PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

The Trauma of Online teaching

By Stuti *(A parent of a six-year-old, Mumbai)*

It still feels like yesterday when our kid had only recently started going to physical school classes, which was a big changeover from the earlier playschool sessions. The kid was just about beginning to realize that school was not just all fun, friends, music/dance, and play and was about to condition to this new understanding of what a school was when COVID struck in March 2020.

It was tough for adults to adjust to this new situation of being confined to their homes. It was equally difficult for kids to understand this situation at such tender age. The situation just kept growing from bad to worse, and with no sight of respite. ONLINE Classes for kids was introduced within a few weeks.

TRAUMA for the child: I could have never imagined my childhood staying indoors, but unfortunately, I see my child living secluded from the classroom experiences and outdoor activities. It is heartbreaking to say no to a kid who wants to go out and explore more with their friends. This indeed was a privileged part (as now we can tell) of our whole experiential learning as a child.

Online classes for a 5-year-old kid, who has not had enough time to understand the school, are nothing less than traumatic than for the parents. The attention span of the young five-year-olds, especially the naughtier ones, is extremely low. The only part of a physical school that my kid could, until then (of what she had experienced of the physical pre-primary school), really appreciate and look forward to was the fun, games and interaction with other kids. Now, that has become a thing of the past in the current digital platform scenario. No matter how much we tried to convince them that it was still the same as before and they could still see and interact with their friends, it simply wasn't and possibly will never be. Most kids, especially the hyperactive ones, who love all the attention, are simply bored and eventually repelled by the idea of this online replacement. Loneliness, boredom and lack of interest in what was being conducted (and I must say with great efforts from the teachers) have become the compelling issue. The same kid who used to jump out of bed excited to rush to school in the pre-pandemic era was now not interested in online classes.

TRAUMA for the parent: At some point in time, all of us have been kids and have attended schools/colleges during our days, and believe it or not, the saying "what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas" actually held for the majority of us. But this is not the case anymore. As a parent, I am exposed to more than necessary information about the kid. As a responsible parent (by societal standards), I am supposed to take action upon that available information for the betterment of the child and her future. And there precisely lies the crux of the problem!

The child has indeed been trying her best to adapt to such an environment of learning. However, post repeated usage of old age famous/infamous "SAAM DAAM DAND BHED" techniques, requests and lures (literally offering her candies sit/get through a session), reprimands and constant comparisons with other kids, it has been a continual struggle for me. Since the kid still imagines the sessions to be non-serious, it has become mandatory for the "accompanying" parent to attend and make notes, if necessary, of the entire session to sit with the kid again and revise and re-revise the session later in the day. So basically, it's not the classes themselves, but it's what ultimately you are teaching your child post the session that matters. The accompanying parent(s) are the agents of the schoolteacher who are now facilitating the studies, and their presence has become compulsory.

Online classes can never be as effective as offline classes. There are a lot of shortcomings like lack of

focus for long periods, not being able to interact with their classmates as much as in regular classes, lack of physical breaks and physical activity, no respite from the screen, and disruption of social communication.

Another extensive trauma for such "responsible" parents is to learn to let go of a child who makes innocent mistakes in understanding a concept or answering a query during the session, which is easier said than done in most cases. The brunt of such mistakes is thus borne not only by the kid but also by the parent who has taken this task upon oneself. Also, the urge to prompt a correct answer OR scold for a wrong one OR simply stare in rage with utter disbelief over a "repeated mistake" by the innocent kid during the online sessions in front of the entire class and class teacher is immense, since the parent (agent now) mistakenly has started to believe that the mistake pointed out directly is co-owned by the parent as well.

In many ways, the realization that these reactions are uncalled for and the regret of such responses is a significant trauma that cannot be washed off easily by any parent.

While I am not a big fan of online studies, I am still not saying that online classes should not be held because something is better than nothing. That something is still not enough for us parents to take so much pain for, as ultimately, it's solely the task of the parents to do everything for such small kids as they are still incapable of doing it all alone. Learning also needs to have joy associated with it. The lack of space to engage with others, and have healthy banter and discussions in a classroom, does take away the joy of the experience of learning on an online platform. It would indeed be a significant relief for every parent to not know of "everything that a child goes through" during the learning stages at school and finally end this co-educating the child along with the distraught teachers through such online sessions.

A teacher itself best handles the job of a teacher, and that's how it must be but through proper physical schooling sessions.