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INTRODUCTION





**TAKE A MINUTE TO LOOK AT THESE TWO IMAGES.
WHAT DO YOU SEE? WHAT ARE YOUR
THOUGHTS?**

The picture on the left is a broken pot. In the picture on the right, you can see that the pieces have been joined with a seam of polish and precious metal, and this increases the value of the pot.

This is Kintsugi, a 400 year old Japanese art form of joining broken pottery pieces with gold. You can see the result is a beautiful and a stronger work of art that has a higher value.

**Kintsugi teaches us an important life lesson:
Each broken piece is an important part of the pot,
and rather than be discarded or disguised, Kintsugi
prefers to highlight the scars.**

THE MESSAGE

Every broken part reflects the flaws and imperfections in our lives. The polish and precious metal that join the scars, indicate our resilience with which we can create an even more unique, stronger, and beautiful piece of art.





UNDERSTANDING ASPECTS OF MENTAL HEALTH

Health comprises our physical as well as mental state of well-being.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Being healthy isn't an absence of sickness. It means we ensure good practices (like eating right, sleeping well, being active, etc.) to keep ourselves fit, so that our body can cope with any illness that it encounters.

MENTAL HEALTH

In the same manner, being mentally healthy isn't a lack of worry and stress. Feeling worried, sad or fearful is normal. When we are mentally healthy, we feel like we can handle challenges better, we are able to express emotions objectively and with sensitivity, and make decisions without wondering whether they are right or wrong. This means we can face challenges and stresses in our daily life without letting our feelings overwhelm us.

Mental health is "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community." (defined by WHO)

According to the World Health Organization, in many geographic regions, families and schools are the strongest social institutions in a child's life. Many children do not show significant behavioral or academic difficulties because of successful coping skills and the support they receive.

The study says, "Academic failure and social rejection often have lasting consequences because the failure to learn in school limits a person's chances to succeed in the future, growth and hormonal changes, as well as the changes in relationships that young people experience with parents and society."

Other stresses are more individual, involving pressures to advance in school, peer pressures, family moves, school changes, parental fighting and divorce, or pressure to engage in substance abuse, sexual and physical mistreatment, natural catastrophes and severe or chronic physical illnesses and hospitalizations may also cause significant stresses.



YOUR ADOLESCENT AND YOU





Parenting can be like an endurance sport. Raising an adolescent today isn't easy, given the changes in our lifestyle. More recently the uncertainty brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown that followed has made it tough for families, parents and children to cope with the many adjustments including work from home and online education.

Besides challenges such as disturbed schedules, sharing of the internet, providing additional meals for family members, increase in household chores, job and financial insecurity and not being able to meet family and friends, this pandemic has increased stress, restlessness, fatigue and irritability.

Other situations that have arisen include loss or illness of loved ones, fear of adolescents getting addicted to social media and electronic devices, lack of physical activity and weakening of emotional bonds between adolescents, their teachers and friends.

In addition, your adolescent is also going through a phase of transition as she / he moves into teenage. They experience confusion and frustration as they face physical and emotional changes, and enter the race to find or form their own identity, through various stages of experimentation. As they make the shift in this growing up process, as parents it is important to ensure to recognize these changes, and adapt communication according to each situation and issue.

While many parents and caregivers are able to understand the mental turmoil and physical changes of adolescents in this transition, the behavior of the adolescent who is striving for independence and autonomy, can be interpreted as disobedience, arrogance, selfishness, or insensitivity.

Therefore, the adolescent's family and school setup become an important part of the support system, and play a crucial role in mental health and overall wellbeing. Research shows that young people who experience a nurturing environment and are provided with emotional, social and physical support, are most likely to experience positive wellbeing, and reach their full potential.



CHANGES DURING ADOLESCENCE

While you are tackling the ups and downs in your life, it is important for you to be aware of the challenges that your adolescent may be going through. Between the ages of 12 and 18 years, adolescents experience many different physical, mental and emotional changes. In addition, the pandemic, closure of schools and online learning have brought about insecurity, fears about the future, inability to interact with friends and family, and other physical and mental stresses.

PHYSICAL CHANGES

Puberty is a period of rapid physical maturation involving hormonal and bodily changes that occur primarily during early adolescence. From growth spurts to questions about the future and career aspirations, your adolescent has a lot to navigate through.

Changes in their physical stature could lead to a period of confusion. They are trying to establish their identity, and in the process, they could develop body image issues, can become excessively conscious of their



appearance, what sets them apart from their peers or the perceived norm, or they could even be confused about their sexuality.

SOCIAL CHANGES

Adolescents may work towards understanding themselves better in terms of what their preferences are, and what defines them. This is referred to as their temperament and is characterized by experimentation; this is the first time they may be trying things outside their comfort zone. Behaviorally, they tend to be more impulsive, prone to taking risks, and believing in a level of invincibility about themselves. The tendency to avoid feeling left out of a group, could be the driving factor for most common behavior patterns amongst adolescents.

All these changes may make adolescents feel more worried than usual. They may have a hard time with seemingly simple tasks like going to school, focusing on a subject that is difficult for them to understand or participating in a physical activity like a sport.

EMOTIONAL CHANGES

An adolescent brain is learning to express emotions like an adult, and therefore their moods may seem unpredictable. A display of strong feelings and intense emotions could lead to conflicts.

Adolescents take time to understand other people's emotions and could misread the body language of others. Their decision-making skills are developing and often, they may act without thinking of the consequences.

Adolescents feel self-conscious about their physical appearance and could compare themselves with friends and peers.



WHAT IS STRESS?

The word stress is quite often used in a negative sense. But stress isn't always bad and is a normal part of life. Stress is the body's reaction to any change that it experiences, which requires an adjustment or response. The body reacts to these changes with physical, mental, and emotional responses.

Stressful situations can affect each one of us differently. While some of us cope easily, others may find it more difficult.

You can experience stress from your environment, your body, and your thoughts. There are two kinds of stress — eustress (positive stress) and distress (negative stress).





EUSTRESS (POSITIVE STRESS)

Situations such as this pandemic when you worry about social interaction, online education, or just wish your adolescents would pay more attention and participate in their classes, may lead to stress. When students are preparing for exams or are participating in a competition, they, and you are naturally stressed. This type of stress is positive stress, which can help you or your adolescent to stay motivated. The body identifies this and accordingly helps you cope with the situation.

Stress helps us stay focused, energetic, and alert. It may even help you to meet deadlines, sharpen concentration and encourages you to motivate your children to study for an exam when he/she would rather be watching TV.

DISTRESS (NEGATIVE STRESS)

When the stress becomes overwhelming to handle and gets in the way of normal routine, it can be damaging to your overall health. The death of a loved one, loss of a job, rebellious child, harassment at work etc, are some examples of situations that may affect your moods, your ability to work and your relationships with your adolescents, family and friends. In such situations, it is common to feel overwhelmed.

There are many coping methods that can be used to deal with stressful situations. Some methods are listed towards the end of this book under the 'Managing Mental Health' section.

LEARNING ABOUT ANXIETY

Anxiety is that feeling of fear, worry, or nervousness you experience when you are about to do something challenging. Situations that cause anxiety may range from helping your adolescent prepare for an exam, meeting new people to dealing with traffic and deadlines.

It is a normal experience. Every individual – adult or child – reacts to each situation differently. What is easy for one person to handle, may cause extreme discomfort for another.

However, when the anxiety becomes a constant part of daily life, and fear overshadows most of the other emotions experienced, it is a sign of distress and you may need to seek help from somebody.

The physical symptoms of anxiety could be headaches, body pains, not caused by other bodily ailments, difficulty in sleeping or a panic attack – **shortness of breath, trembling hands and feet, chills/cold/ heat sensations despite no change in weather, sweating, nausea, dizziness, possible crying spells.** They may even feel restless and may show edginess/or nervousness in their behavior.



IDENTIFYING DEPRESSION

Feeling low or upset is a very natural part of our range of emotions, which we may experience at different points in our lives.

As a parent of an adolescent, you would have observed the ups and downs as your child goes through the transition from being a child to growing into a young adult. Their identity, academic performance, relationship with friends and family, could be different in this phase and that could cause them to feel alone, not heard or not understood.

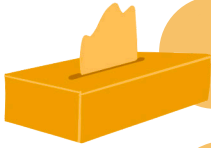
That does not necessarily mean that they have a serious mental illness. However it can still be helpful to provide them support.

Depression is an illness and can be experienced differently by people. The word depression or "being depressed" is often used in everyday conversation, when one experiences sadness or is upset with an outcome that is not in one's favor. **Depression is not just a feeling of sadness or low mood. It is a genuine mental health concern that can be triggered by several causes.**

Clinical depression can have a major and lasting impact on your child's life and relationships.

While sadness can be brief, depression will persist for at least two weeks or more. When depression persists, it may become a serious health condition and hamper an individual's ability to function in many areas of life, including work and relationships. It can have a major and lasting impact on your child's life and relationships. It is therefore important to reach out and seek professional support at the earliest.

Some common symptoms are :



A low mood.

Changes in appetite and/or sleep patterns.



Loss of interest or pleasure in things around you.



Tiredness or persistent loss of energy.



Thoughts of self-harm or suicide.



Loss of confidence.

Feelings of frustration especially in an environment of uncertainty like the pandemic.



THESE COULD TRANSLATE TO EXPERIENCES LIKE:

- Not wanting to get out of bed.
- Sleeping for extremely long hours or not getting enough sleep as one regularly would.
- Constant headaches/stomach aches.
- A pit-ish or hollow feeling in the stomach.
- Avoiding eating or overeating.
- Dodging social situations/attending school.
- Lack of energy, and not wanting to do things that he/she liked doing before.
- Irritability – snapping at people often, trying to start fights without reason.
- Feeling that life is not worth living.

Many of us are uncomfortable using the term 'depression' because we fear it will associate us with a serious mental illness or a sense of personal failure. This comes from a strong stigma attached to the illness itself and is the wrong notion to hold on to.



Experiencing depression isn't anyone's fault. It is a result of the environment and an individual's body chemistry, not something that is willingly experienced.

HANDLING BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING

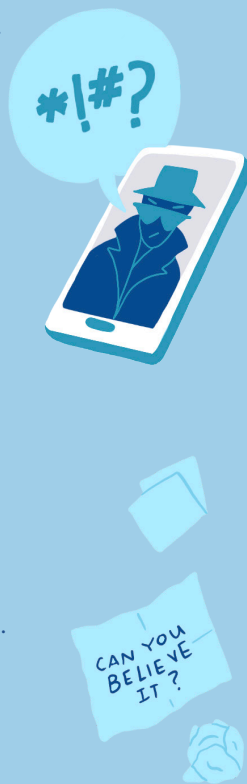
Bullying is a form of aggressive behavior in which someone intentionally and repeatedly causes another person injury or discomfort. Bullying happens in many different forms and can happen anywhere. It can take the form of physical contact, abusive words or more subtle actions and may take place at school, at home, or an apartment complex.

Cyberbullying happens on the Internet/online via text messages, emails, videos or on social media platforms.

COMMON EXAMPLES OF BULLYING

- Teasing someone, calling them names, giving nasty looks or making rude gestures.
- Spreading rumors or lies about someone (online or in person).
- Hurting someone physically by pushing, hitting, slapping, ganging up on or restraining them.
- Excluding someone from a group (online or in person).
- Harassing someone because of their race, color, sex, religion, gender, or a disability.
- Sharing embarrassing photos of someone online.
- Posting mean things about someone on social media.
- Stalking someone online with texts or instant messages, or in person by intimidating them or following them.

For the person being bullied, it can be an incredibly stressful experience that may have a serious and long-term impact on their life. The person bullied can experience low confidence, sadness, loneliness, changes in sleep and eating patterns, loss of interest in activities, anxiety, and health issues. Bullying can also take a toll on the bullies themselves.



What can you do as a parent when your child is being bullied?

First you need to look out for common signs that indicate your adolescent is being bullied.

- Reluctance to go to school – complains of ill health/ aches and pains that are not related to other illnesses.
- Low confidence levels.
- Irritable and withdrawn more than usual.
- Secretive, avoids contact more than usual.
- Has injuries that are hidden.
- More cautious, scared than usual – may ask to sleep with the lights on/in the same room as someone else at home.

YOU CAN:

- Teach your children to be supportive peers to others.
- Address any concerns that your child brings up.
- Ensure that your child feels safe. Reinforcing that they are safe and secure can go a long way in keeping the lines of communication open.
- Communicate that you're willing to listen without judgment or getting overwhelmed.

While there is a very thin line between teasing and bullying, a basic indicator would be the level of discomfort a child feels – irrespective of the intentions of the person teasing.



MANAGING MENTAL HEALTH



BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH SUPPORTIVE PARENTING

Most parent-child relationships are largely expressed as fulfilling and consistent. However, the adolescent phase could be challenging and frustrating as adolescents try to find their own identity during this transition from childhood to adulthood.

Parenting styles may need to be altered while managing adolescents, whose communication may be confined to monosyllables or wanting to spend more time with peers instead of family, and feeling that they are not heard or supported by their parents. The added pressure brought on by the pandemic, and the feelings of isolation may be intensified, and this could lead to increased stress.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- As parents, you can be the first to notice changes in behavior and attitude, and be of help. Be their emotional support during the transition to adulthood.
- Let your adolescent know that you are a safe space for them to emote, vent out and even cry, should the need arise. And during this pandemic, they need it more than ever.
- Give your adolescent the option of approaching you in case of any doubt or clarification – sometimes, just hearing them out will give them a chance to work the problem out verbally. In other



cases, a change of perspective may help them find a solution as required.

- Control the urge to question or suggest solutions immediately after your child is sharing a challenging situation with you. By just listening to your adolescent, you are helping him/her to be more receptive to you, feel supported, and less isolated.
- As a parent, there is a natural tendency to fix a problem immediately, rather than help your child to do so.
- Life's lessons are of great value but mostly when they are your own. It may be tempting to narrate your learnings from your experiences. So instead of communicating it as 'In my life...' or 'When I was young...', maybe try phrasing them as tentative suggestions when the time is right. "Do you think it may help if you maintain a diary to write about your emotions? Should we try that for a few days?"
- Encourage them to reach out to others in their circle, those whom they trust. If required, put them in touch with a certified mental health professional, and having you by his/her side when seeking professional help will help them feel more secure and supported.

HELPING TO COPE WITH EXAM FEVER

As a parent, worrying about your adolescent's state of preparedness for an exam is only the tip of the iceberg. You are also concerned about whether they are taking care of themselves, eating and sleeping regularly, and ensuring that this anxiety-ridden time goes as smoothly as possible. These concerns will probably surface more with online studying and exams, when it is natural for you to wonder if your child is learning and studying enough through these online classes.

Some children do brilliantly well by listening to online classes while other children prefer face-to-face learning from the teacher or discussing the subject with their peers.



HOW CAN YOU HELP?



- Have compassion and empathy. Children may be going through a tough time during this pandemic – missing the interaction of going to school and meeting their classmates and teachers.



- Avoid adding stress by placing strict expectations from their results – online studying may not be helping your child learn better, or your constant supervision and reminder of results may be demotivating them.



- Relieve some of your child's pressure by communicating that bad grades are not the most important, defining factors for their futures.

- Help shift the focus to hard work rather than being 'smarter' or competing with their peers on the basis of academic performance.



- Encourage them to turn off their mobiles or laptops at least an hour before going to bed.

- Remind children that while it may feel like sacrificing sleep and meal times will allow for more time to study, both sleep and food are necessary to nourish their brain and allow for it to work at its best capacity.



TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

As a parent, you have to keep in mind your adolescent's overall health. At the same time, you are also adapting to change during this pandemic, as we move ahead in a world that is talking about the new normal.

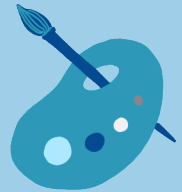
Your child is building resilience with your support, besides help from her/ his close friends, teachers, and family. You are also facing bigger stressful challenges. As parents, it is extremely important to recognize stress that you may be facing and take measures to seek help.



HERE ARE SOME TIPS THAT WILL HELP
YOU THRIVE IN AN ENVIRONMENT THAT IS
FILLED WITH UNCERTAINTY, FEAR, ANXIETY,
HELPLESSNESS...



- **Stay in touch:** Even though you may not see your family or friends regularly, make an effort to keep in touch with them.
- **Discover hobbies and activities:** This will help you and the family to relax and take your mind off stress. Become involved in activities previously enjoyed and didn't find the time to pursue them.



- **Get adequate sleep:** It is necessary to get 7-9 hours of sleep for optimal mental health. Poor sleep (in both quality and quantity) is associated with physical problems such as a weakened immune system and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. When you improve your 'sleep hygiene', you will not only see an improvement in your moods, but you will also notice that you have higher levels of energy and motivation.
- **Stay hydrated:** Studies have indicated that dehydration is linked to heightened anxiety, panic, and other issues such as forgetfulness.

- **Eat regularly:** Eat regular meals and avoid stress eating. Binging on less healthy foods could lead to sudden weight gain, exhaustion and lowered attention span.

- **Limit intake of caffeine:** It is important to limit the intake of caffeine. If you need to stay awake to probably catch up on deadlines, it will help to look into other means such as drinking water and exercising.



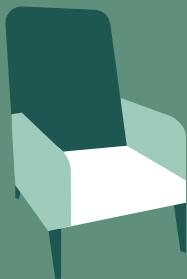


- **Take breaks:** It is important to get up from your chair at least every hour even if it is for just 10 minutes. Walk around your home, play with your pet or chat with your family. Too much screen time could hurt your eyes. So, close your eyes for a few minutes. Avoid use of your mobile or laptop, at least an hour before bedtime.
- **Decluttering:** Remove all unnecessary items from your personal space may help make your environment more peaceful. In fact, it helps to declutter your mind, and allows for greater concentration.
- **Stick to a routine:** In uncertain times like this pandemic, even though you don't have to be at work on time, continue with your routine like waking up at a fixed time, taking care of personal hygiene – this will help you to maintain physical and mental wellness.

- **Avoid tobacco, alcohol, and other substances:** These do not give you the comfort and strength to deal with your emotions, especially during adversity.
- **Physical exercise:** Exercise will help you establish a strong connection between your mind and body. Exercises relieve tension and stress, boosts physical and mental energy, and enhances well-being through the release of endorphins. It improves your physical health and your physique, and even adds years to your life. You will feel more energetic throughout the day, sleep better at night, be able to concentrate better, and feel more relaxed and positive.
- **Breathing exercises:** Simple breathing exercises, meditation, yoga have been proven to help deal with stress and anxiety and helps to ensure well-being.



SEEKING HELP



WHEN TO ASK FOR HELP?

When you feel sick or sprain your ankle, you usually know that when you would need to see a doctor. However, when it comes to mental health, we may be reluctant because of the stigma attached to mental illness in our country. Additionally, many of us may not have the information we need to make the decision for ourselves, our adolescents, friends, or family.

HERE ARE STEPS TO HELP YOU MAKE THAT DECISION:

- Recognize the symptoms that you or your child are not feeling ok – anxious, fear, sad, irritable, stressed.
- Talk to your spouse, friend, colleague, family or a relative.
- If the symptoms persist, reach out to your family doctor/ general physician.
- You may be then directed to a psychologist, counsellor, or psychiatrist.

It is important to recognize that it is much better to look for this extra help early on. In fact, it is a sign of strength rather than weakness to ask for help from a doctor or other sources of help, even for reassurance.

HELP IS
AVAILABLE!



WHOM SHOULD YOU TALK TO?

When you are physically hurt or develop a fever, you usually know what needs to be done and whether you need to see a general physician or a specialist. When it comes to mental health however, we are confused about whom to approach for help.

When we talk of mental health professionals, psychologists, psychiatrists and counsellors are the first ones that come to mind. It is important to know the work that each does so that you can make an informed decision about the type of support you, or your loved ones require. Psychiatrists, psychologists, and counsellors are trained to think of mental health as part of health and so take an all-round view of mind and body.

A PSYCHIATRIST is a medical doctor, with a post-graduate medical degree in Psychiatry, who specializes in preventing, diagnosing, and treating mental illness in various ways including talk therapy and medicines. Psychiatrists often work in a team with other health and mental health professionals; they usually aim to provide person-centered care and to work in partnership with the person seeking help and his or her family where that is appropriate. They can prescribe medication if needed, and are attached to a hospital, or have a private practice.

A PSYCHOLOGIST has a masters degree or higher in psychology, which is the study of the mind and behaviours. They are attached to a hospital, or may have a private practice. They evaluate and treat mental and emotional disorders but cannot prescribe medication.

A COUNSELLOR has a master's degree or higher in mental health counselling or marriage and family therapy. They help clients to discover better ways to manage their problems, mainly by providing psychotherapy or talk therapy. Counsellors usually work in a private practice, in schools or mental health clinics.

HELPLINE INFORMATION

If you, your adolescent, or anybody close to you feels like they need to speak to a trained expert, please call the helplines listed below. They are good resources for emergencies or if for some reason or the other, you are unable to visit a counsellor in person.

Mental health professionals on these helplines are able to help individuals who are worried about their academic grades, careers, have trouble in their relationships with friends and loved ones, or are just feeling very lost about the way ahead and the tough decisions to be made.

COOJ MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION (COOJ)

Helpline: 0832-2252525 | 01:00 PM – 07:00 PM |
Monday to Friday

Email: YouMatterByCooj@gmail.com

Proficient with: English

PARIVARTHAN

Helpline: +91-7676 602 602 | 10:00 AM to 10:00 PM |
Monday to Friday

Website: www.parivarthan.org

Proficient with: All Indian languages except Telegu,
Malayalam

CONNECTING TRUST

Helpline: +91-992 200 1122 | +91-992 200 4305 | 12:00 PM
to 08:00 PM | All days of the week

Website: <https://connectingngo.org>

Proficient with: English, Hindi, Marathi

ROSHNI TRUST

Helpline: 040-66202000, 040-66202001 | 11:00 AM - 09:00 PM | Monday to Sunday

Email: roshnihelp@gmail.com

Proficient with: Telegu, Urdu, Hindi, English

iCALL

Helpline: 022-25521111 | +91-9152987821 | 08:00 AM to 10:00 PM | Monday to Saturday

Email: icall@tiss.edu

Proficient with: Marathi, Bengali, Telegu, Hindi, English

MITRAM FOUNDATION

Website: www.mitramfoundation.org

Helpline : 080-2572-2573 | 10:00 AM - 02:00 PM | Monday to Saturday

Email: share@mitramfoundation.org

Proficient with: English, Hindi

ARPITA SUICIDE PREVENTION HELPLINE

Helpline: 080-23655557 | 10:00 AM - 01:00 PM | 02:00 PM - 05:00 PM | Monday to Friday

Email: arpita.helpline@gmail.com

Proficient with: Hindi, Urdu, Kannada, Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam, Konkani, Assamese, Gujarati, Bengali



LIFELINE

Helpline 1: 033-40447437 | 10:00 AM – 06:00 PM | Monday to Sunday

Helpline 2: +91-90 880 30 303 | 10:00 AM – 10:00 PM | Monday to Sunday

Email: lifelinekolkata@gmail.com

Proficient with: Bengali, Hindi, English

SUMAITRI

Helpline: 011-23389090 | +91-93157 67849 | 02:00 PM to 10:00 PM | Monday to Friday | 10:00 AM to 10:00 PM on Saturday & Sunday

Email: feelingsuicidal@sumaitri.net

Proficient with: Hindi, English

SAMARITANS MUMBAI

Helpline: +91-84229 84528, +91-84229 84529, +91-84229 84530 | 05:00 PM – 08:00 PM | Monday to Sunday

Email: talk2samaritans@gmail.com

Proficient with: Hindi, Marathi, English

MANN TALKS

Helpline: +91-8686 139 139 | 09:00 AM– 06:00 PM | Monday to Sunday

Website: www.manntalks.org

Proficient with: English, Hindi, Marathi

VANDREVALA FOUNDATION

Helpline: +91-9999 666 555 | 18602662345 | 24x7

Website: www.vandrevalafoundation.com

Proficient with: English, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam & Bengali

KIRAN

Helpline: 1800-599-0019 | 24x7 | Government Helpline

Proficient with: Hindi, English & other regional languages

Disclaimer: The Live Love Laugh Foundation ("TLLLF") is not in the business of providing counselling services and does not own, operate or control the helpline numbers listed here or on the website. The helpline numbers are listed for referral purposes only, and TLLLF does not make any recommendations or guarantees regarding the quality of response and medical advice you might receive from any of the helplines. TLLLF does not endorse these helplines and makes no representations, warranties or guarantees as to, and assumes no responsibility for, the services provided by these entities. TLLLF disclaims all liability for damages of any kind arising out of calls made to these helpline numbers.



You are not alone. There are others who have the same questions, concerns, & doubts.

LiveLoveLaugh website details:

Visit us at <https://thelivelovelaughfoundation.org/> to know more.

STORIES OF HOPE

Disclaimer: The stories of hope ("Stories") set out by The Live Love Laugh Foundation ("TLLLF") are intended purely for reference purposes and are by no means intended to malign or defame any person, organization, caste, or community. The Stories are views of the concerned author only and TLLLF does not endorse, recommend, or represent on the veracity of the advice contained in the Stories. Additionally, the Stories should not in any manner be considered a substitute for professional help. All experiences are personal, hence advice and suggestions contained in the Stories may not apply to the user's specific facts or situations, and it is recommended that professional help is sought for such matters. TLLLF disclaims all liability of all nature arising out of reliance placed on the advice set out in the Stories.



MANGALA'S* STORY OF HOPE

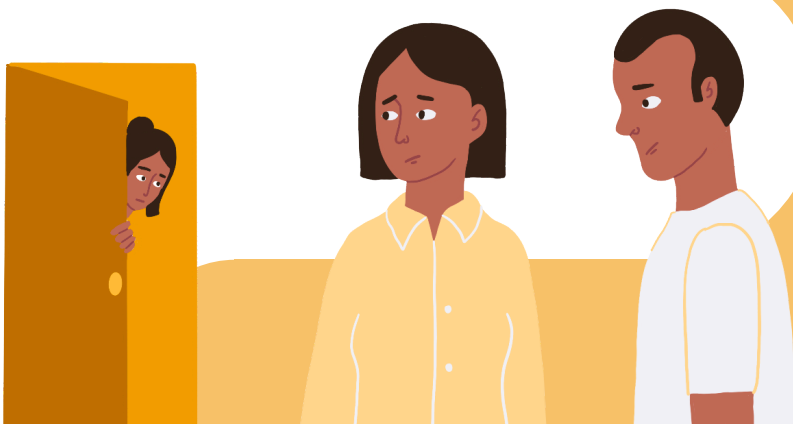
I am a working mother. My husband travels, and my 16-year-old daughter has seen me trying to balance work and family life. When I am at home, I give her a hundred percent of my quality time, and my husband and I make sure she does not lack anything. Therefore, I had no reason to think or even imagine that she would be depressed and needed professional help.

My daughter Neha* was born after eight years of our married life. I am grateful to God that by then we were reasonably well settled, we could give our daughter many comforts, that I did not have growing up.

It was hard for me to digest the fact that Neha was going through an emotional crisis from the age of 12. I had no clue about this. I used to think that it was a part of growing up, and that maybe adolescents go through mood changes during this time.

When there were family functions, she hesitated to come out of her room and meet friends and relatives, and instead preferred to sit in her room and read. She became a generally unhappy child.

Since I thought it was all part of growing up, I did not give it enough importance at the time. During this COVID pandemic, my husband and I were inundated with both home and office work, and since Neha had all the basic comforts at home, maybe we were indifferent to these mood swings.





*Name changed to maintain anonymity

One evening during Diwali, I asked Neha to light the lamps. As she lit them, I noticed that she was crying. That is when I really felt that there was something wrong and began paying more attention to her.

Neha told me that there were some situations, because of which she did not feel like going to school. She found it difficult to explain her emotions or what triggered these reactions.

Usually, I used to leave for work before her bus arrived. But now, I took advantage of my flexible work timings to be with her in the mornings to see her off. But that did not work for too long because she started to bunk classes. I gave her the alternate option of studying at home instead of going to school. This helped for sometime and she managed to keep her grades up, but then she began bunking again, missing her bus, and saying that going to school is not fun. On the days she attended school, Neha called me at work after reaching home, and would only cry. Eventually she stopped calling, and instead I had to call her every day to check up on her.

When I felt it had gotten out of hand, I started counselling her as a parent. When this did not work as well, I began to get frustrated and told her about the expensive fees we pay for her education and reminded her about all the privileges we gave her.



Nothing seemed to work, and the arguments between my daughter and I only increased. I reminded her that I took great pains to give her the highest quality of life, only because I loved her, but she retorted that she did not want any of it. There also came a time when she expressed that she did not want to talk to me face-to-face, but rather only on the phone, where she could cry, argue, and speak out her feelings.

She was happier talking to my husband because he was able to understand her emotional challenges and listened to her patiently. That was quite the opposite of me. I was becoming aggressive and agitated, and would tell her that crying was a sign of weakness..

It was then my daughter who initiated the first step towards recovery. She must have read up about depression, or learned about it in school, and suggested that she needed the help of a mental health professional. My husband immediately agreed to this, while I was not in favour of it. Depression was something unheard of during my growing up years. I encouraged her to chant mantras that would give her the strength to face the same challenges that I had faced at her age. For me, it was a stigma, and I refused to accept it. .

Eventually, I had to reconcile myself and attend the follow-up session with the mental health professional. I was very happy to hear the senior psychiatrist say that our daughter is incredibly intelligent, for having taken the initiative of seeking professional help. She said that with the right support and treatment, she will be able to recover.

As our daughter learns to live with her mental illness, I am able to learn about my child's mental health better. This is a turning point in our relationship and is helping her on her journey to recovery.

We do not quite know what caused this depression. Was it that the culture of the students in the school was different from our culture? Or that classmates were bullying her and she was unable to stand up for herself? I hope that someday, Neha will be able to tell us.

Whatever the trigger was, I have learned that it is better to listen without being judgmental, and to seek timely professional help. Today, we are more empathetic parents when we know she is upset. She thanks us for giving her space when she is feeling low. I am also proud that thereafter my daughter attended a counselling course organized by her school, to help peers during this pandemic.

To every parent reading this, my message is simple – do not hesitate to listen to your child's feelings, and reach out for professional help, sooner rather than later.



A MOTHER'S STORY OF HOPE

"We saw signs of unusual aggression in her [my daughter's] behavior only to discover much later that it was the result of bullying by her closest friend – someone she had grown up with from kindergarten. It was continuous and patient communication that got her back her circle of friends over a period of more than two years and pulled her out of depression."

The signs began when my daughter was in class six. My husband and I noticed a change in her behavior, like remaining aloof and preferring to be in her room most of the time. We put it down to the onset of adolescence and the consequent behavioral changes that come with it. But then we started noticing things like scratching the walls with a pencil or even tearing the mosquito net and cutting plants. This was a rather dramatic change because normally my daughter would exhibit very compassionate behavior – she loved plants and animals and was usually very gentle.

When I would come home from work, I would check with my husband or house help to find out how the damage had occurred, and everyone would react and say it was not me. Then I would ask my daughter, but she would get very defensive and angry. She would not even want to interact with her friends in the apartment complex or call them home.

So, I asked my husband to try and speak to her because I thought there was something more to it than meets the eye. Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful in our attempts. I then decided to consult my counsellor and seek his advice on what could be done.

The plan that we decided on was for my husband and I to keep talking to my daughter, and thereby continuously building an element of rapport over time. As expected, it took some time and effort but ultimately it bore fruit. She eventually opened up and we discovered that she was being bullied not just in school, but even on the bus ride home.

The child who was bullying her was a close friend whom she had grown up with right from kindergarten.

She felt hopeless for not being able to defend herself. The hopelessness was turning into mild signs of depression and feelings of sadness. This was manifesting itself as anger – which was in turn being taken out on the furniture at home. I realized that she was feeling a sense of loss and betrayal by someone close to her.

The only help we could offer as parents was to slowly enable her to rebuild friendships by continuously communicating and talking to her and working on building trust. This was a slow and gradual process which took us about a year.

Thankfully, we were able to identify her depression relatively early and seek timely support.

Patiently listening to her, talking to her and giving her the space to heal also helped me reconnect with my child, and strengthen the relationship between both of us – mother and daughter.



ASHWATHI'S* STORY OF HOPE

I am bipolar, and this is my story of hope to all parents battling any mental illness. My father also had bi-polar disorder and he was honest about it with the family. The bond between my father and I was strengthened because of the open communication that was encouraged at my home. I try to practice the same with my daughter. Seeking professional help and talking about the illness helps us cope.

I was 13 years, when I saw my father go through a phase that I did not quite understand. I remember my parents sat me down and explained to me what my father was going through. They made me understand that the Bipolar Disorder was just a part of who he is, and this would not be a hindrance to his life and success in any way. He went on to be an established fisheries scientist.

With my father being such a strong role model throughout my life, it became easier for me to follow in his footsteps, when I discovered that I too had bipolar disorder at the age of 34.

My family – husband, baby, and my parents – lived in Kolkata. My job as head of the finance function for a retail business in India, allowed me to work between Kolkata and Bangalore. One evening in January 2016, my mother was with my father in the hospital, and I returned home with my five-year-old daughter. I could not remember where the house keys were. And that is when I experienced my first crash.

Like my father, I too have not let the illness come in the way of succeeding in my career or being a good parent and wife. I realize that my father and I have sailed through only because we had supportive spouses, strong family bonds, open communication, and wonderful mental health professionals to guide us.

After my daughter had witnessed three episodes where I behaved differently, just as my parents had done with me, my husband and I felt that we needed to explain this to our little girl even though she was only five years old. We

explained to her that I have a mental health condition, and that together we can handle it. During one of our conversations, my daughter said, "Mamma, you are the best mamma in the world."

I feel fortunate that my father was alive when I had the first few episodes. I had seen my dad go through the illness; with the right medication, support from my wonderful mother and a great medical team of a GP, a psychiatrist, and a neurologist. He thrived without any damage and lived a long happy life. In fact, he continued to review thesis and research papers of students until the day before he passed away.

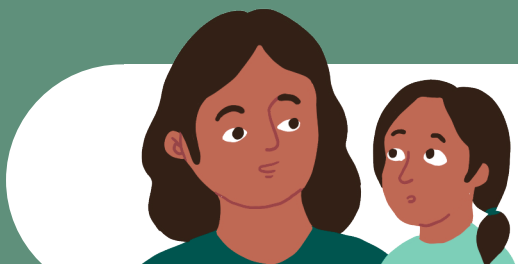
I am grateful that I was born into a family that dealt with mental illness in the best possible manner, without any stigma. I learned from my parents that my mental health comes first, and that I need to accept the illness. It helped me accept that I need medication, probably as long as I live. They taught me that it was okay to talk about it.

My parents' example of coping motivated me to do the same. Our daughter is aware of what her mother goes through and knows that there is nothing to be frightened or ashamed of. My husband and I help her to feel comfortable enough to ask us questions or talk about her worries because this communication is very crucial for a child.

The company which I work for provides an environment where it is "ok to say you are not ok". Even my colleagues are non-judgmental and supportive.

I would like to tell every parent that mental illness is nothing to be ashamed about. Just as we have a gynecologist for women or a pediatrician for children, we have psychiatrists, psychologists, and counsellors for mental health. Don't be ashamed to seek help for yourself or your child and reach out to others who may be going through a mental health crisis.

*Name changed to maintain anonymity.



FAQS



I UNDERSTAND
MYSELF SO
MUCH BETTER
NOW!



1. How do I know counseling is for me or my kids?

Counseling is for anyone who is going through a difficult time in their lives. Counseling often looks like talking – but it is treatment as it is a structured process, designed to help you. Through counselling, people learn about themselves. They discover ways to overcome troubling feelings or make changes in themselves or their situations. Counselling is a combination of building trust, talking and listening. It also involves receiving support and guidance. Through talking, listening and observing, a counselor can evaluate the problem that needs attention.

2. How can I help my child if he/she is in distress?

There are many steps that you can take to help recognize mental health issues of your adolescent. You can educate yourself and others about mental health, provide a safe and open environment to discuss the topic, encourage good health (physical and mental), and make mental health resources readily available to them. For more information, please refer to the 'Building Resilience through Supportive Parenting' section in this booklet.



3. How can I talk to my child about mental health?

- Reassure them that even adults have problems they can't sort out on their own. Everyone needs support.
- Talk about how common it is to have negative emotions. It's not unusual for young people to feel worried, stressed or sad.
- Tell your child that talking about a problem can often help put things into perspective and make feelings clearer. Someone with more or different experience – like an adult – might be able to suggest options they haven't thought of.
- Let your child know that talking with a GP or other health professional is confidential.
- Emphasise that your child isn't alone.

YOU ARE NOT
ALONE.
I AM ALWAYS
WITH YOU!



4. How can I help promote positive mental health with my adolescent?

- Increase your awareness about the topic including the signs and symptoms of mental illness.
- Seek support of a school counsellor or psychologist.
- Educate your child on mental health.
- Encourage open and authentic conversations about mental health.





I'M JUST A
DOCTOR!

5. What can I do if my child refuses to speak to a mental health professional?

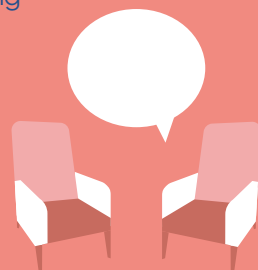
There should be no hesitation or shame in seeking mental health support. Visiting a mental health professional is the same as visiting a physician when you catch a fever or break a bone.

6. Is counselling only meant for people with mental health conditions?

The first step is to normalise conversation in your home about mental health. Children learn from the adults around them, so if you don't stigmatize the topic, they may learn to do the same. You can also seek professional support for yourself and learn from the mental health professional about how to support your child better.

7. What do I/my child need to tell the mental health professional on the first visit?

- Be open, expressive and tell your mental health specialist exactly what you feel.
- Observe and write down any behaviour change or symptoms you think you are experiencing.
- Make sure to ask your mental health specialist all the questions you have in mind.
- Take a friend or family member along with you.



8. What typically happens in a counselling /talk therapy session?

Regular counselling sessions are held in a private and confidential space. In the current scenario of the pandemic, counselling can even be done via a phone call, video call or online chat. Counselling relationships are professional working relationships with a purpose. During a session, your counsellor will listen to you, ask you questions and try to gain a better understanding of who you are. In subsequent sessions, you may mutually set goals with your counsellor and work towards them. Counselling can help you understand yourself better and enable you to cope with any challenges you may be facing.



ADDITIONAL READING

PANDEMIC SPECIFIC

1. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/covid-19-is-hurting-childrens-mental-health/>
2. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/three-ways-to-protect-your-mental-health-from-covid-19>

GENERAL

1. <https://healthyfamilies.beyondblue.org.au/healthy-homes/building-resilience>
2. <https://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/learn-more/perma-theory-well-being-and-perma-workshops>
3. https://nimhans.ac.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/1.-Child-and-Adolescent-Mental-health-Research-in-India-An-Overview_79-89.pdf
4. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4477835/>
5. https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/62308/WHO_MNH_PSF_93.3_Rev.1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y