

New Age Parenting through the Lens of a Practitioner

by

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Parenting or child rearing is the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood. Parenting refers to the aspects of raising a child aside from the biological relationship

What is new age parenting?

A review in parenting literature reveals that there is no clear-cut definition of new age parenting, though it is referred to as parenting that is different from the traditional kind of parenting which was more authoritarian than democratic. New age parenting, thus seems to be more permissive and liberal. This however comes with a whole set of challenges and problems with itself. The problems were there even in the traditional method of parenting but these days the number of conflicts arising between parents is sharply on the rise.

In one's experience, the kind of problems which parents have been facing with children in earlier times, maybe 20 years ago and now, all begin from 12-13 years onwards. This is the onset of puberty and continues till 18-19 years of age. The set of problems and issues are very similar, however it is the response of handling the problems which has lead to there being challenges in child rearing and rising conflicts amongst the child parent ratio. Perhaps, boundaries are not being set, exposure to a very liberal lifestyle and inconsistency between parental relations. Another major contributor to this conflict is sky rocketing expectations from children added to the fact that both parents working.

Case studies enumerated below that involve children from the age group of 11-16 years will illustrate the dynamics and challenges faced by new-age parents that contribute to problems of children.

Case 1 is of an 11 year old girl with truancy, lying, stealing and rude behaviour belonging to a very middle class background .

Case 2 pertains to a 12 year old boy with defiant behaviour, so much so that the child frequently used to lock himself up in his room, once tried to jump off a roof and the every time he was checked, would change the pass word of his mothers phone or lap top. Belonging to a very affluent family.

Case 3 is of a 16 year old girl who has failed class 10, has twice tried to commit suicide, once by jumping from the 2nd floor, fractured her pelvic bone and then tried to cut her wrists, and is now at a de addiction center, belonging to a middle class family.

Case 4 is of a 17 year old girl, alcoholic who sneaks out of the house every night by 11 pm and returns home at 4 am, is a chain smoker . This girl is in love with an 18 year old boy who is affected by throat cancer due to excessive smoking. The mother every time cries as she is at a loss at handling her. Belonging to an upper middle class family.

Case 5 of a 7 year old with aggressive and defiant behaviour. Belonging to an affluent family.

These are only some of the acute cases which are being highlighted. However, the focus is on case no 4 involving a 17 year old girl that illustrates the outcomes of new-age parenting and the effect it has on this young girl. The case will focus on different aspects such as presenting complaints, parental, adolescent and siblings' interview, parental reaction and counselling thereafter and the present status of the child.

Presenting Complaints

The child was brought for counselling by the mother, with the following complaints.

The child had failing grades in school. She was a student of class 12.

The girl had a history of being an alcoholic since class 9th along with being a smoker.

The girl was reported to be totally defiant and had run away from home at age 15, in class 10.

Presently the mother was at her wits ends as the girl had started getting her friends at home and indulging in smoking different kinds of drugs through bong which is a different version of hookah. The child was also caught sneaking out at night.

Parental Interview

Only the mother had come for the session. It was a nuclear family set up. There were three children, this child was the eldest.

The family relations were all enmeshed. The father was a property dealer; educational qualification was that of class 12. The mother was a graduate. Financially the family was very well off with the children having the latest gadgets.

Upon understanding about family relations and parenting, it was revealed that right from a very young age the children had an exposure to the father drinking every day. There were parties at their house every weekend. The children were exposed to the couples drinking and smoking. The mother one day caught her young daughter, that time in class 8th trying to have a drink on the sly. The child was not reprimanded in a very strict fashion but it was told to her by the father that when she was 16, she could have a drink with the parents, thus the child was stopped at that time.

The mother however at her own level tried to be strict with the child and stopped her going out of the house. The girl naturally revolted and complained to the father. She was then given permission and the mother was ticked off by the father.

None of the three children had a routine which was regularly followed as there was no one to supervise them at home. The mother it seemed was trying to find her own footing in the house. The girl eventually started smoking when she started meeting her school friends who were already smoking. The access to cigarettes was easy as there were a plenty at home.

On her 16th birthday a grand party was organized by the parents where the first exposure to drinking and hookah was given by the parents in the form of flavored substance which as per the mother did not have any sedation or “nasha”.

She had once run away in 10th and had gone to her grand parents house. The reason was not revealed but the mother said that because both the husband and wife were being over strict with the child , in retaliation the child had run away. She was brought back by the parents with the reassurance that everything would be done as per her wishes.

Now the girl was in class 12th. She was addicted to drinking every day, smoking, failing in most of the subjects and refusing to listen to the parents.

The other two children were being neglected as per the mother as the entire energy was being spent in handling the girl. As a result the son was academically doing poorly and the youngest child was a very misbehaved child who always wanted things to be done in her way.

Adolescent Interview

The girl came across as very beautiful, well-mannered and soft spoken . With much difficulty rapport was established but the revelations of the parents were shocking.

The child said that she did not have a very happy childhood because the parents never had time for her. As per the girl, the father loved his drinks and under the influence of alcohol used to beat the mother on a regular basis. When sober the parents were cordial to each other but were never in agreement on the rules and regulations at home. There was no wrong or right as per the child as it was a very liberal atmosphere at home. The father was very very indulgent. When ever he travelled abroad which was very often, he would get expensive shoes, watches and other things for everyone at home but everyone preferred that the father stay away from home because it was always very chaotic.

With the father at home, there were many social gatherings both at home and away from home where both the parents went. The mother was always tense and took out her aggression on the children by hitting and shouting at them for any indiscipline.

Being fed up with this lifestyle and chaos, the girl ran away in class 10. The trigger at that point was the mother having been badly beaten by the father, she herself had left home and gone away to her friend's house leaving the children at home. This 15 year old was feeling lost and scared and in her words "sick" to the core".

The child was visibly very disturbed as she felt that she would die if not given help immediately. The reason was that she was in love with a boy who was suffering from throat cancer due to excessive smoking and she feared for herself. Surprisingly that boy had not revealed his own condition to his parents as they were very influential and busy people who had no time so he had

checked himself into a government hospital in Pune where the diagnosis was done and wanted to move to Delhi for treatment.

He had convinced this girl to take up a room on rent and move in with her to take care of him.

The girl was crying bitterly all the time while talking. In her own words she said “maam I could have been raped by anyone at night whenever I went to a disc or at conti parties”, “ my parents never stopped me and it is only this person who has saved me and guided me to stop doing wrong things”.

Interview with the siblings and father

After meeting the other children it was finally important to meet the father who till that time had not come for any session.

The meeting with the father was a very volatile meeting as he was yelling about how ineffective his wife as a mother was and how the children had misused the freedom given to the children.

It was a very unpleasant sight as the parents were accusing each other on their inadequacies in raising the children.

It was also revealed that because the mother was so unsure of her marriage she had started working free lance to earn money as a result of which the children were left unattended for a lot of time.

Parental reaction

Since the situation was very sensitive with the girl ready to walk out of the house again, the management of the case was very delicate.

The mother thought that she had done no harm or wrong in raising her children. The father was very clear that he had put the children in the best school and provided them with every luxury and latest things and the children had been ungrateful and had taken undue advantage of the situation.

Management

Right from the beginning the family dynamics was explored, after various sessions with the mother and father many other aspects came to light.

The parents having the best intention for the children at heart provided them with everything other than a normal house hold.

The parents were nasty to each other as a result the mother never really had raised many issues of her children with the husband.

Once middle childhood set in, many changes were bound to happen with the child which was taken as a defiant behaviour.

There were no clear cut boundaries laid out for the children. Once the girl had attained puberty she wanted more freedom to move around with her friends, initially it started with movies, then late night movies and then parties and going to discothèques. Permission was easily granted as the parents were of the same culture hence for them as well all this was a routine thing.

The role models for the children unfortunately were parents who themselves had a very liberal attitude.

The problems started when there was no cushion for the child to fall back upon in the sense of a parent.

Things went totally out of hand when the girl started breaking all boundaries and it was then that the parents realized the extent of the harm which had been done.

The girl was referred to a psychiatrist for management of depression, alcohol and smoking.

Parental counselling

For any family to function as a normal family the first requirement is that both the parents have to be having a mutual respect, love and understanding with each other. They have to be mentally prepared to have and raise children.

Parents need to understand that children need stability and security in their life. They need to see parents as parents and not as friends who themselves are still growing up.

What ever the children are exposed to and they see is the right behavior for them. Thus it's important for parents to model the correct behavior. In this case, the parents being very young parents lead a very carefree and liberal lifestyle, which for them was alright, however this was also seen as the acceptable behaviour with the children. Thus the problem started when this girl started to remodel this behaviour. It was when the parents initially initiated the child into consumption of alcohol and other things but unfortunately the child did not know where to stop and before late it became a problem with the parents.

Because no clear cut boundaries had ever been laid for the girl, boundary setting now was a problem as she was always used to having her own way and suddenly now she was expected to behave modestly, stay at home, not drink or smoke and cutoff from her friend circle.

The child was provided with everything which any body desires other than a normal household. Unfortunately the family environment was absolutely un conducive for the children.

The nurturance which children require in the form of understanding, discipline, controlled freedom and correct role models is very important.

Extensive sessions of both the parents were held, both at individual levels and together. It took many sessions to first make the couple understand the difference between being permissive and being democratic.

In trying to be the modern parent somewhere the parents forgot to be parents and ended up being friends who were then trying desperately to be a parent.

The friend which the girl who she was trying to save had a similar family background, thus like attracted like and both ended up making up for the lost love which they never had from the parents.

Present Status

2 years have passed since this episode. An eclectic mix of psychotherapy, art therapy and play therapy along with medication was done with the girl. Slowly she started to regain her lost confidence and as the parents too understood the importance of being respectfully together, the child started becoming normal.

Conclusion

In all the above-mentioned cases, the pattern was similar wherein parents were very liberal themselves and have no respect for each other. The family dynamics were all shattered as the rush for a luxurious life has led most of the families to have both parents working, no family support in the form of grand parents or an elder at home and finally, there is literally no check on the children. Exposure to so many gadgets, peer pressure and lack of good role models has also led to a decline in childrens' understanding of right from wrong. Hence, new-age parenting with all its liberal and egalitarian standing vis-à-vis parent-child relationship has fuelled the emergence of a host of

problems in children particularly, that of addiction, suicidal tendencies, depression, etc.

Adolescence is a period of experimentation, characterised by a search for one's identity and hence, anger and confusion are experienced by children and youngsters alike and the expression of the same needs to be handled and reacted to sensitively by parents.

Though there is no set mantra for parenting as each parent always wants the best for his/ her child and then in his/ her capacity does everything possible, ranging from the provision of physical luxuries to emotional support.

Finally, what one needs to understand as parents is that irrespective of the type of parenting - traditional or new age, the fact remains that a child always looks to a parent to parent him and not a friend. Moreover, children always appreciate discipline and boundaries inspite of their defiance.

Thus all the cases have a similar flavor, unfortunately it takes just a small amount for the damage to be done but a life time to rectify the harm done.

The scars remain deep and permanent difficult to remove so parents need to be parents.