

Children and Stress – A Psychiatrist’s Opinion

-In Conversation with Dr. Priyanka Yadav

Dr Priyanka Yadav is a consultant psychiatrist and therapist. She was earlier working at Delhi’s AIIMS but now she has her own practice in Noida. She also gives consultations at Fortis Hospital. She is a trained psychiatrist and has 19 years of medical experience and expertise in CBT, MBT, ACT, and trauma therapy. She believes in treating her clients holistically through medication and/or therapy.

Q1. How often do children experience exam stress? What is the approximate number of complaints regarding this kind of stress, and are the parents willing to seek counseling for the same?

Stress is a regular occurrence during exams and I often conduct awareness workshops prior to the exams to inform parents about the typical range of stress levels etc. Parents frequently assume their child has grown lazy and does not want to study when they are ill informed. They may not know that children who experience excessive stress prior to exams may actually be suffering from anxiety or depression which can hinder their ability to perform to their best capacity. Thankfully, things have become better over time, and awareness has increased regarding these issues and they are no longer a taboo. Exam stress is a typical occurrence and fortunately many good schools are working in tandem with doctors to help students control their stress levels by hosting in-house workshops for them. This is something that was not so common at the time we were growing up.

Q2. What steps should parents take to ensure that their children are supported during preparation time to prevent exam related stress and trauma? Is stress such a bad thing after all?

When it comes to supporting kids during



examinations I advise that the first and most important thing to do is to learn to balance things out. Parents must assist their children in realizing that stress will always be a part of life and that they must establish a routine that is almost stress-proof in order to enjoy a healthy and balanced existence from the start of the academic year itself. Additionally, working with the child will help a parent comprehend their interest and passion. I suggest parents work on it before the exams and not after they begin.

In my experience, most of the time I end up working with the parents rather than the children because parents extend a lot of their mindset and thinking to their children. Further, parents should encourage children to form healthy social circles. It may be peers, uncles, aunts, teachers and so on. Having a good circle is extremely important in today’s society. I believe good stress helps one perform, but in a majority of the cases, children stop attending dance classes or art

classes or they tend to stop playing outdoors. A parent's mindset of what an exam should be like, how should a child behave etc. affects the daily activity of the child causing bad stress leading to anxiety and depression.

For the other part of the question, stress is anything that places demands on one's body and mind. Let's take an example of a marriage, which is a joyful occasion but may also be stressful. There are two types of stress actually - good and bad. In essence, stress is a demand for personal development, so one might not grow if there is no stress. Thus, a small bit of stress is beneficial for both adults and children.

As far as bad stress goes, I will say that stress is only harmful when it lasts for an extended length of time and exceeds our ability to handle it. Taking children as an example, let's say they lack the emotional maturity to handle it and hence it can lead to depression and anxiety. It is vital to address the children's mental and emotional health from the beginning itself and not get conscious about it just preceding school examinations.

Q3. How should children approach the educational system given that they are enrolled in it? How should they prepare for exams? What should they do in the event of stress?

I suggest children should eat well and carry out their daily activities as usual like playing, attending co-curricular activity classes and meeting their friends which might lead to good stress, helping them perform accordingly. Additionally, I also advise them to have a thorough stress-proof routine which they should follow during the exams. They can discuss it more with the elders around them, including supportive teachers, if possible, as speaking about it always helps.

