

Nurturing Believers

An Urgent Appeal to all Parents

As parents, we all wish to see our children succeed. However, many parents put extreme pressure on their children to do well in school, with success being measured primarily in terms of examination results. Even children who are already getting good grades are pressurized to do even better, indeed to be “the best.” Many are pressurized to excel because academic excellence is seen as a prerequisite to pursue certain prestigious professions such as medicine, and many parents are bent upon making their children doctors, regardless of whether their children have any interest in the field or not. Their obsession with the academic performance of their children, over and above everything else (and at great cost, as we will see later) is usually a result of the following perceptions:




There are, however, in reality several factors that contribute to our obsession with our children’s academic and professional success:


Personal Reasons	Social/Cultural Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We try to live out our own unfulfilled dreams through our children - We derive a sense of accomplishment through our children’s achievements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Certain professions are considered prestigious, while others are looked down upon - We are obsessed with what others think of us, specially in this age of social media - Women measure their worth according to what others think of their children

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We desire to be looked up to and praised by others - If we ourselves were toppers, we expect our children to be the same - We want our children to earn well so they can take care of us in our old age 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A man's success, indeed his worth, is measured by how much he earns - Happiness, intellectual satisfaction, and internal peace are considered frivolous goals - Children not recognized as individuals with their own unique abilities, personalities, interests, views, feelings and dreams - Authoritative parenting style is considered most effective
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It would not be incorrect to say that our obsession with our children's academic and professional success has more to do with the satisfaction of our own ego than with the actual well-being of our children. It is because of this that when our expectations about their academic performance are not met, we react in the following ways:

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- **Emotional outbursts** (including statements like, *"I have sacrificed so much for you," "We spend so much to send you to a good school," "You have disappointed me," "I had hoped that you would make me proud"*)
 - **Fits of anger**, which include yelling and hitting
 - **Insults**, aimed primarily at their lack of intelligence, often including comparisons with others
 - **Threats and punishments**

Because some children may work harder and produce better results in the short-run out of the guilt, fear, and humiliation resulting from these reactions, parents think their approach is effective. However, in reality, the real impact of their attitude and behavior includes the following **devastating consequences** for their children:

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- Low self-esteem and diminished self-worth
 - Lack of self-confidence
 - Feeling unloved
 - Feeling guilty for disappointing parents, "wasting" their money
 - Hiding failures and weaknesses from parents
 - Frustration and demotivation
 - Dissatisfaction because personal interests not explored
 - Anxiety and depression
 - Feeling suicidal
 - Resentment towards parents
 - Indifference (after some time they stop caring about how their parents feel)
 - Disobedience
 - Rebelliousness (which may lead to experimentation with drugs etc.)

With final exams around the corner, we are writing this post as an exception to our usual series, as an urgent appeal to parents to think about the following:



Is money the goal in itself, or the means to the goal of a successful life? Is happiness not essential to a successful life? Is it okay to inflict deep and long-lasting, even permanent, psychological and emotional damage on our children, to ruin their personalities, and to ruin our relationship with them, in order to "ensure" that they can earn well? Does this not compromise the goal of making money, which is to have a good life?

Will our children be unable to do well in life if we don't hound them? Is it not possible that our pressure can, in fact, produce the opposite result? That children can either crack under the pressure (e.g. during exam time) or give up trying (when they see that no matter how hard they try they are unable to please us), or stop working just to spite us? That if we keep reprimanding them for failures, they will stop participating altogether out of fear of failure?

Is it possible to force our children into becoming "the best"? They can surely try *their* best, but being the "best" requires that everyone around them be of lesser intelligence or ability than them, and they can in no way ensure that. So, is it fair to make that their goal?

In the year 2019, should we still be forcing our children to become doctors if their interest and aptitude lies elsewhere? Why is it so difficult to understand that our children have their own personalities, unique interests, their own strengths and weaknesses, their own dreams, that may be different from ours, and they don't want to be doctors? In this day and age there are so many options of fields and careers; must we restrict our children and subject them to an unhappy life just because we are or wanted to be doctors?

Is the worth of a child restricted to his grades, and later to how much he earns? Do the kindness of his heart, his creativity, his honesty and uprightness, his sense of humor, his artistic or athletic abilities not matter? Can't we learn to appreciate our children for who they are rather than simply for their accomplishments, especially academic ones?

Does this mean we should never tell our children to work hard, or harder?



No, we should, but for these reasons:

- We want them to aim high
- We want them to explore their full potential
- We do not want them to have regrets in life
- We want them to be productively occupied
- We want them to develop self-esteem, self-confidence and a sense of achievement

And to achieve these objectives we must:

- Set realistic goals, keeping in mind our child's capabilities
- Set goals that they will also be motivated to achieve, given their own interests
- Give incentives rather than punishment
- Be proud of them for all their accomplishments, not just academic ones
- Be proud of them for the good character traits they exhibit
- Highlight their abilities and talents, and help them develop those
- Help them explore their interests
- Appreciate their participation and effort itself, regardless of the results
- Accept that they will not always succeed, and teach yourself and them that failure is a part of life
- Never make them feel like they are lacking in intelligence or ability
- Never compare them with others



We appeal to all parents:

Have mercy on your children. Be their safe space, where they can be themselves without being judged, taunted and put down. Be the shoulder that they can cry on when they are disappointed or hurt. Be the ones to lift their spirits when they are feeling low. There will be enough people in the world who judge them, taunt them, mock them, humiliate them, give them grief; the least we can do as parents is to not be among them.