DID PARENTING JUST BECOME ALL THE MORE CHALLENGING IN POST COVID EPOCH?

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ABSTRACT

Looking at the present circumstances, the best tools to protect ourselves from the coronavirus is quarantine and social isolation. This confinement has trans-located into our homes. And we find the impact of this confinement on our mental health. The impact will depend on factors like the physical space of our home, the family members residing, their age and their ability to function independently. Parents have to understand that they are not alone with their problems. And their issues are not one of a kind or peculiar. No matter what the degree of frustration and problems there exists, there is a wide community of parents who are facing these same challenges and issues. This paper has been drafted by explaining the concept of positive parenting. It has focussed on the emotional turmoil the children are facing in their home. The manifestation of the emotion also shared the spotlight in this paper. Lastly, it concluded by recommending the techniques and skills that parents can use to increase their efficiency and equip them to handle challenges that parenting entails. The personal experience, observation and informal discussions have prompted the author to pen down this emerging concern which has mutated just like the virus to become all the more complex to handle in social isolation.

KEYWORDS: *Parenting, Positive parenting, Post COVID, social isolation, Lock-down*

INTRODUCTION

Is this the perfect time to give the example of 'Familiarity breeds contempt'? Parenting, as it is, is a handful job. It can be frustrating and challenging. If you look at, a typical day, the ingredients would be stress, strain, defiant behaviour, with loads of yelling and sprinkle of admonishment. Nobody experiences the same parenthood. For positive parenting certain set of skills, proper knowledge, correct techniques are required which has been proved by a vast plethora of research findings published (Bronstein, 2000; Engels,2002; Juffer, 2008; Power, 2013; Kerr, 2009; Mandara, 2003; Lonczak, 2020). By using these techniques and skills, parents can increase their efficiencies and equip them to handle anything that is to come. And this would significantly reduce our daily resentment and frustration. The personal experience and the informal discussions have prompted the author to pen down this common concern which has mutated just like the virus to become all the more complex to handle.

Looking at the present circumstances, the best tools to protect ourselves from the coronavirus is quarantine and social isolation. This confinement has translocated into our homes. And we find the impact of this confinement on our mental health. The impact will depend on factors like the physical space of our homes, the family members residing, their age and their ability to function independently. No matter how much we love our family members, a little time for themselves or privacy is craved by everyone at the end of the day. For couples who are single parents, they face a different set of challenges. Our homes have become the centres of crèche, daycare, schooling, workout, workplace and centre for recreation. No doubt during COVID-19 the complexities of parenting, social isolation and social distancing has reached its peak. Even if people started with hope and manifested good mental health, they are slowly giving way and losing hope to the uncertainty lurking around them.

POSITIVE PARENTING

Positive parenting applies to all developmental periods. Raising toddlers and teenagers need not be terrible nor terrifying with the positive parenting approach. According to Belsky (1984), he asserted

three principal social-contextual determinants of parenting, namely the parents' personality and other personal psychological resources, the child's individual characteristics, and lastly the contextual stresses and supports.

Positive parenting promotes children's self-esteem, emotional expression, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, social and decision-making skills, and belief in themselves. (Colemam, 2003; Couter, 1999; Engels, 2002). Positive parenting fosters secure attachments and quality relationships with parents; reduced behaviour problems; school adjustment and achievement; depressive symptoms, and risk behaviours; and positive youth development in general (Joussemet, 2008; Lochman,2000; Maccoby, 1983; Steinberg,1989). The outcomes associated with positive parenting are long-term and often permanent.

EMOTIONS TURMOIL

The emotions a child's faces are different than that of an adult. As a result, their responses or the way to handle these emotions will also differ accordingly. The common negative emotions a child faces during post-COVID times are:

- *Sadness*- A child is sad mainly because of loss of social connection, especially his friends. He craves for this connection that he found in school, during recess time, playground etc

- *Fear*- Fear is the most common emotion. The whole abstract concept of 'coronavirus' is hard for him to comprehend and digest. The child fears to contract this virus or his loved ones inflicted by this unseen entity.

- *Angry*- The third common emotion every child will manifest is anger. Anger to why this is happening to him and why is somebody not doing anything about it. Adolescent, on the other hand, will usually be in the grumpy, angry mood because of lack of autonomy, the demand of privacy and some of them are angry with the authorities and public in general for not handling the situation effectively. Children might lose hope and will question regarding their religious beliefs and spiritual self.

- *Guilt*- This emotion is usually common in children who are inclined to offer their service for social welfare. They feel they have something to contribute, but their parents and the authorities are taking that opportunity away from them.

THE MANIFESTATION OF EMOTIONS

The parents during social isolation have to be extra vigilant. The negative emotions are the most common emotions that every child and adolescents will experience. When they are sad, they might binge watch on Netflix or are addicted to social media sites to be connected with their friends. There may be a sign of excess sugar intake by children who are sad and depressed. (Li Lei, 2007)

Children when they experience fear, it may get translated into 'an irrational fear or phobias' too. The fear of being inflicted by the virus might make them obsessively glued to the internet and news. Fear of their grandparents or parents suffering from this virus will throw them over the edge. And if their parents are going outside for running errands, they might argue, cry or shout at them.

Adolescents or mature children compare themselves with the medical personnel, as to how they are making a big difference where ever they are and helping to save lives. They might be feeling guilty for not helping others and in turn, blaming their parents for not allowing them. (Duineveld, 2017; Laible, 2005)

The anger emotions are manifested when they pick up fights with parents and siblings. Adolescents who are addicted to the internet might use blogs and social media sites like angry Facebook rants and rave to pour all their anger towards the authorities, their never-ending situation and the hopelessness of their situation. Some children might even yell and shout at the news and commentaries on television. (Li Lei, 2007)

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR POSITIVE PARENTING DURING SOCIAL ISOLATION

The author has put together and deduced specific strategies which might help the distress parents in parenting and grooming their children effectively and positively.

1. *Avoid Boomerang effect*- As parents and children are living together 24/7, though it may seem to some like time has stood still, and one is suspended in eternal limbo. With children, there will be behavioural problems as their perception of the circumstances will vary from an adults' point of view. So as an adult, we cannot make it worse by scolding, shouting and punishing them. It will have a boomerang effect, and the children, especially the adolescents, will lash out. Don't let the sparks initiate an endless fire. We have to learn to observe, absorb and ignore trivial issues. Positive discipline is an effective, practical, evidence-based approach that should

neither be punitive nor permissive. (Lonczak, 2020)

2. *Loosen your reins*- Here we have to shift our priorities. Quarantine might not be the only time in which we prioritize in teaching household chores and good habits. These cannot be forced to learn. Make the activities enjoyable, and a 'family time' for them, eventually they will learn routine activities. Don't set high standards for them to achieve. Let them learn at their own pace and time. Our priorities should reshuffle to maintain amicability in these circumstances for all the family members.

3. *Break the Monotony*- We have to break the monotony by changing some routine activities like dinner time, sleeping time. Even changing the place the child studies or where they have food or are engaged in other activities, can be constructive. If possible, rearranging the physical interiors of the house from time to time can also do wonders for the psychological climate of our homes. Cut a slack during weekends, let the children not miss what it feels like on weekends. Strike a balance between those parents who are policing children during this lockdown, and there might be some who have just forgotten what parenting feels like because of their issues.

4. *Stress should not be contagious*- As it is we are dealing with the notorious virus which is contagious, we don't have to add more on our plate to make our *'daily stress'* to be contagious as well. We have to manage our anxieties to maintain our sanity. Stress which are not regulated at our end is usually dumped on others, especially our children. And this stress will be perpetuated in the children. We cannot ignore the implication of Social Development Theory given by the famous social behaviourist Vygotsky (1978). Adult pedagogy, *'in the form of purposely showing a child what to do'*, is so common in our everyday lives that it is often taken for granted. Adult modelling and infant imitation are pillars of human culture. Vygotsky's developmental theory has highlighted the critical contribution of social, interpersonal and linguistic factors in facilitating children's mental development. The noncompliance of a child is significantly increased if the child can detect constant irritability in their parent's voice and even through their body language, gestures and facial expression. Now is the best time for the parents

to read and educate themselves regarding stress management.

5. *Exercise together*- The main objective is to spend time together and, of course, it comes with perks like losing weight, staying fit and release of serotonin hormones. Serotonin boosts our mood and makes us more agreeable and sociable. Lack of it can cause irritability and depression (Gawel, 1979). Even when you are not ambitious in a total workout, simple walking in your driveway, terrace; cycling ad playing outdoor games in your courtyard can be light and fun. These bonding activities enhance the positive emotions and in turn, augment the ambience of our homes.

6. *Staying Connected*- One of the silver linings of COVID-19 is that it has made all of us tech-savvy in using different apps like ZOOM, Facetime, Webex, IMO, Skype, Whatsapp to name a few. These apps are being extensively used in keeping touch with not only our far-away relatives and friends but also staying connected to anyone in our neighbourhood. We have learnt how to get involved in a group conversation which is fun and exciting. People are attending an online birthday, anniversary celebrations and even small gathering of engagement and marriage ceremonies on these apps. For children, let them connect to their grandparents, distant cousins and friends. Let them revel in other's celebration also. Apps also provide a split-screen, and they can have their meals and watch movies together with their grandparents and cousins. I am sure something we won't have discovered under normal conditions. Of course, this comes with a predicament; that is, a good internet connection can only make this a success. Parents can also ask and encourage the children to write letters and make *Miss you*, *best wishes*, *friendship cards* for their friends and relatives.

7. *Role model*- In these times, to our children, we are the only role model they are observing and imitating. The way we are handling this social isolation will significantly affect our children's behaviour. Even how we are communicating and complaining to our friends and family is heard silently by our children who are only an earshot away and not to mention that walls are thin also. We have to be flexible in our rules and its implementation. How we are reacting to other's outburst, the language we are using and the means we are adopting for our catharsis, all

these are likely to model something very crucial for our children to experience.

8. *Making a Difference-* One thing that gives a purpose of living in these turmoil conditions is the sense of making a difference. We can teach children how contributing money, clothes, toys and ration is helping the impoverished people. They can also contribute and distribute by making homemade masks. Engage them in packing and if possible in distributing, as long as they are trained to follow social distancing norms. This will sensitize them and built up gratitude for the things they are blessed with. Help them to be thankful to the Almighty and realize His blessings.

9. *Good News-* Always start and end our day with something good to read and hear. During these times our media is splattered with horrid, gruesome news and hopelessness. This has a considerable impact on the psyche of the young mind. As an adult, we have to carefully filter the news and expose them to what is necessary for them to know at that particular age. There are several researches which have proved that a child's anxiety is greatly influenced by his exposure to media (Primack, 2009; Anderson, 2001; Courage, 2009; Reid, 2016).

10. *Reading time-* Reading a pleasant and enjoyable book can spark up and lighten up their mind. Share jokes and laugh. This might be a good time to share our anecdotes with our kids and have a good laugh at it. Make sure our anecdotes are a good source of life skill lessons for them. Even going through old family photographs can be rejuvenating in lifting our mood.

11. *Learning together-* We can select some common interesting topic and learn together. It could be related to a dinosaur, some character in the movie, some scientific facts or a geographical location. The topic should be able to sustain interest for more than a day or two. Then the family can have a discussion on that topic. It is fun to have some creative juices flowing that keeps the family members engaged.

12. *Trying out clothes-* Let go your attire if you are only wearing 'PJs' at your home. Take time and efforts to dress up yourself and the kids in their best comfortable clothes. The colour of our clothes affects our mood, behaviour and stress levels (Birren, 2006). There are researches which support these findings. Colours can significantly affect our moods and the way other people respond to us. Amazingly, colours can even change our heart rate, blood pressure and respiration (Jacob and Hustmyer, 1974). So take your best comfortable clothes that you wear outside and dress up for dinner. Parents could also have a colour theme with their children to spice it up.

13. *Flexible Routine-* Don't regiment your day. It will especially create problems in this lockdown condition though routines do have a calming effect in our life (Arlinghaus, 2018). But these structured moments and activities can be let loose. Give each member privacy and alone time before they start demanding it, especially when you have a teenager at home. It can be constructive for the ambience of the house. To kill boredom for children, engaging them in household and outdoor activities that parents usually don't involve them, like gardening, organizing shelves, cleanliness drive and de-cluttering the house etc. Praise and reward them for completing the activities successfully that would motivate them extrinsically.

14. *Display Affection-* Social distancing has had an impact on our oxytocin hormone, the 'love' hormone. Oxytocin is released upon physical contact. Oxytocin provides feelings of love and trust, which is why relationships boost our happiness (Jones,2017). We have to maintain its level by the human touch and should display physical affection to our children by hugging, kissing, holding hands, putting arms around their shoulders, cuddling them etc. Just by sitting next to them, giving high five on their ideas are some of the ways that will trigger the release of oxytocin. This hormone has a soothing effect, and it decreases our stress level.

15. *Observing and Monitoring-* We cannot miss any sign of depression and anxiety in our children. We have to be vigilant enough to notice any slight change in behaviour, their language, gestures or facial expressions and nip the stress in the bud itself before it explodes. Any change in their appetite or sleeping pattern can be a cause of concern. We have to look for departures from the usual patterns. We are stuck in close vicinity and will be influenced by the changes in others. The researchers found that children who had parents who monitored their behaviour, were consistent with rules and were warm and affectionate were more likely to have close relationships with their peers, be more engaged in school, and have better self-esteem. (Engels, 2002; Duinveld, 2017; Laible,2005)

16. ***Minding the age difference/Individual Difference-*** Every child has to be dealt in a different way. Your children might need constant monitoring, but adolescents might demand some alone time. So give them space. They might also want to be in charge of something; as a parent, we can assign them a lead role in any activity. They might also be assigned to formulate rules. Select such activities for them that they feel the power of autonomy and freedom.

17. ***Roleplay-*** One way for children, especially adolescents, to participate in sharing their negative emotions like worry, sadness, fear and anger, is through sitting with them and striking a conversation just like old friends. Here we have to adopt the role of a confidante, someone they are missing terribly during the lockdown. It's not the quantity of time but the quality of time that is essential. Parents don't have to be judgmental during the conversation, keep the role of parenting aside for some time and think that it is like a therapy for the children. It will help in grasping what is going on in their young minds. Parents have to be empathetic, and they have to show and express their confidence in their child's ability to face and overcome fear and worry.

18. ***Worry time-*** Children should know that it is fine to have worrisome thought. As a parent, we should be available to listen to them. Adolescents might be more interested in keeping journals and diaries. Encourage them to write down and ask them to share only when they are comfortable. Assign a time for them to think and share about their disturbing thoughts. Gradually reduce the time and with the passage of days, they will reflect and understand that it is only the figment of their imagination, and they have nothing else to elaborate or fret. Eventually, these thoughts will phase out. (Kerr, 2009). Lonczak (2020) notes the importance of respecting a child's fears and not punishing her/him for them, as well as talking to the child in a way that shows empathy and helps him/her to verbalize feelings.

19. ***Practising Mindfulness-*** Paying attention to the present moment in a non-judgmental manner is mindfulness. By training and supporting children in practising mindfulness, the parents can help them to redirect their focus to the '*here & now*' rather than getting swept up in the "*what if*". This technique is especially helpful in *tolerating uncertainty* and enabling kids to focus on one thing at a time.

Another aspect which is observed regarding parenting is that the maternal parenting is most consistently associated with developmental and health outcomes in children (Parke, 2002; Crouter et al., 1999; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Mother's role in parenting is crucial and has a deep impact on the psyche of a child. Parenting has a far-reaching effect as Kerr (2009) explained in his study that if we control a child with anger and threats, he will learn to deal in this very same way with his peers, teachers, and eventually later in future with his children. He further pointed out that. "We see now that changes in parenting can have an effect not just on children but even on grandchildren."

CONCLUSION

Parents have to understand that they are not alone with their problem. And their problem is not one of a kind. No matter what the degree of frustration and difficulties there exists, there is a wide community of parents who are facing these same challenges and issues. Parents have to be vigilant and observant regarding their child's behaviour. If one does not know how to teach their child life skills to successful living, others will take over their job of teaching him about the world. But those lessons may involve a lifestyle that is not compatible with becoming a positive parent. The more attention as a parent we give, the more increase and enhancement is seen in the behaviour of the child. Parental attention and care are the most effective tools we have in shaping adaptive child behaviour. Even though parents include both mother and father, but our society dictates that it is the mother who is ultimately responsible for their young children's lives and health.

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