can use the video game the next day. Or, if your two children fight over the same toy, take away the toy for a limited period, until they learn to share the toy. Avoid using physical punishment, as this is not effective in the long run and can lead to your child behaving more aggressively.

### ***Monitor your own mental well-being***

Pandemic has led to many financial and social difficulties that may lead to considerable stress in parents. When parents are stressed, they are more likely to be irritable and yell at their children. If the parent is irritable and behaves aggressively, their children are likely to behave the same way. Therefore, take measures to manage your own stress so that you can model the behaviour you want to see in your children.



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## ***Social connectedness for children during the pandemic***

Covid 19 pandemic has impacted everyone worldwide. One of the significant challenges that we are facing due to the pandemic is social distancing. Since we are social beings, we find it somewhat difficult to meet this challenge. However, to overcome this challenge, we always try to connect socially with others while maintaining physical distance according to health guidelines. While we try to overcome these challenges and balance our lifestyle, we might ignore that children face the same challenges as we do. Although it is the same situation, we all face, children might react differently than us. Before we understand what they are going through, we need to understand who children are.

Most of the time, we tend to think children are miniature versions of adults. That's why the way we communicate with children isn't that different from how we communicate with an adult. Mainly we expect them to understand what we are saying at once. And doing so, we create a lot of confusion and conflicts between ourselves and children.

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a 'child' means every human being below 18 years. This definition mainly associates with the biological maturation and development of skills in a child. When it comes to psychological maturation, many theories help us understand the development of the psychological aspect in a child. It also gives us a better understanding of the function of mental processes. Further, it helps us to differentiate characteristics between adults and children.



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According to some philosophers such as John Locke, a newborn's mind is like a blank slate where you can write anything you want during the journey of life. When it's explained more in detail, nothing is predetermined. It's only the experiences that we face that makes us who we are. Since Philosophy precedes Psychology, it does not support by any scientific evidence; therefore, it might seem like there's no basis for this fact. However, we also cannot completely ignore this fact since it has some truth. According to some psychology theories, it is evident that experience that we gather throughout life greatly impacts our lives in terms of our personalities and perception.

In one of the psychological theories, children initially identify their environment through developing 'schemas'. Schemas are like building blocks of knowledge. They help us to categorize characteristics of objects, situations, people, or places around us where we can use them later when we need them. From childhood, we start developing schemas with our experiences, and these schemas help us get more experiences in our lives and develop our knowledge/understanding about our surroundings. However, up to around 11 years, they will not have the ability to think logically where they will look at things and respond to the environment according to their previous knowledge/experience. This is one of the major facts that support us to identify children as children and not the miniature version of adults. Some psychologists have pointed out that this is more like a self-learning process, where others have thought it should be associated with social contact. With social contact and direct/non-direct, teaching-learning process children can improve knowledge more effectively and quickly.

And yes, children learn in two aspects which are direct and non-direct. Direct is the method we sit down with them and teach skills or subjects. Non-direct teaching is when we are unaware that we are teaching the skills, characteristics, or values they try to learn about. This non-direct method of learning can also be called observational learning. Children are active observers, and they learn a lot of things from observing. They observe their parents' behaviour, siblings' behaviour, adults' behaviour, certain characters on television or digital media, and society's behaviour.

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Therefore, individuals around children, including the social connectedness, have a huge impact on developing children's perception, characteristics, and personality. Making them exposed to society will help them to learn a lot and develop their knowledge. Anyhow, it should always be guided and monitored in this learning process. Society is a formation of different levels of interaction that we have with individuals. Society's foundation is a family. Children learn many details through family in their initial stages of life before being exposed to the other levels of society such as extended family, neighbours, and school. During this pandemic with restrictions, it is challenging to interact with these other levels of society. However, it won't let us stop developing social skills among children. Then how are we going to maintain social connectedness for children during this pandemic?

When it comes to social connectedness quality of relationships plays an important role. One of the main things we learn while interacting with individuals is the quality of a relationship and not the quantity! The quality of a relationship will lead an individual to have a better, fulfilled life rather than having so many people around you just for numbers. Making children understand this is very important and will make them learn about life satisfaction.

During this pandemic, teaching about the quality of the relationship can start with the family. The way family members interact with each other, time spent talking with each other, and reading out stories related to quality relationships will help children understand the importance of this factor.

Prosocial behaviour is another major social factor that has an impact on social connectedness. Helping someone else, understanding another person's feelings and emotions, helps us to make better meaningful connections with people. During this pandemic, we can help children to understand the need of helping others and how it will affect someone's wellbeing. Therefore, involving children in such activities during this pandemic will help them develop the necessary social skills for their personal growth.

Since we must follow specific protocols during this pandemic, it is vital to maintain our engagement with people from a distance. Since technology is so advanced, we can take advantage of it and connect with the people around us through technology. There are many ways to connect with other people through online platforms such as Skype, WhatsApp, Facebook etc. There's no harm to use technology when it's necessary and for the proper purpose. Moreover, this is a perfect chance for children to closely observe how their family interacts with people around them. So, it is always better to involve your children while you are contacting your friends and relatives where they will be able to add more social skills to their lives.

Daily activities also have a significant impact on developing social skills. People who don't have access to technology can focus on this factor. Before entering society as a grown-up, a person will have to be independent to maintain their personality, values and morality. Therefore, being independent is very important. Directing children to activities that allow them to be independent will help them to build up strong personalities. When assigning activities in the household, it is also essential to understand that their activities hold some responsibilities for them because teaching them responsibilities and giving them responsibilities will help them become independent, which will help them in the future.

Above mentioned methods and activities aren't limited only to develop the social skills essential for a child. They will also help children positively face the pandemic. They will reduce the stress of being at home or feeling trapped at home by following stated methods.



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## Positive Parenting

There has been an increase in the number of articles and resources on negative parenting techniques and their negative effects on children during the recent years in Sri Lanka. Yet , there has not been many articles written on the positive parenting. Most parents know that methods such as physical punishment , yelling , verbal aggression have negative consequences on children. Yet , most parents are not aware of positive techniques which can be used instead to achieve common parental goals of discipline , motivation to succeed , safety of children etc. Therefore , this article expects to discuss positive techniques that can be used to achieve these parental goals.

Positive parenting refers to a toolkit of beneficial techniques of parenting.

### **Why positive parenting?**

Current research has shown that positive parenting techniques helps children become successful in may areas of their lives such as career , personal relationships , education etc. It has also been observed that children raised with positive parenting techniques perform better at school and have better mental health as children.

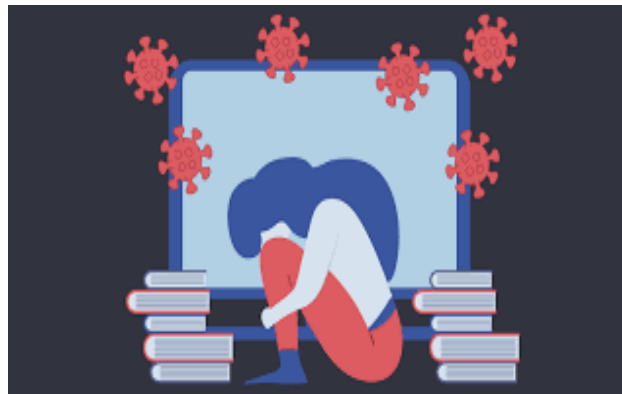
In addition to this , neuroscientists has also demonstrated that positive parenting techniques are beneficial for teenage brain development. Parts of the brain responsible for processing emotions thoughts function better when raised with positive parenting techniques. This can have far reaching benefits in academic success and teenage emotional management.

### **Praise**

First technique to lean in positive parenting is praise. Saying something that conveys approval to the child in a way he/ she can understand is termed as Praise in positive parenting. Praise helps children feel good and helps them understand your standards of behaviour and what you approve of.

## How to praise

When you praise you should very specific about what behaviour or action of the child that you praise. For example your child comes to get some help with his/ her homework and notices that you are in the middle of a telephone conversation. Therefore he/ she quietly and patiently waits till you finish your call. When praising the child you would have specifically say that you appreciate his/ her patience and being quiet till you finished your call. If you pass a general praising comment such as “good girl/ boy” , the child may not be able to understand praised him/ what is good different from person , your highly the child. always specific with



for why you her. Further , as and bad can be person to praise can be ambiguous to Therefore remember to be your praise.

It is important to praise the efforts of the child towards desired behaviour. Always notice the little steps taken towards a desired behaviour and praise the child. For example if you want the child to dress up for school by him/ herself , little steps towards it such as selecting the school clothes from the closet, taking them out , taking them to the dressing area ,trying to put them on should be praised. As praise makes children feel good , the child is more likely to try the behaviours again and again until the desired behaviour is reached.

When you praise , use one to three words which show appreciation. In addition to that use positive body language such as smiling , a pat on the back or a hug along with the words.

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## Reflections

Reflections involve repeating the words of the child and then elaborating on it. When you repeat what the child says, he/ she feels that you are pay attention and listen to him/ her. Your attention is a reward for the child. Repeating the child's words can be very important during the stage of early language development. It encourages young children to learn and use more words. For example if your child says "boo" , pointing at a book , you can reflect by repeating the correct word "book" and probably elaborate on it by showing the book , or asking the child if he/ she needs the book.

When you reflect your child's words , the child learns to take turns in a conversation , thus improving conversational skills which are very important to developing other social skills. Your child also learn that you respond to him/ her if he/ she starts a conversation . this encourages them to share more information , feelings , ideas with you and converse with you more frequently , which would help you strengthen your bond with the child. Best way to start reflecting is to replace your "hmmm" , "ohuu" responses with brief reflections.

There are few principles to be remembered when you reflect or have any other type of conversation with a child. Main thing is to keep your conversations brief. Always use short sentences. Children's attention spans are short and therefore their ability to concentrate is less. Therefore , if you talk to the child with long paragraphs , the child is more likely to forget most of what you say and thereby not be able to understand you properly.

In addition to this , always remember to avoid vague statements such as "now be a good boy ". This is not helpful in helping the child understand the behaviour you expect from him/ her. if you expect the child to sit quietly for a moment , say that clearly , using a short conversation.

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## Imitation

Imitation is playing in a similar way as your child or doing the same gestures as your child. When you try to imitate the child, he/she feels quite important. It gives them the message that what they are doing is interesting and important enough for you to imitate. This makes them feel flattered. It helps you get to the child's level and is the best way to join a child's play. Playing is the main mode of cognitive (intelligence) development during early childhood and when you are part of it, you can promote their growth by imitating more of their desired behaviours. This would make them repeat those desirable behaviours and gestures again and again.

When you imitate a child, the child is more likely to imitate you. This way, the child has a chance to learn social and other skills from you. Further, when they grow up, they will know how to learn many skills from others by way of observing and imitating. Remember not to use imitation as an insult.

## Description

Description involves describing what your child is doing much like a cricket commentator who describes the match from ball to ball. If your child is building a tower with blocks you can describe by saying "now Hiru is building a tall tower". This shows the child that you are paying undivided attention and interest in what he/she does and helps them develop high self-esteem.

When you use descriptions, with the positive feelings generated in the child, he/she is more likely to spend more time on that particular task. This helps them focus on one task for a longer period of time. This helps them develop their attention span, and thereby their memory skills which is very important in academic success. Description is also a valuable tool to be used in when the child does his/her homework.

Descriptions also help children learn new words and concepts from you. Specially, if you have young children who are at the early stage of language development, when you describe their behaviours, you can introduce new words, shapes etc. For example if your child gives you the ball, you can describe by saying "now my baby is giving me the ball". When you do that a few times the child can be introduced to the word "ball" as well the verb "giving". For very small children you can only say the word ball as the description.



## Enjoyment

Enjoyment includes showing warmth and enthusiasm. You can show warmth and enthusiasm with words and actions when you interact and play with your child. When you show warmth and enthusiasm to the child the child feels that you care for him/ her and that you enjoy spending time with him/ her.

Children are more likely to sense and imitate others emotions. Therefore , when you are positive , the chances are high that the child will behave positively as well. You can show enjoyment with positive body language such as smiling , making eye contact , hugging and kissing , putting an arm around the child or rubbing his/ her back. You can show enjoyment with your voice too. You can adapt a warm animated voice and actually tell the child that you enjoy spending time with him/ her. Laughing together is quite beneficial too.

These skills are commonly referred to as PRIDE skills. Adapt these skills to suit your child's age and your cultural environment. Provide more attention to desired behaviours using PRIDE skills to promote those behaviours. You can quietly ignore undesirable behaviours if there is no threat to the safety of the child or anyone else. Behaviours that receive less attention reduce in frequency over time. Always remember , scolding is not ignoring. It is providing attention and therefore , the negative behaviours that you scold the child for may increase. When you have to ignore remain calm , show that you are uninterested in the behaviour by keeping your facial expressions neutral. Where possible, direct the child's attention to something else or show the child that you are paying attention to something more interesting. Once the child re- starts behaving positively , promote them with PRIDE skills. Do not hold on to negative behaviours by remaining them a raing.



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## How To Structure the Day During the Pandemic?

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only a global health crisis, but it also has implications in every field, posing numerous unprecedented challenges to humanity. One of the most difficult challenges we all face is coping with the massive disruption to our normal lives. Our work, home, and social lives have been turned upside down, and we are forced to reinvent ourselves. When so much seems to be beyond our control, it is critical that we try to remain adaptable, establish a "new (temporary) normal and structure our days in order to provide some stability.

We can be very anchored by our daily routines, and if you feel as if you have lost that anchor, you may find yourself falling off your feet. Therefore, when you think about creating a new normal and structure your day, the first question you should ask yourself is that what parts of your day and routine have traditionally been the most useful and important, enjoyable, and helpful to you, and how can you adapt them to this new normal?

Making a daily plan with set times for each task can provide stability and comfort during a time of uncertainty. Even if it's as simple as when you eat, get up, go to bed, or talk to a friend, having a structure will make long days at home more manageable. End of the day, we want to create a level of certainty, moments of awareness, times when we can be certain that we know what is going to happen at this precise moment in time on this particular day.

Many people may struggle to incorporate structure, especially during COVID 19 lockdown. It's understandable; many of us don't have the same responsibilities as before. Structure, on the other hand, can help increase motivation, relieve stress, and reduce boredom.

Here are some ideas about how to plan your day during the pandemic. There can also be flexibility within your organized day, so you don't feel rushed or anxious to "do everything." For instance, if you want to exercise, you may do so by watching an online yoga video one day and going for a solo stroll the next. You may also feel the need to take a day off from exercising, which is also fine.

## Stay active

It is critical for people of all ages and abilities to be as active as possible at this time. Make an effort to be active while having fun. World Health Organization (WHO) recommends taking a short break from sitting by engaging in 3-4 minutes of light intensity physical activity, such as walking or stretching. This will help to relax your muscles while also increasing blood circulation and muscular activity.

Physical activity on a regular basis benefits both the body and the mind [1, 2]. Further, you have a lot of additional time now that all of your traditional morning engagements have vanished. Make the most of this opportunity to start living a healthier lifestyle by exercising and meditating to relieve stress. Even if you live in a small space, you and your family need to be physically active. It can lower blood pressure, aid in weight management, and lower the risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and many malignancies, all of which can enhance susceptibility to COVID-19.

## Have a routine

Maintain a schedule even if you are at home, have flexible working hours, or are not required to attend school. Maintain regular routines as much as possible or create new ones. Easiest way to follow a routine is to make a timetable for yourself. Make timetables for both adults and children. Stick to the timetable religiously so that you will motivate your children by setting an example [3, 4].

## Make sure to main a healthy sleep cycle

It has been observed that an increasing number of people including adolescents and children experience issues related to sleeping during the pandemic[5]. It is vital to get up and go to bed at the same times every day while maintaining a schedule. Sleep for at least six hours per day. This aids in the maintenance of a healthy sleep cycle during the pandemic[6].

## Maintain your personal hygiene and grooming

Personal hygiene and grooming are often seen to be neglected or given secondary significance during pandemic days. However, it is important to maintain personal hygiene and grooming since it helps you stay oriented, maintain your drive, and rapidly return to normalcy once daily activities are resumed[7].

## Eat healthy and on time

During the epidemic, it is not uncommon to see people deviate from their typical eating patterns and acquire unhealthy eating habits[8]. Adults and children alike stuff them with junk food, skip meals, overeat, and deviate from mealtimes[9]. It is widely observed that adults and children alike have become overweight as a result of the pandemic[10]. Therefore, it is important to eat nutritious meals at regular intervals. Eating healthy also boosts the immunity[8].

## Make exercising a practice

Exercising not only keeps you physically fit, but it also helps you sail through challenging times with confidence since it reduces mental stress, boosts self-confidence, and energizes you throughout the day[11].

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## Work and rest

It is critical to schedule time for both work and rest during the day. When rest is incorporated, it brings rejuvenation into your day and boost your immunity[12, 13].

## Make time for things you enjoy

Make a list of activities you enjoy and take turns engaging in them. Dive into some new hobbies that you can learn during this time to keep yourself entertained and to give your brain an exercise[13].

## Spend time with nature

Spend a significant amount of time in the garden when planning your day. Spend more time in the garden than you normally would on a normal day. If your garden isn't appealing, take advantage of the extra time to transform it into a place you enjoy spending time in. Create some greenery on your balcony if you don't have a yard and live in a flat. It is beneficial to connect with nature in order to alleviate the stress[14].

## Set up your 'Work from Home' schedule.

Keep your work from home schedule as close to your regular office schedule as possible. This will enable you to work in a structured manner, minimize distractions, and maintain a sense of normalcy, even if you are housebound. If both partners work from home, develop a plan that takes into account the needs of the family's elders and youngsters. Share the responsibility of daily household work with the rest of the family[3].

## Spend quality time with your family

This is the ideal time to take a break from the fast-paced world of work and spend quality time with your children and other family members[15]. Play traditional board games, recollect old memories from photo albums and do things together[16].

## Communicate with relatives and friends

Remember it is physical distancing not social distancing. It is still feasible to communicate with friends and relatives using current technology[16]. Make video calls to your loved ones to offer them support and assurance during these trying times.

## Establish a routine for the children

Children have been stranded at home and isolated from their pals due to the closure of schools and other extracurricular activities. Because children are restless, it is critical to remain calm and engage them productively. Create a timetable for them that is comparable to their school schedule; it should include time for studying, limited screen time, indoor recreation, learning new skills, and participation in some household chores[4].

The pandemic will undoubtedly put our mental fortitude and patience to the test, but it is up to us to respond constructively and make the best of the situation. Remember that while we may not be able to control the big picture, we can control how we organize our days. Smaller things, which appear to be less important and less influential, are actually the building blocks that create a sense of stability, allowing us to confidently navigate the pandemic.



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# Child Sexual Abuse: An Epidemic During a Pandemic

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is often misperceived as only a direct and obvious act which happens one time at once by an unknown stranger. If such is true, the rate of child sexual abuse should decrease during lockdown periods as social distancing shall minimise the risk of children being exposed to abusers, but according to the Sri Lankan National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) Chairman, Professor Muditha Vidanapathirana, “12,165 cases had been reported to the NCPA during the past 18 months regarding abuse of, and sexual molestation of children” (dated 07 July 2021, Daily News). These numbers may be underreported as the World Health Organisation (WHO) notes that “data on family violence during the COVID-19 pandemic are currently scarce because most cases are not reported to services”.

## Why has the rate of child sexual abuse increased during the pandemic?



### Children

- Fewer opportunities than adults to leave the house and access help.
- Smaller children are less likely to understand or have access to pathways for seeking help.
- Lack of access to school as a safe space and no school-related support networks due to school closures.
- Heightened risk of online abuse due to increased time online.

Why would children need to seek help outside of home? Does this mean that children get abused at their own homes by trusted adults?

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## The subtle sexual grooming process

The 'child sexual grooming' process is one of the less spoken and reported domains in sexual abuse mainly because on most occasions, the perpetrator is well-known to the victim; adult authoritative figures labelled as "safe" by parents, such as an extended family member, family friends, teachers, and/or religious leaders, etc.

The 'grooming process' as self-explanatory by the term, happens over a long period of time. It could be over a few months or sometimes maybe even years (!!!). This process is extremely subtle that it may not feel and/or look like 'textbook abuse, which is why it is easy to go unnoticed and/or perceived to be friendly actions.

## THE CYCLE OF ENTRAPMENT

### Step 1: The abuser will verbally and physically desensitise the child towards sexual acts

- Watch them change clothes
- "Accidental" touching
- Expose children to phonographic material and/or offer to teach masturbation by implying as if it for the child's knowledge

### Step 2: Physically and mentally isolate the child from close support networks

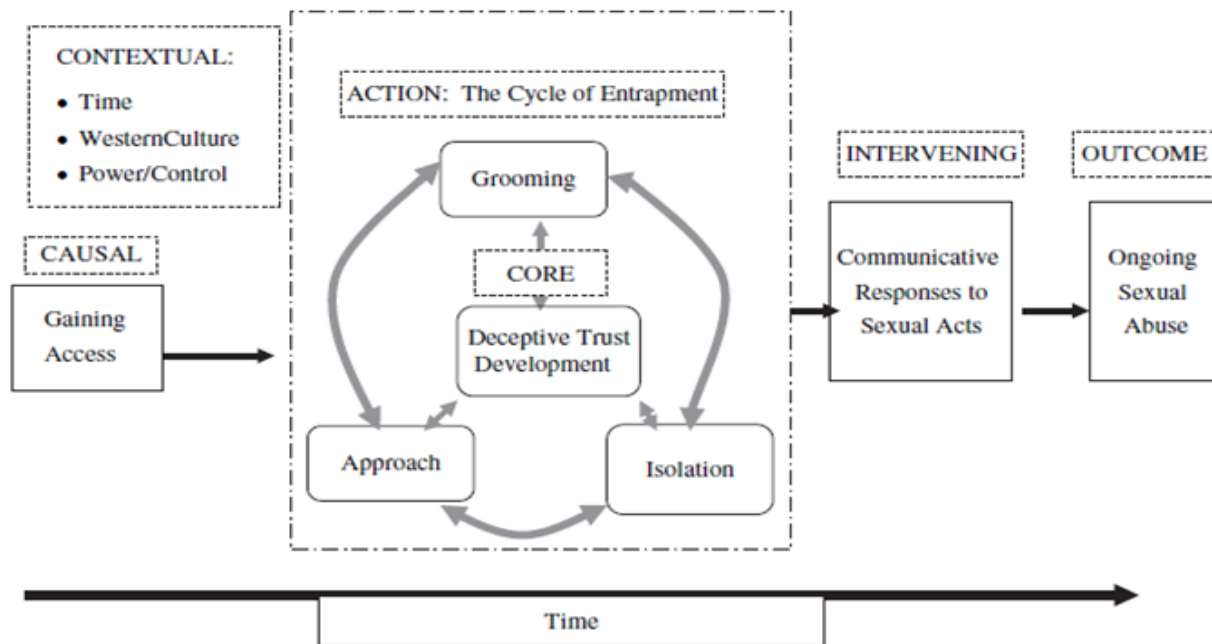
- Offers to babysit/give a ride home
- Separate from family members by spending more time with the child and/or by instilling negative thoughts in children about their trusted adults ("They don't spend much time with you because they don't care about you like I do")
- Isolate from friends by frequently occupying the child's leisure time/activities

### Step 3: Approach the child for sexual acts

Acts are not limited to sexual intercourse only, but also include:

- Indecent exposure (i.e., show genitals and/or force the child to expose genitals)
- Verbal lead-ins (e.g., suggest playing sex games: "If you can't find where I hide [when playing hide-and-seek], you have to take your shirt off")
- Explicit sexual discussions (e.g., telling and/or asking about sexual acts/interests, and/or encourage to talk about pornography and sexual fantasies)
- Oral sex (i.e., stimulate genitals and/or anus with mouth, lips, and/or tongue)
- Masturbation of own self and/or child through systematic physical contact (rubdown → helping to undress → offering to bath together/lie naked on bed)





**Figure 1** A model of luring communication theory.

### Why does the abuse continue?

- The child may misperceive the sexual acts as healthy attention and/or expressions of love
- The abuser may threaten to harm family members/friends/pets (“I will kill your dog”, “If you don’t continue this, I will do this to your little sister”)
- The child may feel as if nobody would believe him/her (“I am the adult here. Do you really think that your parents would believe what you say?”)
- Reward sexual behaviour with verbal (“you are a really good boy”) and materialistic encouragement (e.g., toys, money, food)
- Portray own self to be vulnerable (“I need you”, “Nobody gets me like you do”, “I will kill myself”) to gain sympathy

Isolated children with low self-esteem and unstable dysfunctional family backgrounds (e.g., single mothers/parental drug abuse) easily fall prey to the sexual grooming process.

If the victim responds with silence, confusion, shame, and/or fear, the abuser will justify it as compliance.

The sexual grooming process is not only limited to physical interactions. It is now easier more than ever due to easy, affordable, and anonymous use of the internet. With technology predominantly shaping our lives, abusers have moved online as well. Some perpetrators may strictly abuse online whilst some of them will initiate the grooming process online, but gradually transition to in-person abuse once trust is established.

The psychological and social impact of online sexual abuse is no less than in-person abuse. It can leave a lasting effect on a child's development. With online exploitation, the risk is higher for children to be approached by a large number of perpetrators who can stay undetected with advance technology. These perpetrators may also include individuals who misuse children for commercial purposes (e.g., pornography and sex trafficking). The aftermath of abuse, whether online or offline is highly damaging, long-lasting, and irreversible.

It is wrong to assume that children will not remember sexual abuse and therefore, there is no harm. Even if they may not understand exactly what had happened or unable to recall the traumatic

impact on children [than on adults] as the cognitive, communication their traumatic is also a high risk traumatic as sexual abuse; to health difficulties criminal activities as

#### Fast Facts

Both male and female children get sexually abused

Both men and women sexually abuse children

Children cannot give consent for sexual acts

Even newborn babies get sexually abused

Grand-/parents sexually abuse their own children

experiences, its is much larger they do not have emotional, and capacity to process experiences. There for a child with experiences such develop mental and/or engage in an adult.

How can we expect children to recognise and report sexual abuse if they do not understand what exactly constitutes as to lack of such aware-fear, children may then evidence, which may abuse.

**If you have any concerns/complaints**

Inform the nearest police station

Call the NCPA helpline **1929** for the 24-hour counselling service by trained professionals

‘sexual abuse’? Due ness, shame, and/or not come forth to give facilitate continuous

**How can we fix this?**

- Build a trusting and strong communicative relationship with your children
- Do not allow cultural factors to conceal abuse. Encourage children to speak against adults who cause them discomfort
- Enforce necessary safety measures to monitor online and/or offline contacts and activities
- Be aware and actively contribute to create awareness (i.e., sex education) and policy changes
- Seek professional support (e.g., police, psychologists) for additional assistance
- Do not neglect your civic duty; expose perpetrator to safeguard at-risk victims

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## **Development of Children During Different Ages**

The development of children occurs during different ages. Their thinking, their intentions, and their behavior change as they grow. Also, how they view good and bad changes with age as well.

From birth to around four years of age, kids want to explore their surroundings as much as possible. The child is curious at this stage. Kids want to see, hear, touch, and smell everything they find. Through such interactions with their surroundings, kids try to figure out the world. Allowing the child to explore, observe and experiment can help their development tremendously.

When children are around 18 - 24 months, they have already learned a lot about language. Their interactions with parents, siblings, and others around them influence them to gain language maturity. Children slowly learn about right and wrong too. During the early years, the child only focuses on obeying you and the rules you put up. Kids do so to avoid getting blamed. At this stage, children's sense of good or bad depends on whether their actions get your approval or not.

During the age of 2-7 years, they develop good language skills. Their memory improves as well. They are also very imaginative at this stage. You may notice that your child names his toys and talks to them as if they were alive. It is a fascinating and great way of learning for them.

Around the age of 4 is when your kid starts to ask you endless questions. The kids of this age are seeking answers to everything. The reason for this behavior is that during this time, they begin to develop reasoning abilities. At this age, kids may still be selfish. They try to gain the best for themselves. They would wonder, 'what's in it for me?'

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By the age of 5, kids improve their thinking abilities. During this time, they learn to express their thoughts and feelings well. They also eventually become less selfish.

During the age of 5-7, they learn to understand the points of view of others. The child learns that others can think similarly or differently to him. At this stage, children can accept different opinions. For example, the child learns that even though he dislikes the color red, his best friend may like it. The more the child interacts with others, the more he gets to recognize various points of view. Through their interactions with parents, siblings, teachers, and friends, kids learn that people have different thoughts, intentions, and choices. Kids also learn to feel for others. For example, if his mother is sad, the child would try to comfort her.

Since the age of 12 years, children get better at thinking, reasoning, and solving problems. Also, children of this age are focused on being accepted by others. They want to fit in. To be appreciated by friends, teachers, and parents is a priority to them. They would try to do the right thing to be seen as a good boy/good girl.

During this period, children are highly concerned about what others think of them. They become cautious about their actions because they want to be approved by others. Children of this age may have a fear of being left out or judged by the peer group. Sometimes their decisions are influenced by their friends. For example, the child may want to try a trendy haircut because all of his friends have it. He may feel that if everyone else is doing it, he has to follow along. The child may want to follow the choices his friends make so that he can fit in. Such decisions may cause misunderstandings between the child and caregivers. As children of this age balance academia, peer pressure, and changes that happen with puberty, they need a lot of support, guidance, and love from the family.

Between the ages of 15 -18 years, children genuinely try to obey rules, not just to be approved by others, but because at this stage, they want to do what is right by societal standards. For example, the child avoids chatting with his friends during a lesson because it's wrong to disturb the classmates or the teacher.

Childrens' development is continuous. At every age, the child needs love, care, and support. Caregivers need to know the changes that happen in children during different stages. It helps you to understand the child better. Also, you can provide guidance and support to the child through his development.



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## Educating Children During The Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant impact to our day to day lives. While the pandemic has brought about challenges of its own, it has also challenged people to search for other options to carry out their work and fulfil their basic needs. Among these challenges is the challenge to educate children. Suddenly the routine of waking up and attending school has now changed to the concept of online school. While online school seems to be the only option or rather the safest option, yet parents and educators constantly are seeking for ways to educate their children and looking for methods to keep children engaged and recreate the experience of school at home. **This article expects to contribute required knowledge to this effort of parents and teachers.**

In order to educate children it is important to know what it means to educate a child. Very commonly education is viewed in a very narrow sense of acquiring knowledge through a set syllabus. A lot of emphasis has been placed on content rather than on practical thinking and creativity. However, education in a broad sense encompasses all life experience an individual gains throughout his/her life. Unfortunately this is also the most neglected aspect in education.

Majority of lessons that are in the syllabus are applicable to day to day life. This pandemic is an ideal time to instil the practical aspects of a lesson within a child which would help the child make sense of the content taught in school. Given below are a few practical strategies which could be implemented right at your home.

### **Practical Strategies**

#### **1) Understand the strengths of the child.**

In order to teach a child it is important to know and understand the strengths and interest of the child. By understanding the strengths of the child it would give us a clue as to how they learn best. For example a child who loves to draw might also remember his lessons by drawing a picture to summarise the lesson. If you are not sure of what your child is good at try:

- observing your child what s/he enjoys doing the most during the day and this will give an indication as to what his/her interests are and what his/her strengths are.
- observe how s/he engages in day to day activities like playing, reading, taking a wash could shed insight on his/her interests.
- observe the people your child enjoys interacting with and why.
- ask your child what they like to do
- ask close friends and family what they have noticed your child's interests are

Identifying the strengths of your child will be the foundation to work with your child. Once you are aware of your child's strengths you can appreciate, encourage and build a healthy relationship with your child.

## 2) Maintain a routine

“You’ll never change your life until you change something you do daily. The secret of your success is found in your daily routine.” — John C. Maxwell

Many of the daily life stresses, tendencies for children becoming addicted to screen can be avoided by maintaining a daily routine. A routine helps a child prepare mentally for their day a head. They also understand that there is start and finish for each task which in turn helps them focus as well as develop a sense of accountability **about finishing them**. A healthy routine should have activities which are enjoyable and not only studying. Adding a variety of pleasurable activities would create excitement as the child knows that there is ‘fun stuff’ to look forward to in their day. **This enthusiasm , helps perform better in educational tasks as well**. Achieving tasks set out on a daily schedule also builds up self- esteem by creating a sense of accomplishment.

## 3) Engage your child in day to day activities

Education is for life and it is essential for children to engage in a variety of activities to enrich their experience in life. Most of the content in the curriculum deals with concepts we make use of in our day to day activities. For example plenty of maths and language concepts can be taught simply by engaging a child in cooking. They learn to measure, gauge or calculate the necessary quantities as well as they learn to follow a process in order to create a dish. **This can help them understand process based activities such as an arithmetic problem-solving , which should be proceeded step by step**. During this pandemic period it is an ideal time to engage your child in such activities which would supplement his/her learning.

## 4) Encourage outdoor play as

Just like adults children also need ample exercise. It is important for children to engage in outdoor play as a means of exerting pent up energy. Regular outdoor play is essential for physical and emotional development and gives children a chance to observe and interact with nature. Outdoor play helps children take risks and face the unexpected. **Since we have faced a pandemic situation , plan for outdoor times with strict adherence to guidelines issued by the health authorities. Most outdoor activities can be done in the safety of your own garden. In addition to this , encourage indoor play as well**. Play also serves as the basis for comprehension skills, maths skills, communication skills etc.

## 5) Delegate household responsibilities

Engaging a child in household chores helps develop a sense of responsibility. Research indicates that children who are given chores performs well academically as such tasks develop skills such as spatial skills, problem solving skills in children. A simple task like doing the dishes can teach a child about breakable objects and non-breakable objects, problem solving when working on stubborn stains, managing space when putting the dishes back, the process of washing a dish etc **all of which will help the child gain essential skills to excel academically**.

Children who are given responsibility also turn out to be responsible adults who are able to manage their work and time effectively.



## **6) Ensure your child gets at least eight hours of sleep**

Research indicates that a proper night sleep contributes to good memory, enhances the ability to focus, improve learning and promotes physical and mental health. Sleep is the body's way of rejuvenating its systems. Inadequate sleep can cause conditions such as obesity, high blood pressure and depression as well as it could affect a child's learning.

## **7) Maintain a healthy diet**

During a lockdown period and everyone is confined to home, most families enjoy trying out new dishes and relaxing with family. While all of the above is good, yet unhealthy diets can lead to conditions such as obesity. Also insufficient nutrition intake can affect a child's health which could lead to learning difficulties.

Meal time can also be a great learning opportunity as the child could be taught to identify various food items their nutritional content and so why they should be consuming it. For older children it could also be a relaxing time where they could reengage in a casual conversation with their parents or siblings.

Even though many mourn about the loss the pandemic has brought about as children are not able to attend school, yet the pandemic can also be used as a great opportunity to educate children in a broader sense and inculcate daily living skills and instill skills which are learned through the curriculum. As the famous saying goes 'when life gives you lemons, make lemonade' so we could make the most of this opportunity given to enrich our children.



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