

# Maintaining mental health of adolescents and children during COVID -19

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## ABSTRACT

COVID 19 has been called upon to health emergency unprecedented in the present scenario. People who are affected or quarantined can develop acute fear of death, feeling of isolation, anxiety, despise, and mood swings. These may also affect the individual's, rational, relationships, self-concept, and self-esteem. Students should take adequate caution for keeping their physical health and mental health. This article suggests the need and means of maintaining the psychological health of the children and adolescents during COVID -19 through several interventions during these public health emergencies.

**Keywords.** Mental Health, Social Distancing, Children, Adolescents

## INTRODUCTION

The 2019 novel coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has become an international public health emergency. Epidemics and contamination outbreaks of diseases have been followed by drastic psycho-social impacts that badly affect the mental wellbeing of the children and adolescents. High levels of anxiety, stress, mood swings, extreme frustrations, anxiety, panic, anger, and depression have already been observed in the general population, especially in children and adolescents (Dar, Iqbal, & Mushtaq, 2017). People who are quarantined can develop acute fear of

death, feeling of loneliness, anxiety, desire, and mood swings. It may also affect the individual's, rational, relationships, self-concept, and self-esteem (Dong & Bouey, 2020).

An emergency brings a lot of uncertainty and sudden changes in the current scenario as well. Psychological interventions are inevitable in this crisis period to maintain public health emergencies (Zandifar & Badrfam, 2020). Maintenance of sound mental state for children and adolescents and appropriation of this 'gifted time' for quality and productivity of one's life which in turn brings new colours and horizons. Nevertheless, what is imperative is that controlling the virus necessitates appropriate and inclusive management and attention to mental health care.

It is appreciable that Central and State machinery has taken unprecedented steps to bring COVID -19 pandemic under control. Social distancing, staying at home, and quarantining has been taken as a precaution to control the spreading of the disease. Remaining at home or quarantine for longer periods creates more numbness, stress, anxiety, depression, etc., deteriorate the mental health of the children and adolescents. Unexpected closing of educational institutions, postponing exams, missing of friends and classmates, restrictions to come out of the house due to social distancing, exam anxieties, parental compulsions, and shift to home-based e-learning modes, badly affect their mental well-being. Psycho-social pressure, which may trigger feelings of loneliness and helplessness, or a series of emotional states, such as stress, irritability, physical, and mental fatigue, and despair may appear in them. Adolescents with already existing mental health difficulties and people who are vulnerable experience high distress in present situations. Such cases of high distress can be referred to appropriate referral sources/helplines for specific inputs and timely help. Support them to understand that this is a temporary situation and motivate with positive thoughts such as 'it will pass', which helps to get better and also help them to identify their strengths and resources and to use them appropriately

Children and adolescents are generally healthy and possess rather good immunity power, admitting the exemptions. Maintenance of mental health is very crucial because almost all mental health-related issues sprout in the childhood days and if there are not well treated in time, it may lead to the physical, mental and social havoc of the person in future.

Leading a disciplined life is essential for maintaining proper mental health. One should keep a schedule and follow the basic activities of daily living in a reasonable framework. Light exercises, walking, jogging, doing yoga and pranayama, etc. will set the tones for the day that follows. Expediting a long time in social media, watching shows and films, playing games takes

away adequate sleeping hours resulting in laziness, irritability, moodiness, forgetfulness, depression, and lack of appetite (Brooks, Dunn, Amlôt, Rubin, & Greenberg, 2018).

Another problem is regarding food and its availability. In the Indian context, especially those state which are backward in education and literacy, mid-day meals are the only source for nutritious food for lion's share of the school children from the lower socio-economic strata. Educators, administrators, and government officials must minimize the disorders that school closures will have not only on academic development but also the food safety of those children without failing to address other services. A sound mind will reside only in a sound body.

School plays a vital role in building up the mental health of children and adolescents. School, the second family, is the cradle of moral values. Sense of belongingness, commitment, affection, personal and social responsibilities, democratic values, abiding by rules and regulations, etc. are cultivated in schools. Thanks to School Counsellors, teachermentors, the special programme for mending behavioral or emotional problems, and school-based mental health services. They also give referrals for more advanced treatment and mental care to professionals, psychologists, and psychiatrists.

During this challenging time of COVID -19 pandemic, students are not only forced to takes adequate caution for saving their physical health but they are also experiencing serious demands to save their mental health. Tele-mental counselling or online counselling services are recommended for students who might need it. Through this method, the counsellors can provide information on any mental health concerns. They can guide with self-help methods that can strengthen the minds of the students and nurture positivity and well-being. Those who give tele-counselling should maintain the ethics of counselling.

One should maintain quality cognition for the maintenance of sound mental health. Thought follows feeling; if thought is positive naturally positive feeling emerges. Positive thoughts influence our actions and reactions (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Hence, know your thought, shift your thought, and correct your thought. Make our thoughts optimistic. Always keep in mind "this too shall pass". Positive self-talk improves the psychological health of a person. Give up negative thoughts and enrich your mind with positive affirmations like- 'I can, I will, I am enriched'. Avoidance of negative thinking can be treated with cognitive behaviour therapy. Self-motivation is another technique to be psychologically healthy. Self-boosting talks, implementing token economy, incentives, etc. will boost up health psychological

levels (Hull, 2005). Creative visualization enables us to make a positive outlook on the future. Examining the wonders of nature generate creative and optimistic views on the future life.

Children are affected directly and indirectly by COVID -19 pandemic. Educational institutions are closed and families are largely restricted to their homes. Uncertainty regarding reopening, exams, keeping aloof from friends and school/colleges, and playground cause many disruptions in their character. **Children from well to do families have more space, and means for enjoyment at their home in comparison to those who are deprived of these facilities.** Society and the civil authorities have the responsibility to cater to the needs of the least in society who are more adversely affected.

Unemployment and deprived socio-economic situations of the family lead to family stress and anxiety may lead to depression. Parental mental status, directly and indirectly, affects the mental status of their children. Psycho therapies and treatment for parents would be transformative for many families and thereby escalate the mental health of their children.

WHO (World Health Organization) has given certain suggestions and directives to maintain the mental health and psychological well-being of the children and adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Help children to find positive ways to express their negative feelings like fear, anxiety, boredom, and sadness. Parents should encourage them to creative activities like colouring, painting, gardening, vegetable carving, clay modeling, and other work experience activities. Children feel comfortable if they can express and communicate their feelings in a safe and supportive environment.

‘East or west home is the best’, the dictum impregnate with the meaning of being at home is well described. Children being with parents and family will maintain sound mental health. Everybody at home most certainly needs to chip in. Feel that you are an integral part of the family and you have the responsibility to contribute some responsible behaviour. There are situations of separation of child/children from their parents. In such a situation, appropriate alternative care is to be provided and that a social worker or equivalent will regularly follow up on the child. Ensure that during periods of separation, consistent communication with parents and caretakers are retained, such as scheduled telephone or video calls or other age-appropriate communication.

Household works can be assigned to the children and parents can help them to fulfill it. e.g., cooking, cleaning, gardening, embroidery works, etc. Parents can encourage their children to have some indoor plays and join with them keeping recommended social distance.

Find time to hear the elderly people and their life experiences, help them in their needs, and console each other.

**Parents and significant others** should discuss the present situation of the COVID -19 with the children to concertize them and cope up with the situation. Children are very keen in observing adult's behaviour and emotional responses in adversary situations. It is advisable to make use of lockdown days for creative purposes. Reading classics, e-journal, and books, taking notes will improve intellectual dimensions. There is excessive information in social medial, but have to select, chew, and then only swallow it. TikTok, online games, and interactive Apps increase the vulnerability to share plenty of information that might not be necessary and warranted. Excessive usage of screens time can result in symptoms like dysfunction of the daily schedule, lack of routine, anxiety, depression, dishonesty, isolation, mood swings, fear, boredom, agitation, and procrastination. It is time to prepare for the competitive and entrance exams. Reading research works, peer reviews, etc. enable will sharpen our intellect to prepare quality works (**Brooks, Dunn, Amlôt, Rubin, & Greenberg, 2018**). Many virtual contents, classes, certified courses have commenced to keep students afloat and get on with your tasks on time.

Children can practice maintaining their mental health by taking some initiatives from their part. They can gather General information on available necessary facilities (food, medicines, medical help, police, and helplines) that can help reduce anxiety. One should balance anxiety-inducing news with uplifting news which talks about how many people get cured and the availability of treatment facilities, and what is the experience of people who were quarantined and then got cured. Maintain regular and healthy routines can help in maintaining both physical and mental health e.g. eating, sleeping, hobbies, social interactions, exercise, etc. with adequate breaks. Use anxiety reduction techniques – brief relaxation methods such as deep breathing, mindfulness meditation, brief muscular relaxation methods can help in reducing anxiety symptoms.

## CONCLUSION

COVID-19 will have major repercussions for children and adolescents 'mental health and well-being. Maintenance of good mental health gives new meaning to one's life. Leading a stress-free life amidst COVID-19 is possible in the present day scenario. The battle against the pandemic will be drawn out, and normalcy in life will have to wait until a vaccine or a treatment

line is found. Everyone should realize the need, significance, and maintenance of mental health and mental health practices for the all-round development of individuals during these lockdown days. One can maintain a sound mind and sound body by giving equal attention to cognitive, physiological, psychological, and spiritual aspects. Always keep an optimistic view that 'this too shall pass'.

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