

Pediatrician, Parenting and Peace

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Children are highly receptive. What a child learns at young age gets imprinted almost permanently. Pruning of unused part of the brain and exponential growth of neural synapses happen at rapid pace for the experiences at younger age. It is strongly believed that be it love or hate/violence, children will give back multiple times what they had received in childhood. If children are handled without aggression or violence and receive due attention, they will be able to be nonviolent throughout the life, even during most difficult situations. Positive or negative role model will be reflected throughout the life of a child.

Data suggest that worldwide nearly 40 million children suffer from child abuse [1]. Neglect is even more prevalent form of maltreatment. Neglect [2] and Abuse [3,4] are closely associated with learning problems (cognitive delays, executive functioning skills impairment), mental health problems (social adjustment difficulties), emotional/behavioral problems, physical/developmental abnormalities (attention deficits and hyperactivity, academic struggles, poorer impulse control, reduced enthusiasm and confidence, assertiveness, antisocial behavior, growth restriction, impaired gross motor and coordination skills), chronic diseases, and immune system imbalance. Such toxic stress in childhood is the topic of research in vogue [5]. Genetic imprinting and encrypting of stress can be perpetuated through generations. But equally, its outcomes can be modified by proper child rearing as suggested by epigenetic theories. WHO and UNICEF have Early Childhood Development (ECD) in top agenda with specific domain of working as “ECD and Peace Building” [6].

We live in a society that is far from ideal. There is violence, communal riots, war, terrorism, inequality, injustice, unsafe environment, malnutrition and indiscipline. As we know prevention of a disease is better than a cure, so is the case for unhappiness and violence in the society. How do we prevent these social ills? Is it possible to transform adults? Many saints and prophets have tried but failed to get the desired outcomes. Famous

Gujarati literate Manubhai Pancholi and Mahatma Gandhi emphasized that early childhood training works diligently to thwart the seeds of aggression from taking root in the children. Positive parenting is a way forward for preventing the negative issues cited above.

For answering how parenting would help in addressing the issues cited above, let us take a look into the determinants of psychosocial outcome for a child. They are: negative childhood experiences; genetic endowment; parenting styles and support; family micro environment and happiness; school, peer group and society environment like mass-mentality and stress; bias in term of gender, religion, caste or creed; and life skills learning. It is obvious that apart from nature (genetic), outcome mostly depends on nurture by parents – not only biological parents, but also any other adult who affects a child’s life.

Pediatricians across the world play a crucial part in the optimum growth and development of children, and thereby their health and happiness. Society is looking towards pediatricians for best future of children; hence, social contribution becomes an integral part of professional role and duty of a pediatrician. One such role of a pediatrician is guiding the parents in rearing their children in the best scientific way in its all domains.

It is assumed that once a couple becomes parents, parenting would be automatic. We leave everything to either their experiences as children themselves or just to chance. But, then how do we spread the awareness about the right parenting skills? There is a need to focus on widespread teaching of scientific skills and art of parenting at every nook and corner for getting the best outcome. Parenting skill course should be an integral part of study for all the prospective parents, more detailed in the medical curriculum.

There may be many professional organizations or private counselors trying to address this need, but one movement that has attracted and has found many takers amongst members of Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP) is ‘Parenting for Peace’ (P4P) movement, which is totally

voluntary, value-driven, selfless, and is based on leadership, handholding and free sharing. Inspired by an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, the foundation of this movement took place in the city of Surat with the help of many of our pediatrician colleagues. Over a short period, this movement has got support of many pediatricians, psychiatrists, psychologists and academicians from many parts of India. Its basic aim is to support and promote parenting in such dimensions of physical, mental-emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing, which contributes to loving, joyful and skillful childhood, and leads to peaceful society and world at large, through multiple modes of communication, advocacy and multi-stakeholders. This is to be achieved by good parenting, not only by biological parents but also by elders, immediately related people, the teachers, the community and the society as a whole who influence the children (or childhood) in any form. This surely drives a point that pediatricians have the key role to play in bringing world peace!

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