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Biggest parenting mistakes that destroy children's mental health

There are many things we get right when it comes to parenting but there are also some that may do more harm than good. There is a fine line between wanting the best for your child and pushing them unknowingly in the wrong direction and destroying their mental health. Here's what to avoid



Biggest parenting mistakes that destroy children's mental health (Photo by Tadeas P on Unsplash)

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By Zarafshan Shiraz, Delhi

Parenting is one of the most physically and emotionally demanding jobs in the world, as it involves more than just providing a roof over a child's head and food in his or her stomach. You're attempting to develop a child who is courageous, independent, kind, hard-working and a humane individual but though there are many things we get right when it comes to parenting, there are also some that may do more harm than good.

There is a fine line between wanting the best for your child and pushing them unknowingly in the wrong direction. Frequently, parents are ignorant of the mental harm they are inflicting on their children and it is common for them to declare that "everything is for the best" when in reality, they are actually harming their children's minds.

In an interview with HT Lifestyle, Dr Malini Saba, Psychologist and Chairman of the 'Ananke Foundation', outlined five ways in which you may be contributing to your child's bad mental health and how you can prevent it:

- 1. Making comparisons between your child and others** - One of the most emotionally damaging bad parenting acts is the comparison to other children. It is the root cause of numerous mental disorders in children, including inferiority complexes, a strong realisation that they will never be good enough, low confidence, low self-esteem and a lack of self-love. Parents frequently compare their children's career choices, marital status, faith demonstration, test scores, etc. Parents must recognise that each child's mind and body are distinct and comparing your child to others will only cause psychological and emotional trouble.
- 2. Ignoring your child's emotional needs** - Ignoring the emotional needs of your child is a sort of abandonment in which a parent wilfully creates a number of personality flaws that later prove to be mentally and emotionally detrimental to their children. Abandonment and ignorance do not usually include physical absence; a child might also feel unwanted and neglected through minor gestures. When a child is hurt, even by something small, it is essential for the parent to console them, comfort them, hug them if they are not feeling well, celebrate their small victories, stand up for them and most importantly, be there for your children when they need you. If you don't meet your child's emotional needs, they will eventually turn to other sources of support, which may or may not be better for them in the long run.
- 3. Using guilt to get your way** - Parents can unwittingly send their kids on a guilt trip to get something done for them in an attempt to induce feelings of remorse or shame. They occasionally use emotional blackmail to induce guilt. For example, phrases such as "you go out and enjoy yourself, don't worry about me," accuse them of "not helping out around the house", "not considering what the parents might need" or "I don't take care of my health because I'm too busy caring for your needs". On the surface, it may appear that they are being considerate yet their actions are intended to elicit guilt. When a parent instils guilt in a child, the effects can be catastrophic and long-lasting, including a loss of self-confidence, difficulty believing they can do anything correctly and the development of self-doubt and low self-esteem. A healthier way to handle that situation would be for the parent to have a healthy dialogue and explain their desires or expectations without condemning or blaming their child, which is a better way to address the situation.
- 4. Demanding perfection** - Children should be taught to reach for the stars but it should be an option and not a requirement. To become a perfectionist and excel in everything, a child constantly strive and work hard to accomplish more and more. This vicious cycle never ends and the child is left with a profound sense of dissatisfaction and failure. As a result, mental health concerns such as sadness, stress and anxiety develop. As a parent, you must acknowledge that it is acceptable for your child to not always be flawless, to not obtain the highest grades, to not win awards and to not thrive in every endeavour.
- 5. Overprotectiveness** - Keeping your child in a secure bubble eliminates a great deal of anxiety but protecting them from obstacles hampers their development. Consider yourself a guide, not a guardian. Permit your children to experience life, even when it is frightening to let go. You will provide them with the opportunity to develop confidence in their capacity to handle anything life throws at them.

Bringing her expertise to the same, Dr Malvika Samnani, Occupational Therapy, Sensory Integration and Speech Clarity expert and founder of Feeding Clinic, discussed five parenting mistakes to avoid:

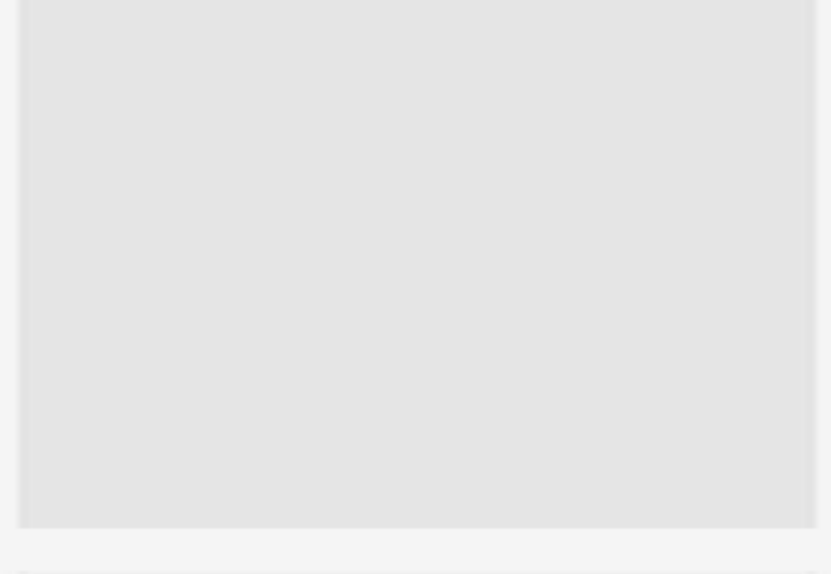
- 1. Assuming that children will always agree on everything** - Some children are raised by parents who do not permit them to express divergent thoughts or opinions and may accuse them of being stubborn, rebellious, ignorant or worse if they do so. Typically, these parents will not tolerate any questioning from their children, as even a simple query would imply that the child does not believe what the parent believes they "should" believe. Religiously toxic parents may refer to their children as "possessed." Other dysfunctional parents may continue to use equally hurtful labels such as "crazy". This is bad parenting because it prevents the child from thinking independently. When kids see themselves in an unfavourable way, they are more likely to keep things bottled up and not say anything in the future, thus making their childhood tense.
- 2. Comfort comes foremost** - Similar to the failure, children need to experience "uncomfortable" situations in order to develop mental strength. Trying new things will undoubtedly make children feel uneasy but it is the first step in learning that they may discover a new food they enjoy, make new friends, excel at a new sport, etc. Give them a gentle push and reassure them that you will be there to support them.
- 3. Aspiring to live out your unfulfilled dreams** - Your child may have more opportunities and better facilities than you did but it doesn't mean you should push them to do what you couldn't. Every child is unique and just like you, your child may have distinct preferences. Therefore, moulding children to love what you love is denying them the opportunity to pursue their own interests. This may significantly impact their mental health.
- 4. Not caring for yourself** - As a parent ages, it becomes simpler to maintain excellent practises e.g. eating well, exercising regularly and taking time to rest. Therefore, it is essential to demonstrate self-care practises to your children. Additionally, it is essential to demonstrate positive coping techniques to your children. Consider telling your child, "I've had a very stressful day at work and I'm going to relax with a cup of tea and a good book," etc.
- 5. Forcing to comply with socially established rules and standards** - Many times, children have their own ways of expressing themselves and there are some who are, as per society, 'different'. Now, "different" doesn't mean "wrong" but according to the rules and norms that the society has made, they are not okay. For instance, if a boy wants to learn to cook, which according to social norms is a girl's interest and choice of hobby, he will be singled out for it but that is not ideal. So, as parents you must never force your child to limit their personality but rather help them to enhance it.

Most parents make the above mentioned parenting blunders which are often misunderstood as harmless. Parents and society sometimes may not be educated enough on children's mental health to distinguish between bad and good parenting habits.

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