

PARENTING



Parenting is more than raising children, it is an act of courage and a meaningful endeavor to grow and transform oneself to be better human beings. It is not only about teaching children to be the best versions of themselves, but also learning from them. Prerana through its years of work has and continues to believe that family and parents are fundamental to a child's growth and development. Prerana also believes that while family is an essential unit in the child's growth, cooperative intervention and consistent support from stakeholders especially social workers, resident caregivers and mental health professionals can be crucial to the successful rehabilitation of children.

This is our effort to bring forth the concerns and challenges in parenting. Through this document, we endeavour to share our learnings of concerns that hinder healthy parent-child relationships as observed on the field under Prerana's Post Rescue Operations project. [1] The aim of the document is to encourage and equip the stakeholders, specifically social workers, caregivers and mental health professionals who interact with victims of commercial sexual exploitation and their families, with an understanding of the major challenges that may hamper a healthy interaction between a parent and child. Additionally, the document also aims to share practical suggestions for strengthening and enriching the parent-child relationship.

While parenting may be an act of courage, Prerana also recognizes the challenges it poses. Children are often at the forefront of the decisions of their parents, yet parents should not lose themselves to the process of parenting. Taking a step back allows parents to recognize their own physical, social and emotional needs. It allows them an opportunity to think, reflect on their challenges and subsequently respond and not react to them. Thus, through this document we also wish to initiate a discussion on the concept of mindful parenting which acts in the best interest of the child and the parent.

Understanding healthy family structure

Please note, for the purpose of the document we understand family structure as parents or primary caregiver and their immediate children. It does not include members of one's extended family or chosen family such as friends, peers, etc.

A healthy family structure refers to a family system where all members of the family are considered as valuable. The relationship among family members is important. The needs of the family as a whole as well as the needs of the individual family members are being met. The family members have clear and flexible boundaries amongst

[1] Please note that these observations are based on the work done with minor victims within the age range of 13 to 18 years and their families who generally have two or more children.

individual members of their family as well as clear boundaries between their family structure and other external structures, such as extended family members, neighbours, peers etc. The family structure is viewed as dynamic with scope of conflict which is generally resolved through appropriate problem-solving techniques and clear communication channels. This dynamic nature of the family system allows for growth of individual members as well as the whole family structures.

Qualities of a healthy family system

Some qualities of healthy family system as understood by the McMaster Model of family functioning [2] has been detailed below:



1. Communication: Communication refers to how information is exchanged among family members. It has been divided into 2 major parts - instrumental and affective. Instrumental communication refers to exchange of factual information among family members. Whereas,

affective communication acknowledges and communicates emotional content. For instance, a parent telling a child that they were sorry for causing hurt by not visiting them in the child care institution refers to affective communication. Similarly, when the parent informs the child that they would be here for the next parents meeting, it refers to instrumental communication. Both these parts often overlap each other and may be interchangeably used as per the needs of the situation.

A healthy family system interacts on a wide range of topics such as education, wellbeing, sports or entertainment. It has clear and open communication channels. It means all the messages exchanged are clear, the content and objective of the message match and they are directly addressed to the respective member. In case of conflict, the communication lines remain open and it is resolved by responding to its emotional toll as well as its instrumental effect.

It is important to note that regardless of the situation, the communication within the family always remains positive, non-critical, non-accusatory and aims to rebuild the strength of its individual members.

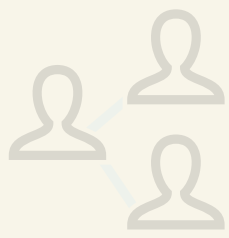


2. Problem Solving : Problems refer to expected or unexpected concern(s) that threaten the functional ability of the family system, and the family has difficulty in finding a solution for the event. A healthy family system attempts to resolve this concern(s) by involving members

of the family, seeking their advice, valuing their opinions and negotiating with them wherever necessary.

[2]Epstein, N., Bishop, D., Ryan, C., Miller, I. and Keitner, G. (1993) The McMaster Model: view of healthy family functioning. In F. Walsh (ed.) Normal Family Processes (2nd edn, pp. 138-160). New York: Guilford Press.

In case of unexpected events, where the family is unable to discover solutions. A healthy family may cope with the challenge through expressing emotions, providing support to individual members and using humor wherever possible.



3. Roles : Roles refer to specific behavioural patterns of individual members which fulfil the needs of the family system. These roles are once again divided into instrumental and affective roles. Instrumental role refers to actions that are essential for the family to function such as provision of physical resources (food, money, etc.), decision making

and family management. Whereas, affective roles exist to provide emotional support and encouragement. In a healthy family system, these roles overlap each other and maybe interchangeably used as per the needs of the situation. For instance, Zara (name changed) was raised by a single mother. Zara mother was the main breadwinner for the family as well as confidant for her children. While speaking about her mother, Zara would fondly refer to her as a ‘friend who always lent an ear when needed’, yet was firm when disciplining if she made a mistake. Thus, Zara’s mother would often exchange her roles as required in a given situation.



4. Affective Involvement : Affective involvement refers to the degree to which the family shows interest in and values the activities and interests of individual family members. Thus, it refers to the commitment to family related activities. Within healthy

family systems, it may involve spending quantitative and qualitative time together, having rituals and traditions, dedicating time and energy to family members and their interests. For instance, when Zeenat (name changed) would come back from school, her mother would ask questions about Zeenat’s day and spend time listening to Zeenat recount all the activities she did throughout the day. Similarly, Drishti’s (name changed) family maintained a ritual of ensuring that they had at least one meal together throughout the day.



5. Behavioural Control: It refers to the pattern of managing the behaviours of family members in different situations. These situations could include physically dangerous circumstances, situations where they express their psychological or physiological

needs and in situations of interpersonal socializing. For instance, a parent telling their child to not backtalk to elders in a family gathering. The standards of acceptable behaviours are unique to each family system and allows for a balance in the family functioning. A healthy family system would set mutually acceptable and flexible standards of behaviour which allow for negotiation as and when required.

Sometimes during our field interventions, it is possible that we might get confused and make errors while assessing family functioning. In the points mentioned below, we share some incidents that may be wrongly understood as signs of healthy functioning.

- **Consistency in presence of most of the qualities:** Within healthy family systems, the qualities mentioned above are consistently present across time and different situations. Furthermore, a combination of these qualities must be present across different situations rather than only one or two qualities being present at any given time. For instance, after her mother's death, Priyanka (name changed) took up the role of the primary caregiver and gave emotional support to her family members. That was her primary role until her father fell sick and her brother passed away. Subsequently, she temporarily took up the role of a provider as well. Thus, for some time she interchangeably used these roles as per the needs of the situation. However, other essential qualities of healthy families such as open communication channels, affective involvement, flexibility and negotiation for managing behaviours among others were not present in her family. Thus, even though Priyanka's role in her family was fluid (affective), her family failed in providing her the necessary support and flexibility.
- **Balanced family system:** A balance in family functioning refers to conditions which allow for the family to perform its tasks without any obvious signs of conflict or distress. Sometimes, it is possible that we may consider a balance in the family functioning as a sign of a healthy family. For instance, Neelima (name changed) is the elder sister of a minor victim of commercial sexual exploitation. Neelima was raised by a single mother and has a large age gap with the rest of her siblings. The age gap often led Neelima to act as the caregiver for her family, especially her younger siblings. While the rest of her family, including her own young children lived in the village, Neelima herself stayed in the city to earn a livelihood. Gradually, her family became financially dependent on her. When we first began intervention there were no obvious signs of conflict and it seemed that Neelima had a healthy family system. Across our intervention, we slowly realized that while the needs of Neelima's family members were being met, Neelima's own desires were often set aside. Neelima wished to return to her village. However, her migration back to the village would have created a disbalance in her family leading to conflict. Thus, Neelima despite her aversion to the city continued to stay. Hence, Neelima's family functioned in a balance that allowed only some members to benefit.
- **Traditional beliefs:** Many societies uphold ideals and beliefs that across time tend to get institutionalized and internalized among families. During the initial phase, it is

possible that the beliefs originated from circumstances that threatened the family's existence and survival. Thus, at that time these beliefs were essential for ensuring that families survive. Gradually, these beliefs transform as pre-existing conditions for family functioning, despite the change in time and circumstances. A prime example of such beliefs is intergenerational trafficking. Among the Nat-Bediya-Banchhada community, women were first inducted into the trade during the colonial times, as men in the community could not provide for or protect their families. Gradually, the practice transformed into a rigid and inflexible internalized belief passed across generations. Thus, even today the belief allows the family to function however at the cost of exploitation of one or more of its members.

For instance, Madhu (name changed) belongs to the Bediya community and is a victim of commercial sexual exploitation. After Madhu's mother abandoned her family and her father became too ill to provide for them, Madhu began to accompany her aunts to the dance bar and was gradually lured into the sex trade. Madhu's exploitation became essential for her family's survival and functioning. Madhu expressed that she did not wish to be a part of the trade. However, since she was part of the Bediya community, it was expected of her to earn for the family through the sex trade. Furthermore, she had not only internalized the practice but also the belief that she was only worthy or capable of being in the sex trade.

Thus, traditional beliefs may ensure that family members are able to perform its task. However, any family upholding a rigid traditional belief that refuses to change in accordance to the changing times and leads to exploitation or violence against any members is a sign of an unhealthy family structure.

Thus, family interactions have to be responsive, flexible and dynamic to ensure that all members benefit from them. The above section explored qualities of a healthy family and some of the common errors we might make on-field while assessing healthy families. The next section will explore some of the on-field observations of concerns and challenges in family interactions.

Concerns hindering positive parent-child relationships

The process of parenting is complex and it is often influenced by various factors including the parents own experience of being parented, communication patterns among family members and new learning acquired through personal experience among others.

Through this section, we aim to discuss the key concerns in the parent-child relationship as observed in counseling while working with minor victims of commercial sexual exploitation and their families. It is important to note that these observations have been derived while working with minor victims within the age range of 13 to 18 years and their

families who generally have two or more children. Please note, these concerns are not exhaustive and do not account for individual differences that may be observed in the narrative of the clients.

1. Parenting style : The narrative of many victims indicates that there are shortcomings in the parental relationships. While working with the victims and their families, we observed that parenting styles play a critical role in determining the quality of a parent-child relationship.

An understanding of parenting styles can be largely derived from Baumrind's [3] classic distinction of parenting authority. According to Baumrind, parenting styles can be categorized based on two characteristics - demandingness and responsiveness. She defined demandingness as the extent to which parents attempt to control their children's behaviour. Whereas responsiveness is defined as the extent to which parents are sensitive and accepting of children's physical and emotional needs.

During our work with victims and families we have observed that parents tend to generally adopt either the authoritarian or neglectful parenting style while interacting with their children. These have been further discussed below.

a. Authoritarian parenting: Baumrind describes authoritarian parenting style as high on



parental demandingness and low on parental responsiveness. Thus, authoritarian parents assert absolute power dominance over the child's behaviour. This could be seen as rigid, inflexible boundaries, unrealistic expectations with the child's behaviour and not listening and valuing the child's opinions. For instance, whenever Drishti (name

changed) would go to college, her mother would force her to check in with her every few hours. Drishti was only allowed Rs.10 as pocket money for a week, she was asked to create savings from the same amount by discouraging her from going out with her friends.

Additionally, authoritarian parents show little affection or sensitivity towards the child's physical or emotional needs. For instance, during sessions Priyanka's father (name changed) would often state that he had provided all the material necessities such as washing machine, cell phone etc. for Priyanka yet she continues to disobey her father by staying out with her friends and does not speak to him kindly. Before her re-institutionalization, Priyanka in her last joint session with the father, shared that she did not want her father's money, she wanted his emotional involvement and affection. However, the father was unable to understand the same.

b. Neglectful parenting: Baumrind describes neglectful parenting style as low on both



parental demandingness and parental responsiveness. Thus, neglectful parents neither enforce rules on the child's behaviour nor fulfill their child's needs. This could be seen as allowing the child to make all the decisions, providing little to no structure for the child's

routine, rarely enforcing any type of consequences for inappropriate behaviour and not providing any form of affection. For instance, Kritika (name changed) is a minor victim of commercial sexual exploitation. Her father passed away when she was very young and her mother occasionally worked as a domestic help. Kritika was never enrolled in a school and she shared that her mother paid little attention to the children or their household. Her brother would occasionally sell stolen goods to contribute to their family income. However, a majority of it was spent by her mother and brother on the consumption of substances. With no protection or support from her family, Kritika was often left to fend for herself. She shared that she always wished to support her family, however, no one provided her with any safe guidance to do the same. Kritika's neighbours took advantage of her vulnerability and lack of parental attention, thereby luring her into the sex trade.

2. Parentification : Due to shortcomings in parental relationships, a role reversal in the parent-child relationship can develop. This process of role reversal refers to parentification. In parentification, children and adolescents are assigned roles and responsibilities typically reserved for adults. Parentified children often fulfil either instrumental caregiving roles, such as financial management, ensuring well-being of siblings, or emotional caregiving roles, such as acting as confidant or guide to other adults and their parents. Due to parentification, many children are expected to respond and manage situations beyond their developmental age. For instance, Aastha (name changed) has three younger siblings. Her father abandoned their family ten years ago. Since then the financial responsibility of the family fell on the mother. She depended heavily on Aastha to take care of the younger siblings and manage the household. The mother's income as a domestic help was insufficient to make ends meet in Aastha's family. Aastha shared that she often noticed her younger siblings struggling to fulfil their needs. Thus, the neighbours convinced Aastha to take up a job in the catering sector to contribute to her family's income from where she was lured into the sex trade. Throughout the process of her rehabilitation, Aastha's mother regularly consulted Aastha for personal matters and looked towards her for making final decisions. Thus, in their relationship, Aastha's mother began to transfer her responsibilities onto the child. This process of parentification made Aastha vulnerable. Furthermore, parentification is also known to cause adverse effects on the psychological wellbeing of children including difficulty in interpersonal relationships as adults, aggressive behaviour and increased tendency towards recklessness and self-harming behaviour.

3. Boundaries : A psychological boundary among systems refers to a barrier constructed on ideas, beliefs, perceptions and understandings that offers a clear distinction between what is allowed and what is not allowed within a system. Within family systems, boundaries influence and regulate the movement of people, ideas and information. It occurs on a continuum from open to closed. If a family has permeable and vague boundaries, it is considered to be an 'open' boundary. With open boundaries, individuals and situations outside the family heavily influence it. If a family has rigid and inflexible

boundaries, it is considered to be a 'closed' boundary. With closed boundaries, family members become isolated from the rest of the social or physical environment. In our observation, many families tend to lean towards an 'open' boundary. It often causes external factors, situations and individuals to influence members within a family system.

a. Boundaries with other external family systems: Within many families, the parents allow members from other systems such as extended family members, neighbours among others to regulate the behaviour of their children. This can be seen as comments made by extended family members such as 'this girl has shamed the whole family', 'it is obviously the mother's fault, she didn't pay enough attention', 'you send her to live with us, we will teach her a lesson'. Such statements made in family gatherings are especially harmful when they are accompanied by actions such as discrimination, physical violence without any interruption by the parents. It often causes emotional distress to the child. Children may respond to this interference by becoming angry, behaving aggressively or experience intense feelings of shame and guilt, and subsequently become overly obedient. For instance, Drishti (name changed) has a large extended family living around the same neighbourhood. Sessions with Drishti and her family revealed that they had an open boundary between their immediate family and their extended family. Drishti would often hear her aunts shame her for being institutionalized and blamed her parents for not disciplining her appropriately when required. Drishti's parents would never interrupt these comments, forcing Drishti to fend for herself. As a result, Drishti began to give scathing responses to her aunts and eventually refused to attend family gatherings.

b. Boundaries within the family system: Having boundaries with other external systems such as extended family members, neighbours, etc. is essential to maintaining a balance in one's own family. At the same time, having boundaries among individual members of one's family is also essential to maintain a healthy and stable family system. This can be seen as having a boundary between the parental relationship and the relationship between and with children. Thus, couple conflict between parents should not be disclosed to or involve the children as it can adversely affect their mental wellbeing. For instance, Apurva (name changed) along with her five siblings often witnessed her parents fighting. Though she and her siblings were not directly involved in their parent's conflict her parents had an unspoken preference for some children. Apurva's mother eventually left their father and took three children along with her. Subsequently Apurva struggled with feelings of guilt and self-doubt. She regularly raised questions such as 'what should I have done differently?', 'why didn't she take me along?' and 'maybe if I had done more to help?'. Being involved directly or indirectly in parental conflicts often adversely affects the child's development. It leads to confusion, feelings of guilt, blame and anger within them. They are more likely to have low self-esteem and struggle with difficulties in their interpersonal relationships.

Similarly, it is important for all members in the family to have individual boundaries separating them from one another. This allows members to have unique identities, self-structure and belief systems. It can be seen through offering privacy, freedom of expression, allowing for disagreements on perspectives in the family. However, we have observed that many parents often tend to impose themselves onto their children's identity, causing them emotional distress. For instance, Anya (name changed) was constantly told by her mother to express gratefulness towards Pranaamya (name changed), a woman who played a crucial role in her rescue. Furthermore, Anya's mother would consistently compel her to follow their faith religiously. It was observed Anya had limited space to express her feelings, perceptions and opinions. In case Anya voiced any opposing thoughts, her mother would quickly dismiss them and would begin to enforce her own. Gradually Anya became frustrated, emotionally distressed and more distant from her family.

4. Communication pattern : Across the narratives of our clients, we have observed that dysfunctional communication patterns cause significant distress in family systems. Some dysfunctional communication patterns as observed on-field have been discussed below:

a. Switchboard communication: Some members of the family do not maintain direct and open channels of communication. Instead they use third parties to send across their messages. For instance, in case of any concerns regarding Priyanka's (name changed) behaviours such as staying out late, disobeying the father's rules or disrespecting him in any manner, the father would never himself address the issue but rather call the caseworker saying 'madam aap hi samjhao isse (Madam, you please make her understand)'. In this communication pattern, vital information may be lost or be misinterpreted causing conflict among members.

b. Double bind communication: This form of communication refers to sharing of two or more conflicting messages, where one negates the other. For instance, Madhu (name changed) belongs to the Bediya community. She shared that it was a common practice in their community, to offer their adolescent girls a choice between marriage and the sex trade. Madhu shared that she has in her family witnessed both of these choices leading to violence and exploitation. Thus, it was always a no-win situation. This form of communication causes significant emotional distress to the child. The child is left feeling confused, they are neither able to respond nor resist in the situation. Hence, they might feel helpless and frustrated at the lack of choice.

5. Impact on siblings : Through our on-field observations, we have also noticed that these concerns also significantly impact the siblings of the victims. Many siblings will be directly affected by some of these concerns such as parenting styles, communication patterns among others. In some situations, other siblings may also become collateral damage to the dysfunctional interaction between parent and one child. For instance, Jessica (name changed) is a child in need of care and protection. She experienced several

traumatic events including sexual assault and medical termination of her pregnancy. Jessica found it difficult to cope with her overwhelming emotions hence she would act out through self-harm, substance dependence or running away from home. Jessica's parents would always be focused on assisting Jessica which led to neglect of her other siblings. Thus, her younger siblings were emotionally distressed and had to take up more roles and responsibilities in the house which were beyond their age.

This section explored the chief concerns in the parent-child relationship as observed among the minors victims of commercial sexual exploitation and their families. The next section will discuss strategies for strengthening parent-child interactions.

Strategies of enriching parent-child relationships

Parenting is a combination of parents acting on what they already know and learning on the job. The points discussed are some of our key learnings built on evidence-based practices and our field experiences. They attempt to address the concerns that disrupt healthy parent-child interactions as well as encourage the development of qualities of healthy families. The strategies suggested below may be utilized by stakeholders, specifically social workers, resident caregivers and mental health professionals who work with minor victims of commercial sexual exploitation and their families, as consistent points of discussion with parents/caregivers across interactions.

Again, please note that these strategies are based on the work done with minor victims within the age range of 13 to 18 years and their families who generally have two or more children.

1. Modelling : Children often observe their surroundings and learn how to behave in a specific manner. Thus, essential life skills such as active listening, empathy, non-judgementality, acceptance, consent among others can be taught through the process of modelling. Therefore, instead of telling children to behave in a specific manner, it is best to show them how to do it. For instance, when the child expresses that they are hurt or angry. The parent could be encouraged to first acknowledge the child's emotions by apologizing instead of becoming defensive or dismissing the child. Apologizing also normalizes the idea of making mistakes among children. Additionally, the parents could be encouraged to use statements such as 'how can I help?', 'what do you think should be done now?'. This initiates an open dialogue and encourages children to voice their opinion. Here, it is also important to discourage parents from punishing children in case they share opposing beliefs.



2. Listening to children: If parents/caregivers want children to listen to them, they must first listen to them. The parents could be encouraged to allow the child an opportunity to come forward and explain their point of view without the fear of retribution. For instance, in a child care institution, one resident complains that a fellow resident had hit them. Instead of reacting to the situation in extremes such as either dismissing their concern completely or shouting at them. Independently interact with both the children and ask them 'what happened?' 'what did the other child say, how did they react?'



Be emotionally and physically present while each child recalls their story. Similarly, even the parents could be encouraged to respond to conflicts or concerns raised by children by first listening to them and asking open-ended questions. Listening to a child without dismissing them makes them believe that their voice has value and can have a significant impact on their future life.

3. Active participation in the child's life : Children value the parent's 'presence' more than their 'presents'. Gifts are just one way of showing concern and love towards a child. However, it cannot overpower the child's feeling of being loved and valued when parents take an active interest in their lives. The parents could be encouraged to show curiosity in children's interests and activities. At the end of the day, the parent could spend ten to fifteen minutes with the child asking open-ended questions about their day. Some examples of open-ended questions could be 'how was your day?' 'What all did you



do?' 'How did you do that? Tell me more' among others. Additionally, parents could be encouraged to set up rituals with the children. For instance, common rituals that could be established among families are eating one meal together, cooking together, finding a common activity such as sewing, painting, listening to music, etc. and performing that together regularly.

4. Disciplining children: As much as children require love and affection, they also require appropriate boundary setting. Therefore, parents must walk the fine line between reward and punishment. Some of the key pointers to keep in mind while disciplining children are discussed below.



a. Avoid physical violence : Conflicts should be resolved with words rather than physical violence. When children are disciplined using violence, children associate it to the process of resolving conflicts. For example, whenever a child speaks out of turn at home, the parent slaps him/her. Subsequently, when a

classmate says something inappropriate to the child, the child responds by hitting his/her classmate. The child hitting their classmate is inappropriate but it happens because this is the conflict resolution strategy they have learnt at home. Thus, instead of using physical violence, parents could be encouraged to discipline children using verbal means. For instance, if a child speaks out of turn at home and disrespects the parent. The parent could assertively communicate their displeasure. Some examples of assertive statements include 'I get annoyed when you do not let me finish', 'I find it difficult to understand what you are trying to say when you are being rude'.

b. Avoid name calling : Children often make mistakes. However, name calling or generalizing their mistake as a behavioural attribute adversely affects their self-esteem. For instance, whenever there is an argument or a disagreement, do not bring out the child's past as a way of suppressing their opinions. Statements such as 'you will never learn from your past', 'you will always bring shame to us like you did before' among others re-traumatizes the child and may lead to behavioural disturbances. Instead, encourage parents to actively listen to the child's perspective, asking open-ended questions that focus on how the incident affects the child emotionally as well as instrumentally. Some questions which could be used are 'how does that make you feel?', 'how can I help?', 'you sound hurt, would you like to share more about that?', 'how can we move forward?' among others which would assist the parents in understanding the child's point of view and develop a sense of agency within the child.

c. Avoid taking away affection: Parents often believe that taking away simple sources of affection from a child's life is the best strategy to teach them how to behave appropriately. For example, children often see communication and necessities such as food as basic sources of affection. Thus, if a child does not come home on time, parents do not speak to the child and do not offer them warm food. It creates a sense of insecurity and anxiety in a child that affection can be taken away at any moment. Therefore, all their subsequent behavior is an attempt to regain the love and not correct the mistake/inappropriate conduct. Thus, the parent's goal of disciplining the child is lost within the child's feeling of overwhelming anxiety. Hence, parents should be discouraged from taking away affection as a means to discipline children. Instead, they should be motivated to use verbal measures of negotiating and communicating discipline with children.

d. Communicating discipline: The reason to discipline a child is often done from the parents/caregivers perspective of the incident. Hence, it becomes important to communicate the same to the child as well as teach them the necessary response/skill to avoid it in the future. Therefore, parents/caregivers must tell children what behaviour was inappropriate, why was it inappropriate and what could

be done instead. For example, if the child comes home late, the parent could sit down with the child and tell them that coming home late at night is not okay because the child's safety can be threatened at night and if such a situation does reoccur a phone call or any other form of intimation should be given to the parent. Boundary setting and rules should actively involve children's participation. While setting rules, parents could be encouraged to ask for the children's opinions regarding the rules and be open to negotiating with them to set mutually acceptable rules.

5. Problem behaviour and children are separate: The problem remains outside the

child. While disciplining the child, keep in mind that the behaviour is the problem and not the child. Therefore, parents should be discouraged from assigning blame to a child's quality/characteristic because it makes the child believe that they have a character flaw which is unfixable. Statements such as 'you are a drug addict', 'you always make mistakes, you will never learn' among others focuses on the child's personality, making them believe that there is something fundamentally wrong with them. Whereas

statements such as 'I noticed that you have been consuming substances more regularly', 'I feel anxious when you stay out late with your friends' among others clearly communicate the concern rather than blame the child's personality.



6. Honest and consistent communication: As mentioned before, children behave in the same manner they have observed their caregivers behave. Therefore, to expect children to maintain honesty while communicating with parents, the parents also have to remain honest and open in their communication with children. Parents apologizing for their mistakes and accepting they may not have all the answers normalizes the idea of making mistakes and encourages them to be honest

about their actions in the future. Parents could also be encouraged to maintain consistency in their communication. Conflicting messages such as 'go and play outside' and 'playing outside will make you fall sick' confuses children. They are unable to identify which behaviour they must perform and it can lead to frustration, irritation and possible acting out. Parents should also be discouraged from making promises that they cannot or do not intend to keep.



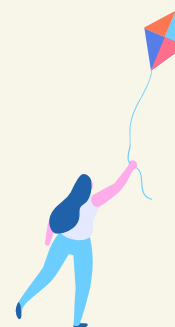
7. Appreciating the child's effort : Validating a child's efforts encourages the child to believe that they have qualities and abilities that can be enhanced with effort. Thus, encouraging them to strive towards challenges and view failures as opportunities for growth and improvement. Thus, parents should be encouraged to appreciate the child's

effort rather than the skill they have used. Some statements appreciating the child effort are 'I am so proud of the effort you put into this', 'you tried to find different solutions', 'good job, this problem was difficult but you did it, you must have put in a lot of concentration and time' among others.



8. Emotional Regulation: Children also experience a myriad of different emotions.

Children often learn how to regulate these emotions through observations of how their parents/caregivers react to such situations. Thus, the parents can assist in the process of emotional regulation by identifying and labelling their emotional states. Statements such as 'i feel confused', 'you not helping me in completing chores makes me irritated' helps children understand different emotional states and label them appropriately. Thus, children understand that not all emotions have to be clubbed under general headings of anger, sadness or joy. There can be nuanced emotional experiences as well. Another important strategy in emotional regulation is to provide space for emotional expression. One of the key rules to follow here is to allow one person's emotional expression to take place. Thus, parents should be discouraged from shouting at children while children are angry or sad. The children should be given the space to express their emotions.



9. Parenting styles and boundaries: As mentioned above appropriate parenting styles can significantly reduce distress in children. The most appropriate parenting style balances between disciplining the child and providing affection. Detailed discussion spanning over several interactions are required to encourage parents to adopt this form of parenting. Some of the key areas to cover in these discussions have been discussed below.

a. Providing resources for children's emotional and material wellbeing: This can be done by providing financial resources for children's educational or vocational training needs, spending time with them, actively listening to their opinions and asking children open ended questions such as 'how are things?', 'how do you spend your day?' among others.

b. Appropriate boundary setting: The parent should be encouraged to love a child but also place appropriate boundaries on their behavior. However, at the same time ensuring the boundaries are placed on children without making hostile comments and criticizing the children as a way of punishment. While setting boundaries, the parent could be encouraged to be flexible, open to children's feedback and show a willingness to negotiate. For instance, statements such 'what are some of the rules

you would think are appropriate?', 'how would you expect me to respond if you do not follow the rules?', 'I don't think I am okay with this, could we look at something else?' among others.

Mindful Parenting

Parenting is not a bed of roses; it is a journey fraught with challenges of rearing children to become independent adults. One has to recognize the exhaustion this journey may bring and the toll it may take on parents. Therefore, parents have to make a constant endeavour to find effective and healthy ways to replenish and restore their energies without it being at the expense of their children. One such strategy may be mindful parenting. Mindful parenting encourages the parents to keep their minds in the present as they go about their daily activities with their children.

Like children, parents also have their unique needs, wants and desires. The needs of children and parents may be different and often in conflict with one another, nevertheless the needs of all family members are important. Rather than pitting the unique needs of parents and children against one another, mindful parenting involves developing an awareness that these needs are interdependent. Through the process of mindful parenting, parents are encouraged to continually be aware of their children's emotional and physical needs as well as their own. Mindful parenting encourages parents to take out time for themselves and fulfill their own needs. It is believed that these time outs allow parents an opportunity to reflect on their life experiences and respond appropriately to challenges. Thus, through the process of mindful parenting, parents become more equipped to handle difficulties and become more open to wholesome discussions, negotiations and compromises with their children. Hence, mindful parenting ensures that everyone's needs within the family system are being met and the system functions in the best interest of all its members.



We are sure that most of you must be doing such data gathering and analyzing exercises at your end too. If you are, please do share the same with us. We shall be more than happy to share it on our website

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