

The Need for Child Psychology and Children's Counselling

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Abstract

A healthy person is a happy person. Happy people make up a progressive society. This leads to people being fit to face any new challenges that they may come across in the future. The confidence and maturity of a healthy society pave the way to a stress-free atmosphere for all to live in. But what does one mean by a 'healthy person'? To be in good health means to be healthy, both in body and mind. If the body is unhealthy some symptoms can be noticed. These can be studied and treated by a medical professional. Unfortunately, the symptoms of a disturbed mind are not very overt. Special attention for noticing the troubled behaviours, specific psychological tests need to be conducted to diagnose the problem area, and therapy sessions may be needed along with medicines to handle some severe mental illnesses. If adults need help, they can be vocal about their problems. But this is not the case where children are concerned. Children cannot understand the reasons for their difficulties or their unsuccessful attempts at performing various activities. Hence there is a need to observe them in multiple settings, study their behaviour, check on their developmental milestones and assess their academic growth. Whatever the problem, if checked and handled professionally in the early stages then adjustment for that child is comparatively easier and growth, both physical and mental, can be almost at par with normal children. Hence, seeking professional help and guidance is necessary. Early intervention can make life so much easier for the child, his family and friends.

Keywords: Mental health, child psychology, early intervention, professional help

Introduction

Psychology is a science that studies the behaviour of an organism. This science tries to link the workings of the mind and actions. Why one behaves in a particular manner in a specific situation, is what psychology helps us understand. One can also say that Psychology is a Social Science which tries to understand the connection between the working of the mind and its results on the actions or the behaviours of the individual, in different social situations. In other words, if there are any disruptive or problematic behaviours, Psychology will help find the cause behind them and help manage them too.

Earlier, parents and teachers used to complain about children being too naughty, being very quiet, or being unable to do their schoolwork properly. There were other complaints also, that their children were unable to follow instructions, were unable to make friends, or they were still bedwetting. The list can go on! Such problems may have a simple explanation like maybe the child was lazy or maybe he/she liked to get attention or it was a simple case of delayed maturation. But this may not be the case all the time. Sometimes such simple problems may have deep-rooted causes and may need special care to address them. This is when the need for professionals arises. The problem then, is approaching these professionals for help. Any form of consultation with a psychologist or counsellor is not seen as a very welcoming solution. These words are taboo and people form the general opinion that the child is 'crazy' or 'mad' Even today, there is a stigma when parents visit a psychologist or a therapist. Society needs to develop a healthy respect for their children with their shortcomings and deal with them in the best possible manner. This can be done by using the services of people who are specialized in their respective fields related to child psychology.

Objectives

1. To study the relevance of Psychology for children
2. To understand the necessity for professional psychological help for children today
3. To create awareness of the need for early intervention for troubled children
4. Steps to be taken to have a positive approach towards psychological help

Review of Literature

Any and every research has its roots in the findings of some other research which is done earlier on the same topic or a topic related to it. A lot of studies have been conducted on the topic of psychological help necessary for children today. Some of the relevant ones are mentioned here.

A study conducted in 2019 by Rocio Garcia-Carrion, Beatriz Villarejo-Carballido and others stated that presently there is a growing awareness about the severity of the problems related to mental health. This is a universal problem. Their study aimed to provide solid evidence of the positive effects on children's mental health and

interventions conducted for them. After the data was collected from various sources, they concluded that psychological interventions lead to supportive interactions between the children, the teachers and the parents. It also resulted in a decrease in negative behaviours like depression and anxiety.

Another study in July 2023, by Jennifer Hudson, Savannah Minihan and others focused their attention on intervention programmes meant specially for children between the age group of 4 and 9 years. The study dealt with general mental health concerns, internalizing symptoms, externalizing symptoms, anxiety and other negative mechanisms. The data was collected from various electronic databases. Their results stated that the different forms of treatments and interventions when applied to the children supported them with their social, emotional and behavioral actions. It also stated that mental health difficulties in children needed behavioural-based parental intervention. It concluded that forms of intervention like CBT (cognitive-behavioural therapy) proved to be of great use.

A study conducted in England in July 2024, dealt with the characteristics of children with psychiatric disorders in 1999, 2004 and 2017. The researchers tried to investigate if levels of difficulties and functional impact faced by children with a psychiatric disorder have changed over time, and if sociodemographic and family correlates have changed. At the end of the study, they concluded that there was a trend in children with disorders experienced more severe difficulties and a greater impact on functioning at school, home and in their daily lives in 2017.

One research done in 2006 by Sue Pattison and Belinda Harris presented a summarized report on research evidence on counselling and young people. Their findings showed evidence therapeutic approaches were effective concerning a range of psychological issues.

Research was conducted by Md Mahbub Hossain and Neetu Purohit in 2019 on ways and methods to be adopted to improve children's and adolescent mental health in India. Amongst other findings, it is noteworthy to mention that the treatment gap in mental health, ranges from 50% to 60% for schizophrenia, 88% for depression, and 97.2% for substance abuse. Methods like problem identification by professionals, policy analysis of the existing ones, recommendations for strategic planning, enactment of the policies and finally implementation of the policies by the Government.

An interesting article was penned by Zara Abrams in the year 2023, as part of the 2023 Trends Report by The American Psychological Association. The article was about children's and teenagers' mental health exploring the reasons for their struggle and finding solutions for it. One alarming fact to be noted here is the high rates of depression and suicide. Their conclusion stated that trends in children's mental health were critical. Solutions need to be found to tackle this, and these may include having more providers to meet the needs of the children, improved training programmes for teachers and other staff members, and creating rules and routines to make children

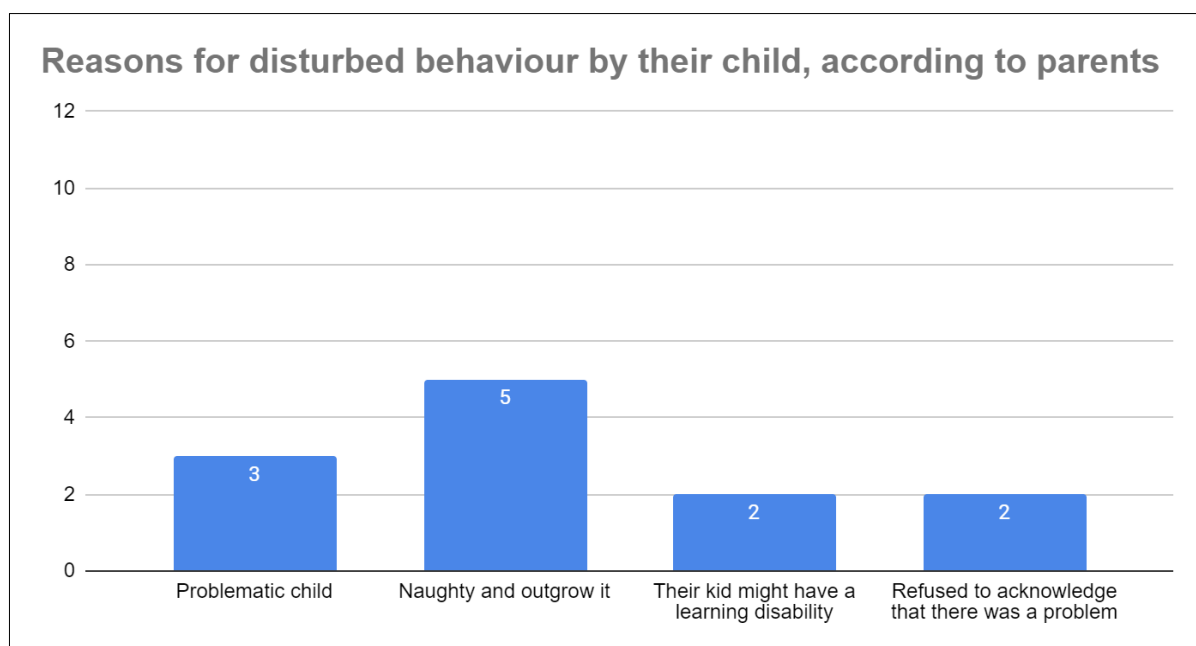
feel safe in schools and classrooms. The most important factor mentioned is the help from the psychologists who can provide direct consultations.

A study related to Learning Disabilities was done by Brett Miller, Sharon Vaughn and Lisa Freund in the year 2015. It aimed to move closer to designing intervention programmes which were test-specific models for young children. The conclusion mentioned that the need is there to have continuous effort programmes for not just identifying but also finding the solutions for children who are struggling with learning disabilities.

Methodology

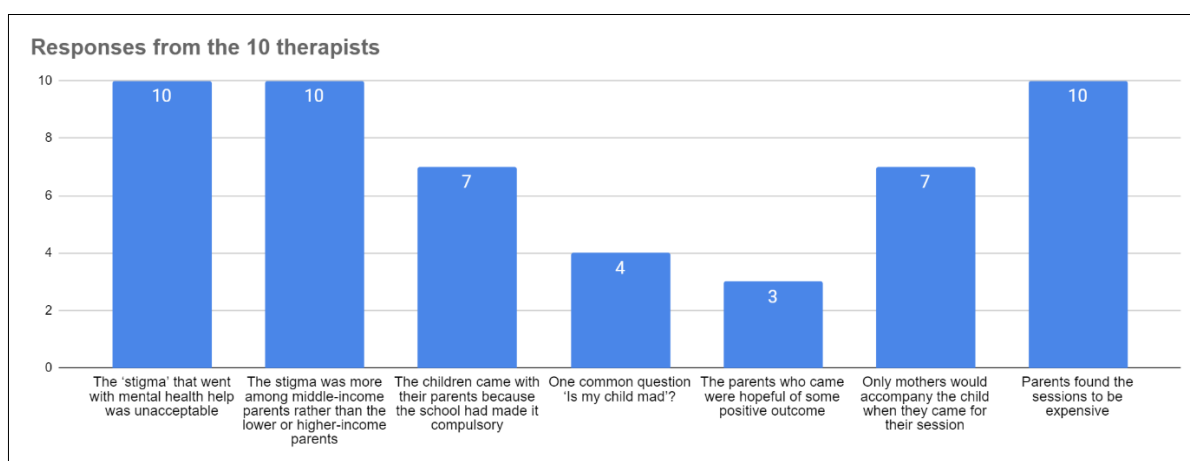
An extensive search in the electronic database was conducted. Various sites were visited to collect the relevant information. Interactions and informal interviews were used as tools to gather data from parents, teachers, school counsellors, child psychologists and occupational therapists. Parents were selected with the help of the school counsellor, who thought that maybe their wards needed some form of intervention. Discussions were related to the problems faced by children, parents and teachers when being cornered in a 'special' situation. Several research papers and articles were studied to gain more knowledge for the same. Special interview sessions were conducted with the teachers, the school counsellors and the occupational therapists. A visit to the centre where tests were conducted to detect the presence of any form of learning disabilities, was made to collect information. All data was collected and then analysed to gain more foresight into the situation.

Results

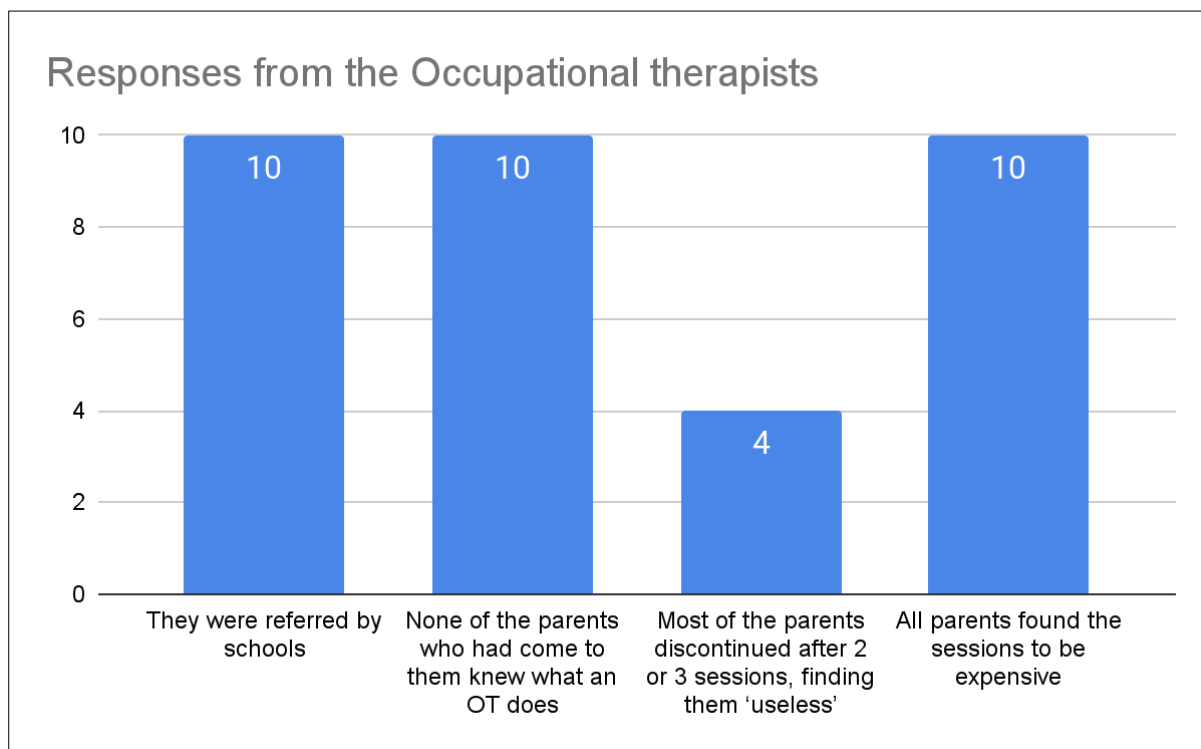


The researcher spoke to 12 parents, 3 of them thought that their children were problematic, 5 of them thought their children to be simply naughty and would improve as they grew, 2 of the parents thought their wards had some form of learning disability and needed help, the rest of the 2 parents refused to talk to the researcher.

Whilst speaking to the school counsellor, it was learnt that there were parents who accepted that their children needed help, but many of them were still not ready to accept that psychological intervention was necessary for their children. There have been cases where even a suggestion made, for a child to go through some form of psychological test to rule out the need for special care, was not accepted. Sometimes, when the developmental tasks were not completed according to the child's age, suggestions for seeing an occupational therapist were refused outright. Some parents were willing to put their children through the process of psychological testing, knowing that it was the best way of dealing with whatever followed. But such parents were few.



10 therapists who were consulted for the semi-formal interview, all said that the stigma that goes along with mental health is more amongst parents from the middle-income group and parents who were not very highly educated. They were able to comment on this, depending on the type of schools which referred the children to them. 7 therapists said that parents got the children to them because the schools had made it compulsory. Out of 10 therapists, 4 of them said that parents who got their children for consultation had one common question, 'Is my child mad'? Only 3 therapists mentioned that the parents who accompanied their child were hopeful that something positive would come out of their sessions together. 7 therapists stated that only the mother accompanied the child for their sessions. All 10 therapists said parents found therapy to be expensive.



10 Occupational therapists were consulted. All 10 said that they were referred by the school counsellors. All 10 said that none of the parents who met them knew exactly what an Occupational Therapist does. 4 of them said that most of the parents discontinued the program after 2 or 3 sessions because they felt that 'it was of no use'. All of them said that parents found the sessions to be expensive.

When one looks at the objectives of this research, the following can be said with some certainty.

1. To study the relevance of Psychology for children:
From all the online research and data collected from professionals, it can be stated that psychology is a must, as it can help identify children with difficulties and also prescribe the special intervention needed for their comfortable adjustment in society.
2. To understand the necessity for professional psychological help for children today:
When teachers of young children notice lax developmental milestones, awkward social behaviours, less than normal attention span, irregularities in daily school work, difficult coping mechanisms and other unnatural conditions that they notice with some of the children, it is time to make use of the various psychological tests and find the underlying reasons for these problematic situations. Multiple tests are available to assess the IQ of a child, to measure the adjustment capacity, to know about the presence and the degree of presence of negative emotions, tests to measure the developmental milestones

according to age, and tests to see if the child had any learning disabilities. There are various tests to handle any form of disability or disorder that a child might have. Early intervention can help cure or cope with whatever problem the child might have, hence allowing him/her to handle the daily chores comfortably. Psychological help will allow one to discover any abnormalities if any, and be a guide for handling the problems. It is the need of the hour.

3. To create awareness of the need for early intervention for troubled children
With the help of psychologists, therapists and other professionals, parents, teachers and other family members can be brought together to explain to them the meaning of mental disorders, social adjustment problems that some children may have, in-depth knowledge of various learning disabilities, reasons for temper tantrums, and other behaviours which are not normal. At the same time, they should be guided to look out for stress points and note down anything that they might find disturbing. Meeting a therapist, just to talk about all that is happening, will give some hint to the therapist if there is anything special to look out for, and can guide the parents and the teachers for the same. Once the problem area has been diagnosed, the next step is to start the therapy or counselling sessions. It is necessary to do this at the beginning because when problems are handled in the beginning stages, they may not be cured outright but they can be made manageable and kept in control. 'Early Intervention' means half the battle is won.

The final hurdle that needs to be crossed is the expenses that go into each of these sessions. This can be done by searching for companies or medical groups to sponsor centres for psychologists and therapists to work at an economic rate. If possible, children's hospitals can also start psychological and remedial centres for patients. Various trusts can be approached and made to see the urgent need for such centres running at nominal costs. Finally, some form of reform from the Government, regarding the perception of psychology would also help. Mandatory screening of all students at important points, like when they are entering the 5th class, where they will be expected to take written exams for the first time. Another way would be to make the parents in rural areas and areas of lower income group aware of the importance of psychology by setting up awareness camps in select localities. Providing free education for the girl child, and free mid-day meals are some of the schemes provided by the government of India. Similarly, some schemes or acts can be passed where children who need psychological help can be provided for the same at special rates, affordable to the parents living there. High costs are one of the reasons why parents stay away from these help centres.

4. Steps to be taken to have a positive approach towards psychological help.
Once the parents, the teachers and society learn about the benefits of counselling and therapy, their outlook will not remain so negative. As guided

by the school and its teachers, the parents will then go for help with an open mind. It becomes the duty of the medical person to explain their method of working, what is to be done, why it needs to be done, and how it will help their child. Parents need to be explained properly that it is a slow process and will take time to show results. Parents should be informed about the number of sessions needed to see considerable improvement.

When a group of parents are asked to meet and talk about the problems they are facing with their children, under the supervision of the counsellor, they will feel a little comfortable knowing there are others also, just like them. They become vocal and share their experiences. Meeting psychologists, then, is not such a taboo. The stigma will be less. Programmes dealing with these problems can be discussed and aired publicly to make everyone realize the need for psychological interventions. Rebate rates in Government-run centres will make the treatment more approachable.

Conclusion

There was a time when the need for psychologists, counsellors and therapists was questioned. It was so often heard that in the olden days, there was no need for such people or such services. It was also mentioned that all the present-day problems with children never existed earlier. People have mentioned that their children have been brought up without all these 'fancy' people and that all have turned out well. To give a fitting reply to such statements, one can say that it is because of these 'fancy' people that there is awareness of various ailments like dyslexia, ADHD, slow learners, and so many others. Along with the awareness, there are solutions too to handle these problems.

Let us consider the earlier scenario. Some children did not pay attention in class, some children were unable to read well or write properly, some refused to write with the right hand, and some looked different as well as behaved differently. There were no valid explanations available for these and people related them to supernatural occurrences. If one looks at each of these 'problems', today there is a scientific reason and a medical solution for them. When a child is unable to read well or write properly, there are tests which can help identify such a child as a 'slow learner' and there are professionals who can help deal with such a problem. When a child refuses to hold a crayon or a pencil with his/her right hand, he/she is forced to use that hand while his left hand is tied behind. Today we know about the left hemisphere and the right hemisphere of the brain and how it impacts the handedness of the child. Similarly, problems like ADHD, mongolism, and learning disabilities have all been identified and ways of dealing with these are also managed. To deal with these problems and handle such cases there are professionals like psychologists, special educators, occupational therapists, and counsellors. These professionals help the children not just in their academic and school life, but also help with their adjustment problems and daily

activities as well. Sometimes the parents as well as other family members also need counselling to deal with a special child. Such help to both the child as well as their family makes it so much easier to deal with the problem. There are times when there may not be a clear solution to the ailment, but there are ways to handle them and make the situation more bearable. If there is a slow learner, there are ways to deal with such a child and teach him/her differently to keep up with the others in the class. When a child is diagnosed with ADHD, one now knows there are various levels of ADHD, and each has its symptoms and its way of dealing with it. Similarly, there are so many ailments which have been identified and each one with its remedy.

When one mentions 'abnormal' cases, it is not just the children who have problems in learning or adjusting with others, it also includes children who are high achievers, those who have a higher IQ than normal children. Such children, when guided properly, can reach new heights in their achievements and be very productive to society. It is because of the psychological tests which had been invented that special cases are brought forth and are guided as per their requirements.

As more and more research is underway, new ailments are discovered. Some are intellectual, some are personality-related, some are physical, and some are muscular and nervous-related. The list is endless. More psychological and psychiatric tests are invented to search for different child-related problems and similarly, new methods are studied to deal with these new problems. As mentioned earlier, solutions and remedies may not always be possible. But in such cases, methods of dealing with these problems and keeping them in check are studied. This helps the children to be more comfortable in different environments, whether in school or at home, with family members or with friends on a playground. This also helps the other people around that child to be more accepting and understanding, since they are aware of the special condition of the child. This is the case with children with certain behavioural problems. Psychology has also helped us identify serious cases of children who might turn violent when they grow up. Such cases need to be dealt with so that they do not harm society later. Sometimes legal action needs to be resorted to, to take care of such violent members of society to protect the others in society. In this way, the present and future of people are taken care of!

Some of the problems relating to children have been discussed above. There are so many more on the list. Each problem has its remedy, and the treatment is handled by the respective specialist. A school psychologist is someone who will identify children who have emotional issues or academic issues. They also help deal with children who suffer from autism or any form of learning disabilities. A school counsellor will handle the school students, as one unit. They provide career planning advice as well as help children who have difficulties with their social skills. They may also help to organize mediation programmes. A cognitive psychologist scientifically studies the different mental processes. It is the study of a child's mind concerning topics like memory, perception, language, problem-solving skills and more. A clinical psychologist can

help treat children or adults suffering psychological problems like anxiety, grief, depression, and other psychological and psychiatric problems. Development Psychology studies how groups and societies develop mentally, intellectually, socially, and emotionally over a long period. Educational Psychologists help to develop techniques and learning methods for schools, colleges, and educational institutions. Social Psychologists study how behaviours and actions affect others and mainly work in organizations, institutes, and companies. Adolescent Psychology is a study which handles pre-teens and teenagers by using methods like psychotherapy and counselling. A therapist is a person who helps to improve behaviour, make daily life easier and relaxed and manage stressful situations. A neuropsychologist deals with brain injuries and neurological illnesses. A Psychiatrist is a medical doctor who helps treat several mental disorders. In this way, several other specialized psychologists are trained in fields related to the problems of children and adults. As the problem differs so does the approach to it.

Why take help!

Getting professional help for any psychological problems is a necessity. Just as one needs to go to a doctor for a cold, cough, or fever, it is necessary to consult a psychologist for any psychological problem. But unfortunately, people are wary of approaching a psychologist. There is a social stigma to be treated by a psychologist. The general outlook is that when being treated by a psychologist the child is 'mad'. The same is the case for when an adult takes the help of a psychologist. This mindset needs to change!

Once there was a time when people were not aware of all the different issues that children were facing. Whatever little knowledge there was, was incorrect and incomplete. Today with research and advanced technology a lot of these issues can be solved or at least managed. This can be done only when society understands the reasons behind these problems and accepts how to deal with them. It can be only through awareness that the common man is made aware of these facts and gets help for the children whenever necessary, without feeling shameful or disgraced. Many of the problems or illnesses, when diagnosed at an early stage are easy to manage and cope with. If detected early, some of these can be cured as well. Timely intervention is necessary not just to help the child but to help the family members also. Even in the most severe of cases, some sort of professional assistance will help the child and his/her family members to make life easy and bearable.

Discussing some hypothetical problems that can be managed with professional help. A child is unable to follow instructions in the classroom and is not able to keep up with the other students. Another child refuses to take swimming lessons and runs away whenever brought near the pool. Another child cannot hold the crayon in his

right hand and is not able to colour. One more child cannot copy the matter from the blackboard onto the notebook. One more child is good in all other aspects except that he cannot do his math properly. One can name so many day-to-day problems which one might neglect. One may think that these problems will go away as the child matures. But this is not the way of handling these 'problems.' These are psychology-related issues which, when dealt with sooner, can be resolved quickly. The child who is unable to concentrate in the classroom may be a slow learner and he/she can be helped by a therapist to handle the academic problems. An Occupational Therapist can also help to chalk out a program to make learning easy. The child who refuses to swim may be suffering from aquaphobia. This can be helped by a psychologist practising Cognitive Behavioural therapy. The child who is not comfortable holding the crayon in the right hand may be a left-handed individual with his centre that controls the handedness in the right hemisphere of the brain, and there is nothing abnormal about it. The child who is unable to copy from the blackboard may have some visual problem, or some problem related to eye-hand coordination. This too can be helped by a specialist and the child would be more comfortable while doing this task. The child who has problems with numbers may be suffering from Dyscalculia. There is a special way of teaching math for such cases and special compensations are given to such children for their academic term, especially during examinations. As seen in all the cases, the problems can be managed, and the child can have an almost normal life. But for this, schools, teachers, and parents must be aware of the services available, and everyone should refrain from making judgments about the mental capacity of the child.

Help is just around the corner

The National Crime Report of 2020 states that 11,396 children committed suicide and the reason was 'parental pressure'. To have expectations from the children, without taking into consideration their setbacks, if any, is unfair to them. Parents are the first mentors while teachers are the secondary mentors. If they do not have the understanding to handle children, then they are going to feel helpless and frustrated. They then take drastic steps which is unacceptable. Awareness is the keyword. Educating parents and teachers about some of the common problems that children may suffer from at various ages would also help to bring about awareness. Workshops can be held to discuss the same. A professional counsellor and a psychologist must be made compulsory in all schools and early education centres. Six monthly evaluations of children should be made mandatory for parents and if any abnormal behaviour is detected, further investigations should be done. This can be the beginning of a long process of understanding and acceptance by parents and other members of society. As more and more people come to know of the problems that children might have, it will

bring about more open-mindedness and a positive approach to the solutions available. One of the ways is to distribute pamphlets with milestones mentioned for the children at different ages. Parents can use this as a guideline to check for any abnormalities. Not just teachers in schools but even those working in balwadis and anganwadis should be trained to check the progress of all the children, physically and intellectually as well as socially. Parents will be more accepting of professional help when they know that they are not the only ones with problems but other parents also have their set of problems. Therapy sessions for such parents would make it more comforting for them to open up about the problems that their children have.

Awareness, training of ECE trainers, discussions, timely evaluations, and therapy sessions are all tools for society to accept the problems of the children and make psychological assistance more approachable for those who need it. Another option would be to start inclusive classes in schools which will help students to accept and befriend other students who have any form of disorders or abnormalities. This may be a little difficult, but with patience and time, it could become one of the solutions for the acceptance of special children. This in turn will motivate the parents to consult the respective specialists and seek their help.

Let us start now to bring about the change that is so necessary. Remember It Is Easier To Build Strong Children Than To Repair Broken Men! (Frederick Douglass)

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