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CONTRIBUTION OF CAREGIVERS TOWARDS HEALTHY COPING PATTERNS IN CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a small representation of various types of case studies handled by the counselor in her professional life over the years. The objective of the paper is to elaborate the crucial role played by both parents and the school in enabling developing of a healthy personality in children . the review of literature done further goes ahead in supporting the author's point . She also attempts to emphasise the importance in providing assistance through hand holding by the different adults in the child's life namely the teachers and the parents seeking the help of mental health professional at appropriate junctures.

The author also goes further to provide recommendations to enable such a situation for all children.

The case studies are varied in nature explaining behavior problems, fears due to negative experiences and special needs and how the same was handled by professionals.

KEYWORDS: *counseling, personality, needs of children, care givers, coping strategies.*

INTRODUCTION

Parenting is deemed to be instinctive. Although with changing environment and family dynamics so much is needed to be incorporated in our nurturing patterns for the well being of the child. The role of child welfare advocates such as a school counselor, special educator and other allied professionals is of paramount importance in day-to-day issues that we may face. The paper deals with how professionals can form the missing link between parents and teachers to be able to successfully include the child in his peers and society.

The inter-relation of parent, child and school is one of the strongest foundations of one's development. School forms the second home for the children. It not only has the responsibility to educate but also impart all the necessary qualities and skills to be positive and empathetic, finally contributing to the society. A bond towards school is established and further intensified when children feel comfortable taking risks in expressing their ideas, their solutions to problems, and their creative endeavors. Children need to risk making mistakes. Commitment towards school activities may be generated and sustained when children feel free to participate in the learning process at their pace rather than mastering only what the curriculum demands as per its requirement.

Parents always aspire high for their children. Many a time, this aspiration unfortunately blindfolds them, thus preventing them to see reality. The reality that their child may require some special need as a result of some lack; The reality that their child may require a different learning system to suit his/ her special need; The reality that their child is not getting his/ her due. Non acceptance of reality sadly affects the future of the child in more than one way. Not only is he/ she denied what he / she deserves in terms of facilities / privileges/ different learning environment but he/ she is also put in to unnecessary difficulty; assessed beyond his / her capabilities resulting in him / her developing low self esteem followed by loads of behavioural issues in addition to already existing academic issues.

Teachers make an effort to reach out to the children in every possible way they have been trained. At the same time, the pressure to produce successful results often compel them to focus more on the successful students and thus neglect these students who are in real need of specific attention. Many a time teachers are unaware of the special needs of their students due to lack of awareness about the various problems of children and absence of counseling cell/ special education department in the school. Many behavioural problems of children stem from inherent unidentified academic difficulties.

The intent of both teachers and parents are not questionable but the method of approaching the problem to solve the same turns out to be ineffective or in some cases detrimental to the mental health or coping patterns of the child.

With the rise in incidence of various disabilities with rising population and stressful lifestyles we come across every day, incidents make our soul shiver. The different case studies handled by the researchers in the due course of their professional careers have been brought together to put forth the fact - role of parents and teachers in helping children develop healthy coping patterns.

To support the given case studies, presented below are the studies which forms a sound base to propagate the facts shown by the case studies.

Adolescents experience two types of stressors- academic and interpersonal and they use 5 methods of coping strategies which are direct emotion management, avoidance/distraction, active cognitive coping, problem sharing, and direct problem solving (Julia Kathleen Hoke,2004). The same are fostered by family communication/ parenting/ teaching styles. While some families were more successful than others in facilitating adolescents' coping, all families, according to the study conducted, created a space that encouraged their specific vision of adaptive adolescent coping. In some families, this vision did entail significant parent involvement and support; whereas, in other families, this vision emphasized



independence, and parents function as a “safety net”. Positive emotions during problem solving strategy play an important role in coping style. It has been demonstrated that use of adaptive coping strategies is positively associated with an increased sense of one’s own capabilities and positive emotional experiences (Michelle Andrews, Mary Ainley, and Erica Frydenberg 2004). Here, it was found that parents’ emotional styles, contributed to the prediction of adolescents’ coping styles (Daniel G. Lagacé-Séguin and Angela Gionet, 2009). The group with the authoritarian parenting style showed higher scores on depersonalization and anxiety. The groups with the authoritative and permissive style of both parents showed the highest score on active problem coping (Uwe Wolfradta., Susanne Hempelb, Jeremy N.V. Miles, 2002). While all discussion is focused on effect of parenting, their emotions and coping strategies having an effect on the adolescents, schools too play a major role in developing their coping strategy with regard to stress. They have a critical role in promoting student wellbeing and mental health. Those students who have a better command of social and emotional skills, including coping skills, achieve better academic success (Linda Huxley, Elizabeth Freeman and Erica Frydenberg, 2004). Studies conducted have proven that implementing low cost, non intrusive programs, in school settings that address the emotional health of all young people does provide better results with regard to adolescents coping strategies. (E.G. Cunningham, C.M. Brandon and E. Frydenberg, 2002).

In this paper attempt is being made to highlight the importance of the role of parents and teachers in helping children and adolescents to cope with their pressures. The different case studies that has been elaborated speak of both categories of children, those with special needs as well as those without. Most of the case studies describe the receptivity in parents and the supportive attitude of the school the case studies have been so chosen in order to dwell on the positive aspects of care givers, be it parents or school. They are also meant to highlight how children with different needs can be helped in the appropriate manner.

M was a four year old boy studying in a nursery school.

HISTORY: The child had a scrap with his classmate, resulting in the classmates’ father slapping him hard in public. The child was terrified and was extremely scared to come out of his house.

PRESENTING COMPLAINTS: Was unwilling to go to school because of fear of the boy’s father. Fear of even moving out of the house.

SESSION WITH COUNSELOR: The parents approached a counselor to help the child deal with the trauma/ shock. The counselor used art and play therapy to help the child identify the fear and deal with it. As the child was very bright, she was able to even use a session of cognitive analysis of the situation.

RESULT: The child was able to go back to school and even meet the other child without any inhibition.

Receptive and alert parents helped their child in the right manner by seeking the right kind of professional help at the right time.

Z was a boy, seven years old, studying in class II.



PRESENTING COMPLAINTS: restlessness in school and at home, incomplete work, impatience while writing, avoiding writing, aggressiveness in school.

MEDICAL HISTORY: had a bout of seizures as an infant resulting in very mild malfunction of right hand. As a result, he found very fine tasks such as tying shoe laces difficult.

PSYCHO EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION: ADHD negative.

SESSION WITH COUNSELOR: during a session with counselor, the mother identified that her parenting style could be the cause for the behavior problems in her son. She realized that her style of parenting was rigid and autocratic. The mother commenced her sessions with the counselor, during which the basis of her parenting style was traced to her early childhood experiences and she worked on her belief patterns and thought patterns which contributed to the present adopted parenting style. This helped her to change her parenting style which in turn brought about a change in the child and the feedback received during the next PTA was positive.

This is a classic example of how the behavior problems exhibited by children need not necessarily be due to a disorder. It also confirms the fact that the parenting style is a crucial factor that lays the foundation for the personality of any adult. It is therefore very essential that parents attend counseling sessions and work on their parenting style and thus help their own children in developing healthy coping patterns when the behavior problems in the child are not the result of any inherent disorder. Early diagnosis of the same will enable the child to grow into a healthy adolescent capable of coping with the demands of the environment.

X was child in class VIII.

PRESENTING COMPLAINTS: Extreme restlessness, incomplete work in school, poor focusing, argumentative at home, no interest in academics, constant complaints from school

EARLY HISTORY: problems in school and academics have always existed. Once the counselor conducted the non formal assessment on the child, she referred him for psycho education assessment.

PSYCHO EDUCATION ASSESSMENT: ADHD and borderline intelligence

INTERVENTIONS IMPLEMENTED

- Pharmacotherapy was commenced.
- Once the mother understood the implication of the assessment, she underwent some individual sessions with the counselor to learn to cope with the situation and the stress related to it.
- She also took his talent in sports seriously and helped him pursue the same with better coaching facilities etc.



- The school became sensitive to the issue and teachers were educated about the problem so that the child is not “punished” anymore for his late submissions and being distracted in class.
- He was given more time to complete his tests and exams.
- When he came to class IX, he was given all facilities of that of a special needs child on receiving permission from the CBSE.

RESULT OF THE INTERVENTION: The child became happier, his display of anger and irritation reduced; his self concept became positive; his confidence in his capabilities was strengthened. His performance in tennis improved greatly.

PRESENT SITUATION: as a result of alternate subjects and extra time, he was able to score a first class in class X. he continued in the CBSE choosing commerce stream and presently giving his XIIth. But his parents are mentally prepared that he may not be able to clear the boards as they are way above his capacity. This acceptance helps them to deal with the child in a softer manner.

A supportive school plays an important role in helping an adolescent cope with his pressures. When teachers and parents work together as a team in both understanding the need of the child and also catering to the same, it helps in shaping a positive adolescent. These children grow to be confident, achieving adults in their own capacity. Realistic parents help children to bring out their best in spite of their special needs.

A fourteen year old girl studying in class IX was found to be indulging in inappropriate activities without a motive. For eg: lying that her mother was mentally ill and could not attend PTM even though her marks were not bad, forging and changing marks, forging mother’s signature on mark sheet, and the last straw was when she brought an imposter as her father.

SESSION WITH COUNSELOR: the parents and the girl were counseled and based on the feedback from parents and keeping in mind the various incidents relating to her behavior, she was recommended to meet the psychiatrist and was diagnosed with Borderline personality Disorder.

REPORT BY THE CLINICIAN: pharmaco therapy was commenced along with regular counseling sessions with the school counselor. In a year’s time, she was asymptomatic and medicines stopped.

She successfully cleared her class Xth. examinations and proceeded to do her XI th.

The various case studies presented are just a sample of the various cases handled by the professional in her professional life. They all conclusively indicate that a cooperative effort from both the school and the home is essential for enabling children and adolescents to develop and sustain healthy coping patterns to deal with the stressors in their life, caused due to a special need or otherwise.

In order to help children and adolescents develop positive healthy coping patterns, the following are some of our suggestions:

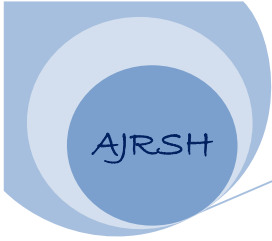


- Necessity of appointing qualified counselors and special educators in schools—counselors who have the capability to identify various disorders and differentiate between a behavioural problem and a disorder.
- It is essential that teachers respect and accept the diagnosis of the counselor.
- it is important that teachers and parents understand the difference between advising and counseling and the therapeutic basis of counseling.
- Regular counseling for parents to help them accept their children as they are.
- More awareness in the society for the para professionals such as counselors, special educators and psychologists.
- It is very essential to work on the stigma attached in society with visiting a counselor.
- It is important that a team – special educators, counselors and teachers work together to help a child. .
- complementing each micro accomplishments of a child is crucial in healing along with positive reinforcement.
- It is important that teachers upgrade their own knowledge and incorporate different teaching styles to achieve better learning outcomes.
- Being critical in class is easy but being therapeutic shows the actual testing skill of a teacher.
- Teachers need to understand that every child has specific learning needs and she needs to cater to them to achieve her goal of teaching.
- consistency and perseverance in following the intervention plan laid down is very crucial for success.

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