

ParentsWorld

NURTURING 21st CENTURY CHILDREN

January 15, 2026 Rs.70

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NURTURING 21st CENTURY CHILDREN

Volume XI No.1

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Website: www.educationworld.in

One year subscription: Rs.1200

Cheques/drafts in favour of DT
Media & Entertainment Pvt. Ltd

Printed and published by Dilip
Thakore on behalf of DT Media &
Entertainment Pvt. Ltd.

Printed at W.Q. Judge Press, 97
Residency Road, Bangalore 560025.

Published at C3-36, 3rd Floor,
Devatha Plaza, 131 Residency Road
Bangalore 560 025.

Editor: Dilip Thakore

RNI No. KARENG/2016/68455



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o the lengthening list of thousand unnatural shocks that citizens in reportedly fast-track India — “the world’s fastest growing major economy” — experience, add one more: the rising incidence of teenage – and even pre-teen narcotic substances abuse.

According to the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), because of its proximity to opium production regions like Afghanistan and Southeast Asia’s Golden Triangle, large population, and emerging synthetic drugs market industry, India has emerged as a major hub for the production and consumption of illicit drugs and substances. A 2019 national survey of the Union ministry of social justice and empowerment reports that 71 million citizens countrywide are dabbling with dangerous banned substances.

Given India’s demographic profile — 47 percent of the population is under 25 years — the most at-risk group are children and youth. A year-end survey conducted by the National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre of the top-ranked All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi, indicates that the average age of children inducted into the usage of narcotic substances — tobacco, alcohol, opioids, cannabis and inhalants — is 12.9 years. Moreover, the survey which covered 6,000 government and private school children in 10 Indian cities including Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Hyderabad, and Lucknow, reports that 31 percent of child substance abusers experience high levels of psychological distress.

In our cover story this month, we beam a spotlight on this often side-stepped issue to highlight ways and means parents can safeguard and prevent children from descending into the abyss of harmful substances addiction. The consensus of opinion among child psychologists and parenting experts is that prevention is better than cure. And the onus is primarily on parents. They have to risk unpopularity by monitoring children’s online behaviour and social interactions without being judgmental and preachy.

There’s much else in this first issue of 2026. Check out our Early Childhood essay in which educator Arshleen Kaur shares a guide for parents to prepare youngest children for their first steps into formal education. Also the Special Essay in which Prof. Pascal Vrtick explains why over-connected parents eager to fulfill children’s every need, aren’t helping their progeny’s all-round growth and development. Also, with the exams season approaching, I recommend our Health & Nutrition story, providing a curated shortlist of foods that boost children’s memory and concentration.

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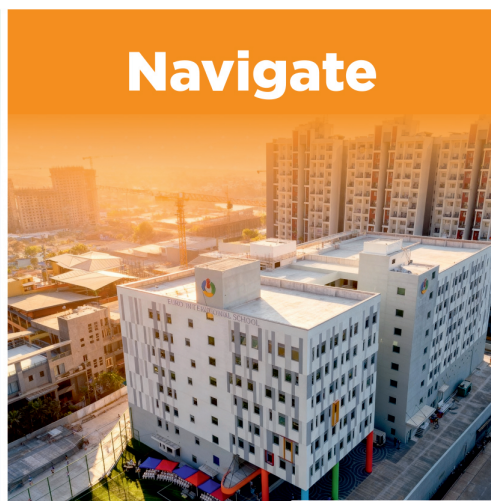
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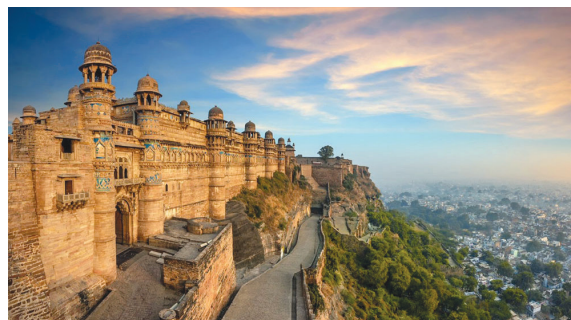
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MAILBOX



Thought-provoking story

Your cover story 'Nurturing children's self-confidence' (PW December) was thought-provoking. It shared some valuable tips on how parents can nurture children's self-confidence through structured activities, encouragement, and supportive guidance. This story is a must-read for parents.

I also liked the expert insights on contemporary child development — encouraging a growth mindset, praising effort, and creating environments wherein children feel safe to make mistakes and try again.

Alisha Khan
Bengaluru

Natural response

Your special essay 'Understanding perinatal relational distress' (PW December) provides a nuanced exploration of the emotional, psychological and relational difficulties many new mothers experience in the weeks before and following childbirth. While this period is often idealised as one of unmitigated joy, the essay rightly acknowledges its inherent complexity.

Prof. Thomas Delawarde thought-

fully relates common emotional struggles within real-life relationship dynamics and the process of post-natal adjustment. By normalising these experiences, the essay raises awareness and reduces stigma, helping parents, especially new mothers to recognise perinatal distress not as a personal shortcoming but as a natural response to a demanding life transition.

Preeti Kataria
Ahmedabad

Reassuring parenting advice

Thank you for your insightful 'Ask the Doctor' column (PW December), in which paediatrician Dr. Saurabh Singh offers reassuring parenting advice on infant teething symptoms and remedies.

His guidance is particularly valuable for first-time parents like us who are unsure of handling this somewhat stressful milestone. His suggestions are all easy-to-follow. Thanks.

Nisha Jha
Ranchi

Joyful learning benefits

Your Early Childhood essay 'Teaching numeracy through play' (PW December) is a refreshing perspective on how young learners can develop foundational numeracy skills through engaging hands-on activities.

Gurugram-based psychologist Priyanka Sethi does a brilliant job of highlighting how playful activities transform what might otherwise be intimidating mathematical concepts into meaningful, joyful learning experiences. I especially liked her emphasis on developing a positive relationship with maths for children from youngest age.

Thanks also for the richly illustrated and information-packed Kidzone

section (PW December). Puzzles, career advice, and animal facts — an interesting mix.

Kanchana S.
Bengaluru

Physical exercise non-negotiable

Your Health & Nutrition essay 'Physical activities for children: Guidelines and benefits' (PW December) was informative and balanced. Unfortunately, today's children are so digitally obsessed that screens have replaced outdoor play, sports and even family interaction. This growing sedentary lifestyle is not only adversely affecting physical fitness but is also contributing to rising anxiety, poor sleep cycles and reduced attention spans among children.

I agree with the author that physical exercise isn't just about being fit — it supports mental health, emotional resilience, cognitive development and overall well-being. It is therefore imperative that parents and schools work together to restore physical activity as a non-negotiable part of children's daily lives.

Garima Kapoor
Gurugram

Compassionate parenting

I am the mother of a teenage girl. Thanks to psychologist Sushma Gopalan ('Ask Your Counsellor', PW, December) for providing useful suggestions to guide teens through romantic emotions — a subject that parents hesitate to discuss openly.

Her emphasis on acknowledging emotional complexity as a natural and critical part of adolescent growth reflects a mature, compassionate approach to parenting.

Girija Sethi
Pune

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NEWS BYTES



One in four Indian adults is obese

Nearly one in four Indian adults is obese, says a study titled 'Building on success to secure India's future health' released on November 25 by the not-for-profit Tony Blair Institute for Global Change. Citing data from the National Family Health Survey 2019-21, the study highlights major regional disparities — 41 percent of women in Delhi are obese compared to 12 percent in Meghalaya and 22.8 percent of children in the 6-16 years age group in Delhi are obese compared to 13.6 percent in Maharashtra.

The report warns that obesity is increasing India's disease burden and exerting pressure on the economy. Obesity costs India \$2.4 billion (Rs.21,566 crore) every year in healthcare spending and reduces the country's economic output by \$28.9 billion (Rs 2 lakh crore), which is 1 percent of GDP. "By combining technology, data and community-driven action, India can not only reduce the growing burden of obesity but also build a stronger, more resilient health system for future generations," says Vivek Agarwal, Country Director at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change.

Microplastics raise bone fracture risk

A study published in *Osteoporosis International* (November) warns that microplastics — tiny plastic particles less than 5 mm long — can harm human bone tissue and raise bone fracture risk. Researchers from the Laboratory for Evaluation of Mineral and Bone Disorders in Nephrology, School of Medical Sciences, State University of Campinas, São Paulo (Brazil), who analysed 62 studies, found that microplastics can impair bone cell viability, speed up cellular aging, spark inflammation, and increase osteoclast activity, which aggravates bone breakdown and osteoporosis.

"A significant body of research suggests that microplastics can reach deep into bone tissue, such as bone marrow, and potentially cause disturbances in its metabolism," says medical scientist Rodrigo Bueno de Oliveira at the State University of Campinas who advises people to reduce exposure to microplastics by filtering drinking water and limiting the use of plastic products, from synthetic clothing to plastic water bottles.

Indian children start substance abuse at 12.9 years

A school survey covering 10 major Indian cities published in the *National Medical Journal of India* (December) indicates that children are resorting to substance use far earlier than previously believed, with the average starting age at 12.9 years.

Led by Dr. Anju Dhawan, chief of the National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi, the study investigated 5,920 class VIII, IX, XI and XII students from government and private schools. Researchers reported that tobacco and alcohol were the most commonly tried substances.

"The age of initiation of substance use was 12.9 years, comparable with findings of other Indian studies and lower than that reported from other regions. This suggests prevention and intervention are needed at age 12 and earlier, as for each delayed year of initiation of substance use, the likelihood of substance use disorder decreases," say the study authors.

Junk food adversely affects brain's memory centre

Junk food consumption disrupts the brain's memory circuits, leading to risk of cognitive dysfunction, says a new study published in *Neuron* (September). Led by Juan Song, professor of pharmacology at the University of North Carolina (UNC) School of Medicine and Taylor Landry, first author, the researchers discovered that a special group of brain cells in the hippocampus, known as CCK interneurons, become overly active after ingestion of a high-fat diet because of impaired ability of the brain to receive glucose (sugar). This overactivity impairs hippocampal functioning, affecting memory formation and recall.

"This study highlights how what we eat can rapidly affect brain health and how early interventions, whether through fasting or medicine, can protect memory and lower the risk of long-term cognitive problems linked to obesity and metabolic disorders," says Song. "In the long run, such strategies help to reduce the growing burden of dementia and Alzheimer's linked to metabolic disorders, offering more holistic care that addresses both body and brain."

DPS Kamptee Road and MIHAN, Nagpur

Resilience: The Most Powerful Gift You Can Give Your Child



school onwards, students engage in problem-solving exercises that teach them an important lesson: every challenge can be handled confidently when approached with thoughtful strategies.

We focus on experiential learning that helps children understand that setbacks are not failures but stepping stones. Through classroom discussions, reflective journaling and guided peer support groups, students learn to express themselves without fear of judgement.

We nurture resilience through leadership opportunities, collaborative projects and value-based learning. Students participate in activities that encourage responsibility, teamwork and self-discipline, helping them believe in their own abilities even when situations feel difficult.

The guidance children receive at home combined with the support they

As parents our deepest instinct is to protect our children from pain, failure and disappointment. But the truth is, life will test them in many ways. In such a world, one skill stands above the rest: resilience.

Resilience does not mean your child won't feel pain, fear or disappointment. It means they learn that these feelings are not the end of their story.

A resilient child does not ask, "Why is this happening to me?" They begin to ask, "What can I learn from this?"

One day our children will step into a world where we cannot protect them from every storm. But if we have taught them resilience, they will not be afraid of the rain.

This shift in thinking is life-changing.

At DPS MIHAN and DPS Kamptee Road, Nagpur, we build resilience in small but impactful ways. We create a safe space for children to explore tough emotions and use art-based mindfulness to help them breathe, reflect and focus on the positive. We promote a culture where seeking support is normal. Whether it's a teacher or a counsellor, our students always have someone they can talk to when emotions feel heavy. From middle

experience at school forms the foundation of their inner strength. When we encourage them to attempt new challenges, learn from mistakes and find solutions independently, we help them build resilience that will serve them throughout their lives.

Resilience is not about avoiding the storm but learning to dance in the rain. At DPS MIHAN and DPS Kamptee Road we don't just prepare children for exams; we prepare them for life. Every challenge our children face is an invitation to grow into who they are meant to become.



COVER
STORY

Parents Beware! *Narcotic substances are addicting ever* **YOUNGER CHILDREN**

A recent AIIMS, Delhi survey indicating that the average age of children inducted into usage of narcotic substances is 12.9 years, has prompted much hand-wringing and lamentation about this issue often dismissed as a Western – specifically American – social problem

KIRAN BALIMANE & CYNTHIA JOHN

A year-end study, conducted by the National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre of the top-ranked All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi, indicating that the average age of children inducted into usage of narcotic substances is 12.9 years, has shaken — or should shake — parents countrywide.

According to the study published in *The National Medical Journal of India* (December) which surveyed 6,000 government and private school children in 10 Indian cities including Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Hyderabad, and Lucknow, 15.1 percent of pre-teen children reported having used a banned narcotic substance at least once with 10.3 percent having done so in the past year, and 7.2 percent in the past month. The most commonly used harmful substances were tobacco, alcohol, opioids, cannabis and inhalants.

Boys reported higher tobacco and cannabis use while girls showed higher inhalant and pharmaceutical opioid use. Especially alarming, 31 percent of child substance abusers indicated high levels of psychological distress. Moreover, 50 percent of the children interviewed said they would deny drug use if asked, indicating actual

prevalence could be higher (see box p.13).

The survey's shocking conclusions have prompted much hand-wringing and lamentation about this issue often dismissed as a Western — specifically American — social problem. "The AIIMS study's report that the initiation age of drug abuse is 12.9 years is very disturbing, as is the revelation that over 30 percent of child substance abusers are suffering psychological distress. One obvious reason is that because the internet and social media have normalised substance abuse, drugs have become easily accessible in India. Moreover, a growing number of Gen Z and Alpha children are suffering from mental and emotional problems which are driving them to find comfort in substance abuse. Early adolescence is a period of intense physical and psychological change, and the adolescent brain is highly vulnerable to experimenting with risky behaviour including substance abuse. Parents must take proactive steps to prevent and protect their children from this new age malaise. Early identification and timely action are critical for preventing children suffering serious physical and emotional damage," warns **Nivedha M.**, a Puducherry-based child psychologist.

While traditional addictive substances such as tobacco,



alcohol, marijuana, and cannabis continue to be widely available and used, a new age narcotic has emerged: vaping. Although banned by the Central and state governments in 2019, vapes aka e-cigarettes are being covertly marketed as a safer alternative to tobacco, and have a significant user base among children. A 2023 survey by the Delhi-based Think Change Forum found that 96 percent of Indian teens aged 14-17 are unaware that vaping is banned countrywide, and 89 percent are oblivious of its harmful effects. Sleek design, nicotine flavoured options, and aggressive marketing strategies with downsides carefully masked have made vaping an attractive option for teens. Yet it is important to bear in mind that early introduction to this addictive substance has dangerous health implications for pre-teens and teens.

COMMON CAUSES

Reena Chopra, a Bhubaneswar-based child psychologist and founder of Saar Holistic Wellness, a firm that propa-



gates mindful parenting, advises parents to be cognizant of common causes of substance abuse. She enumerates the following as common triggers pushing children towards usage of addictive substances:

Peer pressure. “Adolescence is a period marked by strong emotional pressure for social acceptance. Fear of ostracisation can drive teenagers to mimic peer behaviour, including substance abuse. Allure of being part of the ‘in-crowd’ often outweighs the risks associated with vaping, drugs and alcohol.”

Emotional turmoil. “The teenage years are a period of emotional upheavals — academic and social pressures,

in-family conflicts, and identity crises. Denied healthy coping mechanisms, teenagers find comfort in addictive substances. But they offer only temporary respite.”

Curiosity and experimentation thrill. “The adolescent brain is wired for exploration. The novelty of exploring the forbidden and risky is enticing. Unfortunately, this curiosity, when directed towards drugs/alcohol, which begins with experimentation, can eventually lead to dependency.”

COVER
STORY*Marijuana:* USAGE SIGNALS

Marijuana aka weed/*ganja* is a narcotic commonly consumed by adolescents and young people worldwide, India included. If you suspect your child is becoming addicted, look out for these symptoms:

- She is unusually giggly and/or uncoordinated
- Red, bloodshot eyes and/or increased usage of eye medication
- Short-term memory lapses
- Drugs and/or usage paraphernalia — pipes, cigarette rolling papers



- Strange smelling clothes, bedroom
- Strong incense and other deodorizers smell for neutralising substances odour
- Purchase of jewellery/posters glamorising narcotics
- Extraordinary pocket money shortage
- Unusual behaviour including unkempt hair, sloppy demeanour, sudden mood swings, aggressive behaviour with family members, new friends circle
- Disinclination to attend school, loss of interest in sports, hobbies and extra-curricular interests
- Change in eating and sleeping habits, aggressive classroom behaviour and brushes with authorities

Source: www.drugabuse.gov

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

According to Nivedha M, parents need to take note of sudden changes in children's behaviour. She advises parents to watch for common behavioural changes including sudden mood swings, irritability, aggression, anxiety, social withdrawal and physical symptoms such as red or tired eyes, sudden weight loss/gain, and unusual fatigue.



Nivedha M.

"Mood swings and desire for privacy are natural during adolescence. These symptoms are not cause for alarm. Symptoms that require parental attention are a pattern of significant changes such as withdrawing from previously valued activities, furtiveness over signs of weight loss/gain. When parents observe such behaviour changes, they should speak to children empathetically, not harshly or critically," advises Nivedha.

PREVENTIVE STRATEGIES

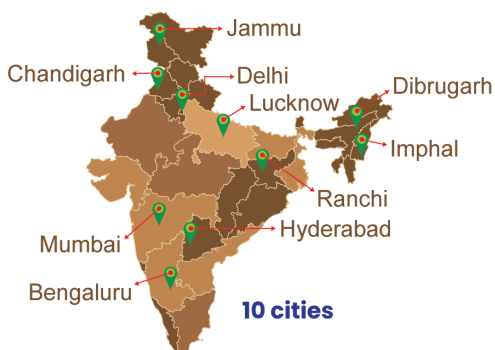
Child psychologists and parenting experts are unanimous that prevention is the most effective response to substance abuse in children and adolescents, because early exposure significantly increases the risk of lifelong dependence, mental health disorders and anti-social behaviour. Unlike adult addiction, childhood substance use is deeply influenced by home environments, peer pressure, school culture and community norms. While India does not

have a separate national anti-substance abuse policy for children, the Union Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment's National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction accords high importance to substance abuse prevention and addiction among adolescents through school-based education, community outreach, early identification and family-focused intervention. While parents should encourage their children's schools and colleges to conduct drug abuse prevention programmes focused on refusal skills, peer pressure, stress management, and informed decision-making, parents themselves have a duty to encourage two-way communications at home, model healthy coping behaviour, remain alert to early warning signs, and create supportive environments in which children feel safe to ask for help without fear or stigma.

Comments **Rajat Soni**, a Delhi-based youth and parenting coach and author of *Un-judge your Teenager* (2020): "Parents play a vital role in preventing children from falling into the deadly trap of harmful drug addiction.



Addiction begins early: Survey



- 5,920 students surveyed across govt, private and rural schools
- 52.4% boys 47.6% girls
- Classes covered - VIII, IX, XI/XII
- Each city contributed 6.8%-11.8% of the total sample

12.9 years
average age
of first drug use

11 years
youngest age
reported for inhalants

15.1% students
have tried
a banned
substance

10.3% used
a narcotic
substance
in past year

7.2% used
in past month



Opioid pills

2.8% - more common
than cannabis (2%) &
inhalants (1.9%)

90% of opioid users used
pharmaceutical
opioids (not heroin)

Class XI-XII | 2x
higher use compared to
class VIII

31% of users show high
psychological distress vs.
25% of non-users

53% would hide cannabis
use; 48% would hide
heroin use

Source: 'Substance use among school-going adolescents in India: Results from a nationwide survey',
National Medical Journal of India 2025

But preventing substance use is rarely about strict rules and/or constant supervision. It is dependent upon the relationship quality between parents and child. Although boundaries are important, parenting based on control and command can lead teenagers to conceal bad and dangerous habits. Teenage children less likely to experiment with addictive substances report one common experience — they can talk honestly with their parents. Not because they fear punishment but because they know they will be heard non-judgmentally and receive full parental support. Attentive parents who invite dialogue make children feel valued rather than judged, prompting children to make thoughtful choices."

Soni recommends parents to have 'four conversations' with their children to support healthy decision-making and choices:

1. Values conversation. Long before children are exposed to addictive substances, they are forming ideas



about who they are and what matters to them. Parents should support this identity formation process by asking open questions such as: "What matters most to you?", "What makes an individual a good friend?" Such conversations enable children to distinguish between right and wrong. Later, when they face peer pressure, they are more likely to recognise situations that don't align with their values.

Moreover, parents should connect home/family values and character strengths to health and safety by explaining why drug abuse interferes with children's goals, well-being, and

future opportunities.

2. Peer pressure conversation. Peer influence is strong from the early teen years. Many adolescents are averse to substance abuse but fear refusal will invite social rejection. Parents need to make conversations on this issue practical rather than theoretical. Take them through realistic scenarios and practice respectful ways

COVER
STORY*De-addiction* **TREATMENT**

There is no common treatment for substance abuse. De-addiction centres and counsellors advise a combination of therapies:

- Professional counselling of patient and parents
- Medication to treat withdrawal symptoms
- Treating related problems such as depression and mood disorders
- Behavioural therapy
- Positive reinforcement activities
- Family therapy
- Residential treatment if necessary

Contact the following helplines if you need immediate support:

- **Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan Helpline:** 14446. A toll-free national helpline offering counselling, information on de-addiction services and referrals to accessible treatment centres.

to decline. Such role play enables teenage children to be prepared for peer pressure rather than be caught off guard. However, it is important to acknowledge that fitting into a social group matters to children. Let them know you understand social pressure and emphasise that true friends respect boundaries. It will ease children's anxiety and strengthen decision-making.

3. Stress and coping conversation. Some teens resort to using addictive substances to cope with stress and emotional trauma. That is why conversations about children's emotional well-being are as important as conversations about harmful substances. Parents should take the lead to ask open questions such as "What has been bothering you lately, what helps you feel better during hard times?" Parents should share their own coping strategies to normalise emotional challenges and emphasise that addictive substances are not an effective solution. Teenage children who receive unconditional parental support are less likely to resort to substance abuse.

4. Accountability conversation. It's important to set expectations, and to frame them appropriately. Instead of relying on threats or fear, set accountability as a shared goal of safety, honesty and growth. Explain what you expect to know: plans to go out with friends and entertainment choices, for instance, and why parents need to know. When children understand that parents need to know children's whereabouts not to restrict freedom but to ensure their safety, well-being, children are likely to cooperate and make responsible choices. Equally impor-



- **Kiran Mental Health Rehabilitation Helpline:** 1800-599-0019. Operates 24/7 and provides psychological support, counselling and referrals, including for substance use and related mental health concerns.
- **CHILDLINE 1098.** For children in distress including those at risk due to substance use, abuse or neglect. This service connects callers to local child protection and support services.



tant is reassuring your child that if she feels unsafe or overwhelmed, she can reach out without fear of shaming. Children are far more likely to ask for help when they believe mistakes will be met with parental empathy and guidance rather than censure and anger.

"Modern day teenagers are exposed to online content that normalises and/or glamorises substance use. Parents should discreetly monitor their children's online usage without being intrusive. Transparency around boundaries and monitoring when framed as protection rather than punishment generates trust and care. With open communication and proactive interventions, parents can safeguard their children against substance abuse," says Soni.

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EARLY
CHILDHOOD

ARSHLEEN KAUR

Parents' guide to **EARLY YEARS EDUCATION**

For many parents, it's an emotional milestone — the beginning of the process of letting go, even if only for a few hours. That inevitable process requires preparation, not just for infants but also for parents



Everyone remembers those first days in preschool -- the tiny backpack, the anxious smile, the courageous wave at the gate, and occasionally, tears. For many parents, it's an emotional milestone — the beginning of the process of letting go, even if only for a few hours. That inevitable process requires preparation, not just for infants but also for parents.

Selecting the appropriate preschool: A step ahead of preparing. Before preparing a child for preschool, it's important to first take a step back and consider which preschool to choose. Remember, a preschool is an extension

of the child's home. Its values, culture, and teaching philosophy should align with what the child experiences at home. When the equation between home and school is aligned, it helps her to feel secure and supported.

While searching for the right preschool for your child, you may be tempted to select the largest or most popular option in your neighbourhood. However, alignment matters more. Ask yourself: does the school's culture of care, support, and learning reflect the values you want your child to grow up with? Is the environment warm, safe, and age-appropriate? How do the teachers interact with

children?

Proximity is equally important. Long commutes are best avoided. Youngest children need time to play, eat, and rest comfortably. Choose a preschool that's nearby so you can make your daily routine less overwhelming. When you're confident that you've made the right choice that trust naturally passes to your child — helping ease the induction into formal education.

The Early Years: A foundation for life. The first six years are a period of profound development for children. During this time, young children are not only learning words and numbers but also how to express themselves, build friendships, and develop resilience. Studies conducted by the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2016) reveal that over 90 percent of children's brain development happens before age five. Every experience, every interaction, and every relationship during these years shapes the child's growing psyche forever.

These are more than just pre-academic years — they are the defining years of their lives. The more secure, confident, and joyful a child feels in her early world, the better prepared she will be for learning in the future. Emotional safety is always the first step toward academic readiness.

Making the unfamiliar familiar. To an infant, a new environment can be overwhelming. The solution is to help your child acclimatise slowly to new experiences that will follow. Take her to the school, the classroom, and the play area before first day. Talk about school in positive terms — “you'll have fun painting and playing with your new friends.” This type of exposure helps children associate school with excitement rather than fear.

The comfort of routine. Children do well when they know what to expect. Consistency in waking up, eating, and sleeping at about the same times every day provides predictable rhythm that offers comfort and stability. Before school starts, begin establishing a routine similar to the school's schedule. That way, by the time they start attending class, it feels natural. Maintain this consistency on weekends too — even after admission. Excessive variation in sleep or meal times can disrupt their biological rhythm and make Mondays more difficult.

Parents also need preparation. Though much of the focus should be on preparing youngest children for preschool, parents also need to prepare themselves emotionally. It's perfectly normal to experience anxiety while stepping through school gates with your little one for the first time. But remember, children quickly absorb the emotions around them. When you display calm and confidence, your child senses that school is a safe place.

Early years educators are trained to handle these first days of separation with tenderness. They understand that every child adjusts differently and know how to build trust through warmth, consistency, and play. Allow them to take the lead.



Home-school partnership. Successful transitions happen when parents, caregivers, and teachers work together as a team. Take time to share small but crucial details about your child — what they like, what worries them, their eating and napping schedules. These insights enable teachers to respond sensitively and ensure continuity between home and school.

Confidence before curriculum. All parents hope their child will enjoy school. And though early literacy and numeracy are important milestones, meaningful learning begins when children are emotionally prepared. A child who feels safe and happy in her environment will naturally begin to explore, listen, and learn freely. Confidence must come before learning. Indeed it fuels learning. A happy child is a curious child, and curiosity is the soil from which all learning grows.

Fostering connections beyond classrooms. Allow space for sharing when your child comes home. Ask gentle, open-ended questions such as, “What brought a smile to your face today?” or “Who did you sit next to?” This type of casual conversation helps children process their experiences and strengthens communication.

Spend time engaging in imaginative play or bonding activities during the weekends — painting together, building with blocks, going for a walk. Quality time together reassures your child that while school is important, home remains her safe and loving anchor.

Ready for school, ready for life. Learning starts with choosing the right school, continues with establishing familiar routines, and grows through daily reassurance and connection. When children feel loved, safe, and understood, they go to school ready not just for academics but for life — curious, resilient, and ready to learn.

(Arshleen Kaur Kalra is the Bengaluru-based Head of Academics, KLAY Preschools and Daycare)

SPECIAL
ESSAY

PASCAL VRTICKA

Synced brains: Rethinking Parent-child **ATTUNEMENT**

Being constantly tuned in to your child's every need isn't always ideal



For healthy child development it's crucial that children form secure attachment bonds with their parents. Decades of research identified one key ingredient for this process: coordination of parents' and children's brains and behaviour during social interactions.

Humans connect with each other by synchronising in many ways. Called bio-behavioural synchrony, this involves imitation of gestures and the alignment of heartbeats and hormone secretion (like cortisol and oxytocin). Even brains can synchronise — with brain activity decreasing and increasing in the same areas at roughly the same time when we spend time with others.

My colleagues and I carried out research which shows that brain-to-brain synchrony between parent and child can be helpful for children's attachment, and tends to rise when a parent and child play, talk or solve prob-

lems together. Recently, however, we started wondering whether more synchrony is always better. Our recent study, published in *Developmental Science*, suggests it can sometimes be a sign of relationship difficulties.

IS CURRENT PARENTING ADVICE UP TO DATE?

A lot of current parenting advice recommends parents to be constantly "in sync" with their children. It tells parents to be physically close and attuned to their children and to anticipate and immediately respond to their every need.

The advice is building upon attachment theory and research, which show that higher parental sensitivity and reflective functioning are beneficial for child development and secure attachment formation.

Yet, despite its good intentions, this advice misses

several important details. For example, research reveals that for about 50-70% of the time, parents and children are not “in sync”. During these times, they may be doing separate activities, such as a child exploring something on their own or a parent working. They engage in a constant “social dance” comprising being attuned to each other, failing to do so and repairing this disconnect.

And it's this flow of connection, disconnection and reconnection that offers children an ideal mixture of parental support and moderate, useful stress that helps growing children's social brains.

Researchers also agree that there can be negative consequences to parents and children constantly being tuned in to each other. For example, it can increase stress on the relationship and raise the risk for insecure child attachment. That is especially true if it is associated with parents overstimulating their child or being too responsive to their child's every need.

For parent-child synchrony, there thus appears to be an “optimal midrange”. Or, in other words, great synchrony may not necessarily be better.

BRAIN-TO-BRAIN SYNCHRONY AND ATTACHMENT

Within a large international team of investigators from across Europe, my colleagues Trinh Nguyen, Melanie Kungl, Stefanie Hoehl, Lars White and I set out to investigate how exactly parent-child bio-behavioural synchrony is linked to attachment.

We invited parent-child pairs — 140 parents and their 5-to-6-year-old kids — to our SoNeAt Lab where they solved tangram puzzles together.

We measured brain activity with functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS) “hyperscanning”, for which parents and children were asked to wear caps linked up with optical sensors. We also recorded videos of their interactions so we could assess how much behavioural synchrony they demonstrated — how attuned and attentive they were to each other. And finally, we assessed parents' and children's type of attachment — known as attachment representations.

We previously discovered increased neural synchrony in mother-child and father-child pairs during different tasks. In mother-child pairs, neural synchrony was linked to taking turns in solving puzzles or conversations. And in father-child pairs, synchrony during puzzling was linked to dads being confident about and enjoying their role as fathers. But does that mean higher parent-child neural synchrony is always a measure of a good relationship?

In our new study, we actually observed that mothers who had an insecure, anxious or avoidant attachment type showed more neural synchrony with their children. Interestingly, mothers' attachment types were unrelated to how synced mothers and children were in terms of their behaviour. We also found increased neural but

decreased behavioural synchrony in father-child pairs (compared to mother-child pairs) independent of attachment.

Our findings suggest that higher neural synchrony may be the result of putting increased cognitive effort into the parent-child interaction. If mothers' attachment representations are insecure, it may be more difficult for mums and kids to coordinate and help each other during activities such as puzzle solving.

A similar explanation may apply to neural synchrony during father-child problem-solving. Dads are more familiar with active, rough-and-tumble play. Engaging in structured and cognitively demanding activities such as solving puzzles may therefore be more challenging and require more neural synchrony for father-child pairs.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

What do our new findings mean? Most importantly, parents should not feel that they must be “in sync” with their kids all the time and at all costs. High parent-child attunement can also reflect interaction difficulties and can often add up to parental burnout, further negatively impacting the parent-child relationship.

It is of course helpful if parents are emotionally available, skilled in reading their children's cues and promptly and sensitively respond to their needs. Especially when children are young. However, it suffices for parents to be “good enough” — to be available when children need them rather than “always on”.

Children also benefit from freedom and independence emotionally, socially and cognitively, especially as they get older.

What really counts is that the parent-child relationship functions well overall. That children can develop trust in their parents and that any mismatches, which naturally occur all the time, are successfully repaired. That's the true essence of attachment theory, which is often missed and misrepresented in parenting advice.

To better navigate the challenging parenting path, parents need access to trustworthy and up to date sources of information. Together with the UK Charity Babygro, we therefore published the free-of-charge Babygro Book for Parents that provides them with evidence-based knowledge on parenting and child development.

It is our hope that our book can empower parents so that they feel reassured and confident in their own parenting choices and can optimally support their children to grow and thrive.

(Pascal Vrticka is Associate Professor / Senior Lecturer in psychology, University of Essex, UK)

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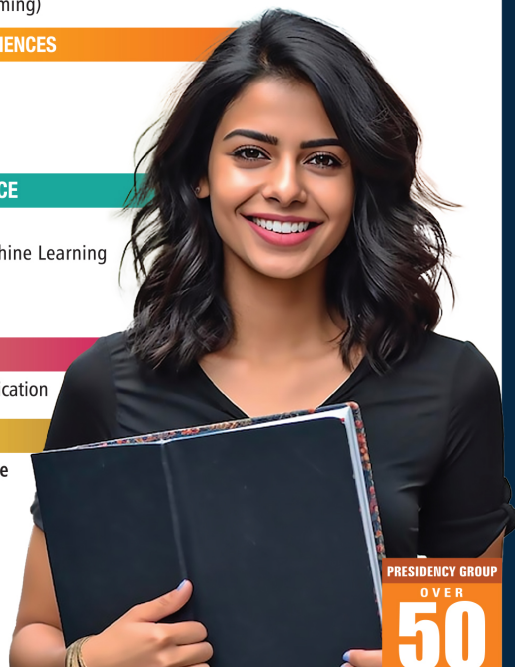
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CAREERS WATCH

Colourful future for **PAINT TECHNOLOGISTS**

With the paint industry growing twice as fast as India's GDP and the automobile and construction industries on a roll, job opportunities for qualified paint technologists are multiplying



With the infrastructure and construction industries belatedly gathering unprecedented momentum, India's booming paints manufacturing and service industry (annual sales: Rs.1 lakh crore) offers great career opportunities, particularly for paint technologists. Set to take off in a big way (India's per capita consumption of paint is less than 5 kg against more than 25-30 kg in developed countries), the paint industry is expected to show at least twice the growth of India's GDP in coming years.

Any surface — metallic or otherwise — needs a

protective coating, referred to as 'paint technology application'. This consists of a combination of processes: chemical treatment followed by a decorative layer (paint). Paint technology entails understanding the chemistry of each ingredient (including resin, polymers, and pigments) constituting paint. The job of paint technologists is to formulate paints for differing needs and requirements. For instance, paints used for aircraft vary from those used for motor cars and in domestic households. Paint technologists formulate appropriately mixed paints and resin (a raw



Paint technologists can choose to work in any of the following departments of paint manufacturing companies: research and development (for which one needs an M.Tech), production, marketing, and as technical assistants/executives who work on clients' sites

material) for the purpose of new product development, product upgradation, and new applications development.

Paint technologists can choose to work in any of the following departments of paint manufacturing companies: research and development (for which one needs an M.Tech), production, marketing, and as technical assistants/executives who work on clients' sites.

BIG EMPLOYERS. With the automobile and construction industries on a roll, job opportunities for qualified technologists have multiplied. They are much required by paint manufacturing companies, the auto industry, furniture manufacturers, and associated raw material and allied industries (e.g. pigment/extender manufacturers, or resin/ polymer, or additive suppliers). With professional paint technologists in short supply, pay packets are getting fatter, varying with size of employer companies. The minimum start-up pay is around Rs.3-7 lakh per annum. The Armed Forces are also big employers of paint technologists.

The best paint technologists are chemical engineering graduates of one of the 17 National Institutes of Technology (NITs) or of the globally renowned:

- Indian Institutes of Technology at Mumbai, Delhi, Guwahati, Kanpur, Kharagpur, and Chennai
- Institute of Technology, Banaras Hindu University
- Harcourt Butler Technical University (HBTU), Kanpur
- Laxminarayan Institute of Technology (LIT), Nagpur:
- Birla Institute of Technology, Mesra, Ranchi
- Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS), Pilani

Other institutes offering B.Tech degrees in paint

technology are Fergusson College, Pune; Institute of Chemical Technology, Mumbai; and University Department of Chemical Technology (UDCT), Mumbai. Moreover, the Garware Institute of Career Education and Development, Mumbai, offers a diploma programme in paint application technology. Most universities offer an M.Sc programme in polymer technology which is also useful.

“The paint industry has witnessed increased activity particularly in the industrial paints segments with the entry of MNCs in the automobiles, consumer durables, and construction industries. Simultaneously public awareness of the corrosion-resistant qualities of paint is increasing, which is a huge boost to this industry. To keep pace with demand, there’s need for many more paint technologists and companies specialising in this field have to raise their standards to utilise new technologies being developed worldwide,” says **Shahaveer Jamshedji**, director of the Mumbai-based Noble Paints, founded by his grandfather in 1934. Noble Paints churns out 200,000 litres a month of industrial and decorative paints and is the first in the country to produce fire-resistant paints.

An alumnus of Canada’s Waterloo University with a bachelor of applied sciences degree, Jamshedji was all set to read for his Master’s and Ph D at the University of Dakota, which boasts perhaps the best paint technology programme worldwide, when he received a call from home to come aboard Noble Paints.

“With the industrial paints industry growing at 10-12 percent, this career option may not be as cool as computers, but it’s challenging as you always need to innovate. There’s a bright future for professionally qualified paint technologists,” says Jamshedji.

ASK THE DOCTOR



DR. RAMSHA SALIMUDDIN

My child is underweight **HELP!**

My eight-year-old son is underweight. I have tried different ways to help him gain weight, but in vain. Please advise.

— Veena Chakravarty, Bengaluru

Healthy weight gain is not about “eating more,” but about eating smart, eating regularly, and eating right. Follow these guidelines:

- Monitor your son’s development milestones using WHO or IAP growth charts, focusing on weight-for-age, height-for-age, and BMI-for-age trends rather than daily weight checks. Record weight and height every three months, observing and recording steady upward trends, not rapid gain. If weight gain is poor despite good food intake, consult a pediatrician to rule out anemia, worm infestation, or chronic illness.
- Plan a balanced food plate. Meals should be nutrient-rich, practical, and culturally familiar — not dependent on expensive “health foods.” A healthy plate for this age group should include carbohydrates (roti, paratha (limited oil), rice, poha, oats); high-quality proteins (dal, paneer, curd, milk, eggs, soy, nuts); healthy fats (ghee, butter (small amounts), groundnut oil, mustard oil) and micronutrients (vegetables (especially green leafy), fruits, jaggery, dates).
- Underweight children often eat in small volumes, so meal frequency is critical. Ideally, children should eat three main meals and two-three planned snacks daily. Avoid long gaps between meals. Ensure breakfast is not skipped, as it sets the metabolic tone for the day.
- Make smart snack choices. Replace calorie-poor packaged snacks with energy-rich, homemade options such as peanut chikki, roasted chana, banana with peanut butter, paneer or cheese sandwich, boiled eggs, curd with fruit and homemade laddoos with nuts and jaggery. These provide calories, proteins and minerals, unlike chips and biscuits.
- Encourage appetite to develop naturally by ensuring he gets adequate sleep (9-10 hours), limiting screen time and encouraging daily outdoor play. Avoid force-feeding.
- Milk is important, but excess milk (more than 500-600 ml/day) can suppress appetite for solid foods. It should



support meals, not replace them.

- Address emotional and academic stress. Poor weight gain is often linked to exam pressure, picky eating, or anxiety. A calm meal environment and positive reinforcement make a significant difference.
- Over-the-counter appetite tonics are not recommended. Supplements such as iron, vitamin D, or multivitamins should be given only after medical assessment and advice.

I am concerned about earwax buildup in my seven-year-old daughter. What should I do to prevent it and when is professional cleaning necessary?

— Minu Daman, Mumbai

Earwax (cerumen) is often misunderstood. It is not dirt, but a natural protective substance that traps dust, prevents infection, and keeps the ear canal healthy. In children, problems arise mainly due to overcleaning, improper habits, or delayed attention. Here are my recommendations:

- Avoid routine ear cleaning at home. The most important preventive step is not inserting anything into the ear. Cotton buds, hairpins, or earbuds push wax deeper and increase the risk of impaction, pain, or infection.
- Clean only the visible outer ear (pinna) using a soft

cloth after bathing. The ear canal cleans itself naturally through jaw movements like chewing and talking.

- Frequent use of earphones prevents natural wax expulsion and causes buildup. Limit prolonged earphone use. Ensure earphones are clean and avoid sharing earplugs.
- Watch for early warning signs such as reduced hearing or frequent “What?” responses, ear fullness or discomfort, itching or occasional ear pain and decline in attention levels at school.
- Don’t use over-the-counter drops routinely. Wax-softening drops should not be used regularly or without advice, especially if there is pain, discharge, or a history of ear infections.

Professional ear examination and cleaning by a pediatrician or ENT specialist is required when the child has

- Hearing difficulty affecting school performance
- Ear pain, ringing, or dizziness
- Wax is completely blocking the ear canal
- Speech delay or learning issues
- History of recurrent ear infections or ear surgery

I live in Mumbai, where the weather is humid. How can I prevent fungal skin infections such as ringworm in my children?

— Joby Thomas, Mumbai

Fungal skin infections such as ringworm (tinea) are very common in children, especially in humid climates. Here are some practical preventive measures:

- **Keep skin clean and dry.** Fungus thrives in moisture. Bathe the child daily and dry skin thoroughly, especially neck folds, groin, underarms, and behind knees. Use a separate towel for each child and wash towels regularly.
- **Choose the right clothing.** Dress children in loose, cotton clothes. Avoid tight jeans, leggings, or nylon underwear. Change school uniforms and socks daily and ensure shoes are aired and dried completely before reuse.
- **Smart school hygiene habits.** Advise children not to share towels, handkerchiefs, caps, helmets, socks, shoes, water bottles, hairbrushes or combs. Encourage them to wash hands after outdoor play and after using the washroom. Change sweaty clothes as soon as they return home.
- **Nails and skin care.** Keep children’s nails short and clean. Discourage scratching of itchy areas, as it spreads infection to other sites. Cover small cuts or abrasions properly.
- **Be careful with pets and play areas.** Ensure pets are checked regularly by a veterinarian. After playing with animals, children should wash their hands. Restrict children from sitting directly on damp floors, grass, or shared gym mats.

Take care not to apply steroid-based combination creams for itching or rashes without medical advice, and avoid home remedies that irritate the skin. Consult a

pediatrician if a circular, itchy rash appears and does not improve in 3-4 days; the rash spreads rapidly or becomes painful and multiple family members develop similar lesions. Don’t stop antifungal treatment earlier than prescribed — this leads to recurrence.

How can I safely introduce swimming/ water safety skills to my toddler in indoor pools to build confidence and prevent drowning risks?

— Hitesh Dalvi, Delhi

Introducing swimming and water safety skills early — ideally between ages two and four — enables children to develop confidence in and near water and significantly reduce drowning risks. Here are my suggestions:

- **Start with water familiarity, not swimming.** At this age, the goal is comfort and respect for water, not formal swimming strokes. Begin with parent-toddler water sessions and let her splash, sit at pool edge, and play with floating toys. Keep sessions short (15-20 minutes) to avoid fatigue and fear.

- **Choose the right swimming pool and program.**

Opt for pools that maintain strict hygiene and water quality standards; employ trained lifeguards; offer toddler-specific programs with certified instructors and use heated water, as cold water causes youngest children distress.

- **Constant, close supervision is non-negotiable.**

For toddlers, supervision means having an adult within arm’s reach at all times. Don’t overly rely on instructors or lifeguards and ensure no distractions such as mobile phones.

- **Teach simple water safety skills.** Even toddlers can learn basic survival-oriented skills such as entering and exiting the pool safely, holding the pool edge and “monkey walking”, floating on the back with support and blowing bubbles and getting faces wet. These skills help reduce panic if she accidentally enters water.

- **Use safety aids wisely.** NB coast-approved life jackets are safer than inflatable arm floats and that floatation devices should support learning, not replace supervision. Therefore, avoid overdependence on floaties — they can build false confidence.

- **Health and hygiene considerations.** Avoid swimming if the child has fever, diarrhea, skin infections, or open wounds. Ensure a pre-swim and post-swim shower. Thoroughly dry ears and skin after swimming to prevent infections.

- **Reinforce water rules at home.** Teach her simple rules such as never to enter a pool without an adult and to avoid running near water pools. However, note that swimming lessons don’t make a child drown-proof. Even confident toddlers need continuous adult supervision and physical barriers like pool fencing where applicable.

(Dr. Ramsha Salimuddin is a consultant pediatrician at Tender Palm Hospital, Lucknow)

FUN WITH WORDS

No sugar-coating WITH VERISM

ROOPA BANERJEE

“The cracked mug lay forgotten on the table, speaking of a truth that nobody was yet ready to tell.”

This is an example of the literary device known as verism, i.e., capturing life with stark, unembellished authenticity. Verism shows people and situations exactly as they are — warts and all — with no polishing of imperfections. It’s an artistic way to convey quotidian truths of life, rather than idealising or romanticising it.

Verism is similar to realism but goes further to embrace raw, sometimes uncomfortable truths of human existence. In literature and art, this often manifests in palpably real characters, settings that are lived in, and narratives that refuse to sanitise reality for elegance.

The word verism derives from Latin *verus*, which means ‘true’ or ‘real.’ It is related to *verismo*, the 19th century Italian movement in opera and literature that realistically — and unflinchingly — depicted contemporary life.

A powerful example of verism is in John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*. The novel is set against the backdrop of the Dust Bowl migration, which Steinbeck portrays with relentless candour — worn shoes, blistered roads, and the quiet desperation of families pushed to the edge.

J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* also uses verism generously. Without the magic and adventure of previous books, Harry is depicted struggling with anger, isolation, and frustrating bureaucracy courtesy of the Ministry of Magic. His emotional volatility, clashes with authority, and bleak depictions of the wizarding world under political control make the story uncomfortably realistic.

Verism is used just as vividly in classic literature as it is in contemporary writing. Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* embraces the psychological grit of guilt, fear and desperation, presenting its characters with raw, human imperfection. In modern fiction, this same spirit is evident in Elena Ferrante’s *My Brilliant Friend*, where childhood rivalries, class struggles and the messy intensity of female friendship are portrayed with a candour that feels almost documentary in tone. Across eras, these works share a commitment to truth over polish, revealing life exactly as it is

lived.

Verism is prominent in today’s popular culture as well. For instance, in the Hollywood movie *The Pursuit of Happiness*, Chris Gardner is decidedly grounded and vulnerable, showcasing veristic storytelling at its finest. An inspirational story that portrays the harsh realities of life such as homelessness, exhaustion, and financial desperation.

At the heart of it, verism is about telling truth the way real people live it. Writers use this device because it grounds a story, allowing readers to experience the characters’ reality rather than a polished, idealised version of it. When characters stumble, worry, argue or make painful human errors, readers connect with them more deeply. Verism gives stories emotional weight because it depicts life without filters. It’s a reminder that fiction doesn’t need to be perfect to be powerful; sometimes, the most memorable tales are the ones that dare to be real.

EXERCISE

Guess the books from which these lines showing verism have been excerpted.

1. “Ma Joad took her elbow in her hand and helped her up. Poor thing, she hasn’t got no strength.”
2. “Harry felt hollowed out with exhaustion, his worries settling over him like dust in an abandoned house.”
3. “Quoye ate with his head down, shoulders hunched, a great damp loaf of a man sitting alone at the table.”
4. “Life’s hard. It’s harder if you’re stupid.”
5. “The world had teeth and it could bite you with them any time it wanted.”

1. The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck
2. Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix by J. K. Rowling
3. The Shipping News by Annie Proulx
4. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain
5. The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon by Stephen King

ANSWERS



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ASK YOUR COUNSELOR



REENA CHOPRA

Teaching children ONLINE SAFETY

How can I instill safety habits in my two children, aged ten and 12 years, about sharing personal information online in an increasingly digital world?

— Manas Thapas, Kolkata

Children in this age group learn best through clear rules and repetition. Introduce simple digital safety guidelines, explaining that private information such as full names, home addresses, school details and personal photos should not be shared, while also reiterating what is safe to share online. Use simple, calm language, not fear-based warnings.

Co-view digital content with children, keep devices in shared family spaces, and role-play online situations just as you would practise real-world safety skills like crossing the road. A helpful tool for online content is the 'traffic light rule': Green — safe to share; Yellow — ask a parent first; and Red — never share.

Moreover, encourage your children to pause and check before posting — it will turn online safety into a habit, not a source of anxiety.

My ten-year-old son is envious of some of his friends' expensive gadgets, foreign holidays, etc. I want him to understand that material possessions don't define happiness or self-worth. Please advise.

— Kyra Ved, Bengaluru

Envy is a normal emotion, not bad behaviour. Teach him to name the feeling i.e., envy, without judgment and shift focus from comparison to self-growth. Avoid dismissive responses such as "learn to be grateful." Instead, validate his emotion of envy, then explain to him that everyone's circumstances and timelines are different, and another child's success does not diminish his own potential.

Encourage effort-based praise and prompt him to identify his own strengths. For instance, a nine-year-old girl was upset when a friend won a piano competition. Her father responded, "It sounds like you wish you had that moment too." Together, they spoke about her love for art and set a small goal of joining a weekend art class. Over time, her envy transformed into motivation and purpose.



How can I support my 15-year-old son to develop a balanced view of success beyond academic scores in a competitive education system?

— Deepa Gagan, Pune

Teenage children mirror what parents celebrate. If home conversations revolve only around exams and marks, teens tend to equate self-worth with exam results. Make a conscious effort to value skills, effort, emotional strength, and diverse interests. Share real-life stories of people who have succeeded in diverse professions and create space for open conversations, not lectures. Discuss how resilience, teamwork, and creativity are critical for success in 21st century workplaces. Most importantly, encourage him to identify and develop his co-curricular strengths. This will help him gain confidence beyond his report card.

My six-year-old daughter gets startled and agitated when she hears loud or sudden noises, such as construction or traffic noise. Is this normal for a child of her age?

— Garima Shetty, Chennai

Young children's nervous systems are still developing, and loud noises can often overwhelm them. Prepare her by explaining that some noises can cause disturbance. Offer sensory support such as noise-cancelling headphones or a favourite comfort toy to help her cope.

Teach simple calming techniques, like slow, deep breathing, and reassure her that the noise is temporary and safe. It is equally important to model calm behaviour, as children learn emotional regulation from parents.

It's also helpful to observe and track common noise disturbances in your neighbourhood such as construction schedules or peak hour traffic and gently prepare her for when to expect them. With reassurance, predictability and support, most children gradually become more comfortable with loud sounds.

(Reena Chopra is a Bhubaneswar-based child psychologist and founder of Saar Holistic Wellness)

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KIDZONE

Folktales help children connect with their cultural roots by transmitting shared values, traditions, and collective memory across generations. Beginning this issue we present folk tales excerpted from *Bird Folktales of Meghalaya for Children* by Glenn C Kharkongor with Illustrations by Balaiaimon Kharngapkynta & Careen Jolin Langstieh (Martin Luther Christian University Press, 2024)

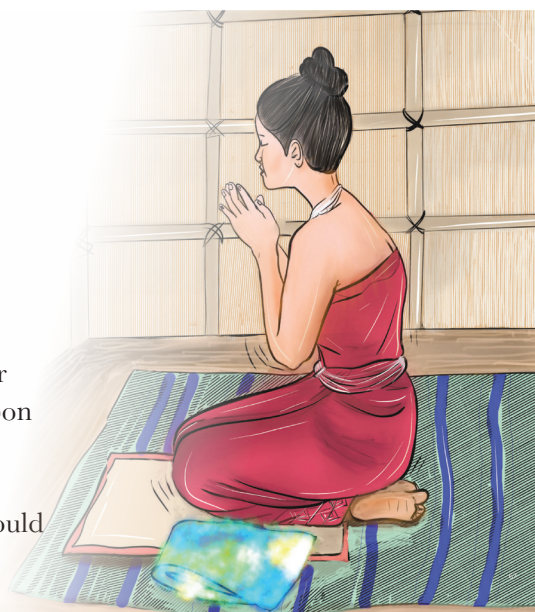
HOW PEACOCKS CAME ON THIS EARTH

A long time ago there was a rich Garo couple who had a young daughter. Among their possessions was a piece of silk woven from many coloured threads. This beautiful cloth had been bequeathed by a goddess to the great-grandmother of the wife. It had been handed down through several generations.



But before touching the precious silk, one had to recite a chant or prayer to the goddess; otherwise, the person would experience bad luck.

According to Garo custom, the daughter would inherit the family property. When she grew up, she married one of her cousins on her mother's side, as was common tradition. Upon her parents' death, she inherited the magic cloth. She lived happily with her husband but forgot to tell him about the story of the cloth, nor did she teach him the prayer that would prevent bad luck.



One bright day, she hung out the magic silk out to dry in the sun. She told her husband not to touch the cloth, even if it rained.



Then she went to the river to catch fish. She took her *chakka*, fishing basket, and a *koksi*, to carry the fish.



While she was away, the clear sky darkened with a mass of dark clouds. The wind blew hard and heavy rain began to fall. The cloth got soaked. The husband anxiously shouted for his wife. She heard his voice and started running home, but she did not reach in time. Worried that the wind would blow away the cloth, the husband grasped the cloth to take it inside the house.



As soon as he touched the cloth, the coloured threads stuck to him. He started changing into a bird with colours splashing onto his wings and tail. The woman in her shock and sorrow, hugged her husband. Without saying the prayer, she touched a bit of cloth that was left. She also turned into a bird, but she was less colourful as only a few threads remained.



Thereafter, they lived as peacock and peahen. Whenever clouds gather in the sky, lightning flashes, and thunder roars, they cry with fear, lest the rains carry away their garments of beautiful plumes.



KIDZONE

Great Indian Bustard

Name of the animal: Great Indian Bustard

Food: Arthropods, worms, small mammals, reptiles and insects

Life span: Upto 12-15 years

Habitat: India and Pakistan, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra

Other facts:

- The great Indian bustard is a large ground bird with a height of about one metre. It is distinguished by its black cap contrasting with a pale head and neck.
- The body is brownish, marked with a black patch mottled with white.
- Males are deep sandy buff in colour and develop a



distinct black breast band during the breeding season. The crown of the head is black and crested.

- Females, which are smaller than males, have a less distinctly white head and neck, and the black breast band is rudimentary, broken, or absent.
- The great Indian bustard is a critically endangered species in the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Red List. Hunting and habitat loss are the primary threats to this species.

Peacock

Name of the animal: Peacock

Female: Peahen

Male: Peafowl

Young one: Peachick

Food: Fruits, berries, grains, seeds, grass, plants, flower petals, small mammals, reptiles, small snakes and insects.

Life span: Upto 20 years

Sound/s: Squawk, honk

Habitat: India, Sri Lanka and Myanmar

Other facts:

- Peacocks can fly despite their massive trains. The peacock tail, aka train, consists of highly elongated upper tail coverts.
- They are large and colourful birds, best known for



their shimmering blue and green plumage and spectacular tails.








- The tail feathers, or upper tail coverts, spread out into a distinctive train and account for more than 60 percent of the bird's total body length.
- The feathers feature colourful 'eye' markings in shades of blue, gold, red and other hues. These eye-spots are best seen when a peacock fans his tail.

(Excerpted from *Why I am Not an Elephant* by Dr. Swati Popat Vats, ECA-APER, 2020)

Refer to the colour code key on the left and colour each box for the given animals as per their characteristics.

Characteristics:

Stripes	
Fury	
Heavy in weight	
Light in weight	
Short tails	
Long tails	
Hangs on tree	
Can swim	
Can run fast	
Moves in solitary	
Moves in group	

This activity helps in understanding sorting by data variable which is an aspect of coding.

HEALTH & NUTRITION

10 memory-boosting FOODS FOR EXAMS TIME

Including the right foods in your children's daily meals significantly enhances their capability to cope with exams-related stress. PW interviewed several nutritionists and pediatricians to recommend ten foods that boost children's memory and concentration

KIRAN BALIMANE

With the exam season beginning next month, many children tend to slip into unhealthy routines — sleeping less, studying for long hours without adequate breaks, eating junk food, and skipping physical exercise. While this routine may seem unavoidable during exams time, it usually elevates children's stress levels and leads to weight gain, mental fatigue, reduced alertness, and poor concentration.

Nutrition plays a critical role during high-pressure exam seasons. A balanced, nutrient-rich diet supports children's overall health, improves memory, sustains energy levels, and sharpens concentration and focus. Including the right foods in your children's daily meals significantly enhances their capability to cope with exams-related stress. PW interviewed several nutritionists and pediatricians to recommend ten foods that boost children's memory and concentration during exams season.

1. Omega-3 Fatty Acids

These are essential for the healthy functioning of the brain and nervous system, especially important for students, as omega-3 fats improve memory, enhance concentration, and regulate mood. Oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, tuna, halibut, and trout are excellent sources. For vegetarian diets, flaxseeds, chia seeds, sunflower seeds, and melon seeds also provide omega-3 fats.

2. Water

One of the most neglected aspects of exam preparation is adequate hydration. Children often forget to drink enough water while studying. Dehydration leads to irritability, headaches, and concentration difficulties. Since brain cells



require more energy than other cells in the body, water plays a vital role in maintaining mental alertness. Encourage children to keep a water bottle on hand while studying and to drink at least 1.5 litres of water daily.

3. Oatmeal

Nutrition experts recommend oats as an excellent source of sustained energy, making them an ideal breakfast food during exams. Oatmeal provides slow-release carbohydrates that fuel the brain through long study hours. It is also rich in vitamin E, B vitamins, potassium, and zinc, all of which support optimal brain and body function. Moreover, oats maintain healthy arteries in the heart and brain.

4. Whole grains

Whole grains are high in fibre and provide children with steady energy throughout the day. Foods such as brown rice, whole wheat, and millets are rich with glucose, which

the brain needs to function effectively. They also contain B-complex vitamins that support nervous system health and enable students to study for extended periods without feeling drained.

5. Eggs

Eggs are a highly nutritious food that supports children's physical and cognitive development. They are an excellent source of protein, while egg yolk is rich in choline, a nutrient associated with memory development. Eggs also provide iron and essential vitamins such as A, D, E, and B12, and are a nourishing addition to exam-time meals.

6. Green leafy vegetables

Leafy vegetables such as spinach and broccoli are rich in vitamins A and K, which support cognitive function and decelerate mental decline. They are also a good source of calcium, beta-carotene, and vitamin C, and vitamin A, which is particularly beneficial for eye health during prolonged study hours.

7. Amla (Indian ooseberry)

Amla is rich in antioxidants that combat free radicals, which damage brain cells. Its high vitamin C content aids the production of norepinephrine, a neurotransmitter that enhances brain activity. Iron present in amla supports oxygen circulation in the body and prevents brain degeneration, making it a valuable inclusion in

students' diet during exam times.

8. Fresh fruit

Regular consumption of fresh fruits is essential during exams. Apples and plums contain quercetin, an antioxidant that protects against cognitive inertia. Berries are rich in antioxidants and vitamins that boost memory, learning capacity, and protect against oxidative stress and brain degeneration.

9. Green tea and natural fluids

During exams, children often turn to caffeinated beverages, which tend to increase anxiety and disrupt sleep. Green tea is a healthier alternative that provides antioxidants and improves concentration. Natural fluids such as coconut water, buttermilk, lassi, soups, and fresh juices maintain hydration, improve mental alertness, and prevent headaches.

10. Nuts and seeds

Nuts and seeds are rich in proteins, essential fatty acids, vitamins, and minerals that support brain function and nervous system health. Walnuts and peanuts are rich in vitamin E, which protects nerve membranes and guards against cognitive exhaustion. Nuts also contain thiamine (vitamin B1), which helps the brain to efficiently use glucose for energy, making them a healthier alternative to deep-fried snacks.

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HEALTH & NUTRITION



LISHA ARVIND

Vegetarian DELIGHTS

Lisha Arvind, a Bengaluru-based food blogger (Nandoo's Kitchen), shares three healthy and nourishing recipes for the winter season

DAL TADKA

(3 servings)

INGREDIENTS

FOR DAL

- ½ cup toor dal (arhar dal)
- ¼ cup moong dal
- 1 finely chopped onion
- 1 finely chopped tomato
- 2-3 finely chopped garlic cloves
- 1 green chilli (slit)
- ½ tsp turmeric powder
- 1 tsp salt (or to taste)
- 3 cups water

FOR TADKA (TEMPERING)

- 3 tbsp ghee
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 4-5 sliced garlic cloves
- 2 dry red chillies
- ½ tsp red chilli powder
- ¼ tsp hing (asafoetida)
- 1 tsp Kashmiri red chilli powder
- 1 tsp crushed kasuri methi
- Fresh coriander leaves

HEALTH BENEFITS

This protein-rich dal tadka, made with toor and moong dal, boosts muscle development and iron levels to prevent anemia, and provides fiber for healthy digestion. Turmeric is anti-inflammatory and immunity-boosting, while ghee enhances nutrient absorption.



PREPARATION GUIDE

- Wash and soak toor and moong dal for 15 minutes.
- Pressure cook dal with turmeric, salt, green chilli, garlic, onion, tomato and water for 3-4 whistles.
- Mash dal lightly and simmer for 5 minutes.
- Adjust water for desired consistency.
- Heat ghee in a small pan on medium flame.
- Add cumin seeds. Let them crackle.
- Add sliced garlic. Fry until golden brown.
- Add dry red chillies. Switch off the stove.
- Add hing, red chilli powder & Kashmiri chilli powder.
- Mix well. Garnish with coriander leaves



VEG POHA

(4 servings)

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups thick poha (flattened rice)
- 1 finely chopped onion
- 1 finely chopped potato
- 2 tbsp oil
- 1 tsp mustard seeds
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 8-10 curry leaves
- 2 finely chopped green chillis
- ¼ tsp turmeric powder
- Salt to taste
- 1 tsp sugar
- 2 tbsp peanuts
- 2 tbsp green peas
- Juice of ½ lemon
- 2 tbsp fresh coriander leaves

HEALTH BENEFITS

This light, nutritious breakfast provides quick-digesting carbohydrates for instant energy, while peanuts are rich in protein and vegetables provide fibre to aid digestion. Turmeric provides anti-inflammatory benefits, while lemon is rich in vitamin C, boosting immunity.

PREPARATION GUIDE

- Rinse rice flakes in a colander under running water for 5-10 seconds. Drain completely.
- Add salt and turmeric; mix gently.
- Set aside for 5 minutes.
- Heat oil in a pan. Add mustard seeds. Let them splutter.
- Add cumin seeds, peanuts and curry leaves.
- Fry peanuts till crisp.
- Add green chillis and onions; sauté until soft.
- Add potatoes and peas.
- Cover and cook until potatoes are soft.
- Add soaked rice flakes to the pan. Add a little sugar (optional).
- Mix gently on low flame. Cover and cook for 2 minutes.
- Remove from the stove, add lemon juice and chopped coriander leaves.
- Mix lightly. Serve hot.

HEALTH & NUTRITION

BESAN DOODH

(3 servings)

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups of milk
- 1½ tbsp besan (gram flour)
- 1½ tbsp sugar
- 1 tsp ghee
- ¼ tsp cardamom powder
- 6-8 chopped almonds or cashews
- Few saffron strands

PREPARATION GUIDE

- Heat ghee in a pan on a low flame.
- Add besan. Roast slowly, stirring continuously.
- Roast until color turns light golden.
- Lower the flame. Add warm milk bit by bit, stirring continuously.
- Ensure that no lumps are formed. Cook for 3-4 minutes until slightly thick.
- Add sugar, cardamom powder, nuts and saffron.
- Boil for 2 minutes.
- Serve hot or warm.

HEALTH BENEFITS

Gram flour is rich in protein, aiding muscle growth and repair, and milk in calcium, boosting healthy bone development. Cardamom aids digestion, while nuts provide essential vitamins and minerals.

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TAXI DRIVERS**SURESH SUBRAHMANYAN**

No one hails a taxi anymore. Shades of coming out of a cinema or concert hall, standing on the edge of a pavement and waving your hand frantically yelling 'Taxi' as another one whizzes past without bothering to stop. Those days are gone. What you see in most cities is people milling around street corners, glued to their mobile phones, trying to call up one of a myriad number of cab hire services. When the vehicle does arrive somewhere close, you and a dozen others rush to peer at the number plate to see if it is the cab you had booked. It can get quite frantic.

Nevertheless, once you are safely and comfortably ensconced in the back seat, you can begin to strike up a conversation with the driver. As a rule, most drivers are not averse to a spot of chit-chat, particularly if the drive promises to be long with plenty of traffic jams along the way. Some drivers can be painfully garrulous. There are some drivers who are reticent and prefer to keep their own counsel. Which is fine so long as they are well-versed in the local topography, and possess more than a rudimentary idea of where the short cuts are.

Then comes the interesting challenge of which language to employ while conversing with the driver. In Delhi, Chennai or Calcutta, you can be reasonably sure that Hindi, Tamil and Bengali respectively will be the preferred tongue of choice though most of them can speak at least one other language. In Bengaluru, a linguistic melting pot where people from all over the country converge looking for employment, the name of the driver alone does not definitively signify his mother tongue.

A cheerful driver enlivens the drive and keeps you in good spirits. While such a one is unfailingly polite, he will not fight shy of letting his window down and discharging a volley of colourful oaths if a neighbouring car attempted to cut across dangerously in front of him. Having got the invective in the chosen vernacular off his chest, he will roll up his window and profusely apologise for his intemperate language, particularly if there are ladies present in the car. 'Sorry Sir, Madam, but that fellow was breaking traffic rules and might have caused an accident. This is the only language these fellows understand.'

Allow me to get a quick word in on car horns. Most drivers have one palm semi-permanently placed on the horn. The resultant din is calculated to break all sound barrier laws, which in any case are observed strictly in the breach.

What do our drivers hope to achieve by blaring away at a large family of bovine creatures blocking the road? This is Bharat. Learn to live with it.

Once, I got talking cricket with one of my drivers. 'Tell me Raju, you must be a T20 fan. I am sure you have no time for Test matches.' Bashir (or Joseph) surprised me with his prompt response. 'Sir, this T20 is masala cricket, just hitting every ball for six or four. No skill involved. I pity the bowlers who get to bowl only four overs and get slammed all over the park. Give me Test cricket any day. Five days of thinking, strategizing, two innings and the winner would have truly deserved it.' I am, of course, translating and paraphrasing Venkat's (or Karim's) views loosely, but his mature and sophisticated take on the game took me by surprise.

If it is election time, who better than the taxi driver to give us his seat-of-the-pants prediction on the likely results. With his uncanny pulse on current affairs, his predictions are usually right on the money! I will take his word against any jumped-up television psephologist.

Often you call for the same driver multiple times because by now the driver is almost a friend, and you encourage this association, unaware of a looming threat. Finally, it happens. He touches you for a not insubstantial loan. His father is going in for a bypass surgery. Tears well up in his eyes. He has managed to mop up most of the money but is short of 25k. By now you are choking up as well for your dear taxi driver friend and proceed to cough up the dough. He thanks you and promises the loan will be repaid with interest inside three months. You wave your hand grandly and waive the interest. You feel good about yourself for having done a noble deed. Expectedly, no sign of the blighter thereafter. Does not respond to your calls, probably changed his sim card. Bye, bye, 25K.

Shakespeare, through his character Polonius in *Hamlet*, has this to say about treating friends: "Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried / Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel." If Shakespeare had been aware of them during his time, he would have made an exception and drawn the line at taxi drivers. Not all taxi drivers are devious, I grant you, but some of them are. If you are not on your guard, they can take you for a ride.

(Suresh Subrahmanyam is a Bengaluru-based former advertising professional)



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The Bidya Bharati Foundation, a charitable trust, was established on 21st November, 2001, by the visionary Late Sri Surendra Agarwal. Driven by his dream to provide quality education and opportunities for skill development, the foundation's guiding motto remains "to promote social awareness through knowledge." Today, the Foundation proudly operates four premier institutions: Delhi Public School Siliguri, Delhi Public School Joka, Surendra Institute of Examination and Management (SIEM) Siliguri, and Delhi Public School Fulbari, all of which stand as pillars of excellence in education under its aegis.



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Established in 2018, Delhi Public School Fulbari has swiftly become a hallmark of quality education and innovative learning in North Bengal. Aligned with the principles of the Delhi Public School Society, a nonprofit organization renowned for its progressive approach to education, DPS Fulbari is dedicated to nurturing character, leadership, and essential life skills in its students. With state-of-the-art infrastructure, including a cutting-edge shooting range, the school continues to elevate the benchmarks of scholastic and co-scholastic achievement in the region.

Founded in 2003 by Late Sri Surendra Agarwal under the Bidya Bharati Foundation, Delhi Public School Siliguri epitomizes his unwavering commitment to education for all. With a vision to establish an Institution fostering moral and spiritual values, creativity, and social consciousness, the school began its journey on April 7, 2003, with 635 students. Today, having completed 22 remarkable years, the Institution boasts a thriving community of nearly 5,500 students, spanning from Nursery to Class XII. Its consistent pursuit of excellence has earned it a distinguished reputation among educational institutions in the region.



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Established under the Bidya Bharati Foundation, Surendra Institute of Examination and Management (SIEM) in Siliguri is a premier Institution dedicated to nurturing technical excellence and fostering industry-ready professionals. SIEM serves as a dynamic hub for academic and skill-based education, consistently preparing students for the challenges of a rapidly evolving world.

The institute collaborates with TCS iON, facilitating a seamless examination experience on its premises. This partnership underscores SIEM's commitment to providing a technology-driven and globally connected learning environment. Additionally, SIEM has a thriving collaboration with the International Institute of Hotel Management (IIHM), playing a pivotal role in guiding and mentoring students aspiring to excel in the hospitality industry. Through these initiatives, the institute empowers students with holistic education, bridging the gap between academic learning and professional expertise.

LEISURE & TRAVEL

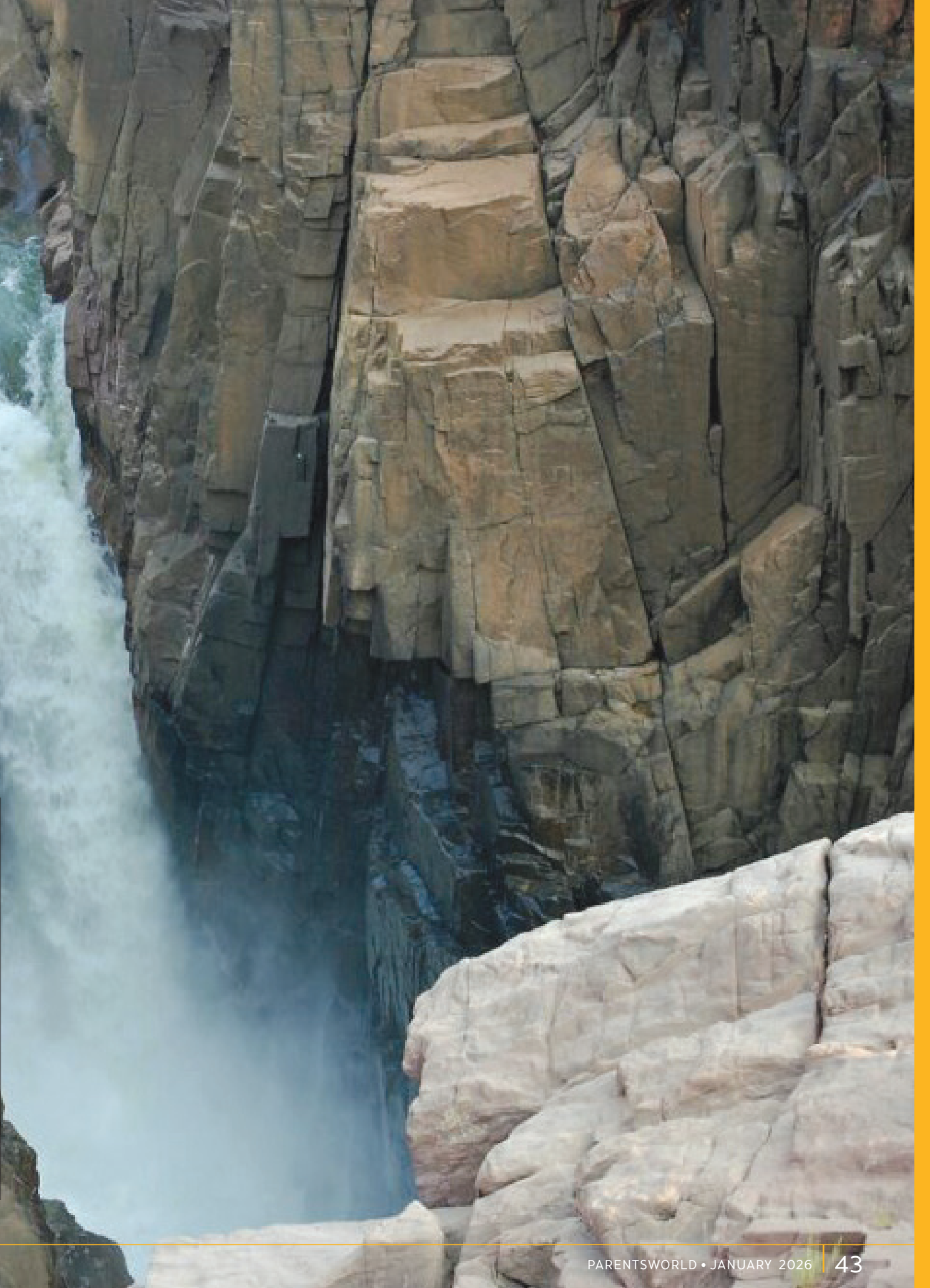
MADHYA PRADESH

THE HEART OF INDIA

(PART II)

In last month's leisure and travel dispatch, I wrote about our travels to Bhopal, Sanchi, Pachmarhi, Jabalpur, and Kanha National Park. The concluding Part II details the second leg of our journey to Gwalior, Datia, Orchha and Khajuraho

ANIL THAKORE



LEISURE & TRAVEL



Gwalior Fort

Madhya Pradesh (MP, pop. 88 million) is the country's second-largest state by area (after Rajasthan), offering rich history, heritage, and natural splendour. Sprawling across plateaus, riverine valleys, and dense forests, MP presents an excellent mix of architectural grandeur and scenic vistas. From the majestic gorges of Marble Rocks in Bhedaghat to the tranquil expanses of the River Narmada to the tiger-inhabited wilds of Kanha, Bandhavgarh, and Pench national parks, MP is a living canvas of India's diverse geographic landscapes, wildlife and architectural splendour.

Madhya Pradesh, which literally means 'central province', reflects its geographic position at the crossroads of Indian culture and civilization. The state hosts Unesco World Heritage Sites such as the stunning Khajuraho temples, ancient Buddhist monuments of Sanchi, and rock shelters of Bhimbetka. Its cities — Bhopal, Indore, Gwalior, and Ujjain — blend old-world charm with modern vibrancy, inviting travelers to experience majestic forts, sacred ghats, handloom traditions, and memorable cuisine.

In last month's leisure and travel dispatch, I wrote about our (a group of like-minded citizens) travels to Bhopal, Sanchi, Pachmarhi, Jabalpur, and Kanha National Park. The concluding Part II details the second leg of our journey to Gwalior, Datia, Orchha and Khajuraho.

Gwalior

The historical city of Gwalior (pop. 1.1 million) seamlessly blends its imposing fort, grand palaces and classical music legacy with contemporary urban life, bustling bazaars and a distinctly old-world charm. The city traces its origins to the 8th century, when, according to a legend Rajput chief Suraj Sen Tomar founded it after being cured of leprosy by the sage Gwalipa, from whom Gwalior takes its name. Over the centuries, the city evolved from a strategic hilltop stronghold into a powerful princely state, shaped successively by the Tomar Rajputs, Mughals, Marathas and the Scindias.

Gwalior is most famous for its majestic eponymous fort built on Gopachal, a flat sandstone hill. The fort covers approximately 3 sq. km in area enclosed by outer walls, 35 ft high, which stretch 3.2 km all around. Suraj Sen Tomar started construction of the fort in 6th century CE with Raja Man Singh Tomar embellishing it to its present grandeur. Within these walls are several water tanks, six palaces, six temples, a mosque, and the campus of The Scindia School, ranked India's #1 vintage all-boys boarding school in the EW India School Rankings 2025-26.

Of particular interest is the **Raja Man Singh Palace** with its exquisite external architecture of turquoise, yellow and green tiling, magnificent courtyards and several rooms,

built to accommodate his eight wives and their families. Nearby is a museum that houses exquisite sculptures and carvings.

Teli-ka-Mandir (11th century CE), a Hindu temple dedicated to Shiva, occupies pride of place in Gwalior Fort. Built between the early 8th–9th century CE by oil merchants from southern India, during the reign of the Gurjara-Pratihara Mihira Bhoja, it's unique because it showcases southern temple architecture. It suffered during numerous invasions but was restored by British archaeologists and the Scindia royal family in the 19th century.

Another archaeological wonder within the fort is the **Sas-Bahu Temple**. An outstanding example of Hindu temple architecture, it was built in 1096 by King Mahipala of the Kachchhapaghata dynasty. While the 'Sas' (wife of king Mahipala) temple is dedicated to Lord Vishnu, the 'Bahu' (his daughter-in-law) temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva. The temple walls depict the epic Ramayana through delicate carvings.

Gujari Mahal, sited at the foot of Gwalior fort, is uniquely designed with open courtyards and aqueducts. Constructed by Raja Man Singh Tomar for his queen Mrignayani, the palace now houses an archaeological museum with an outstanding collection of sculptures and artefacts, including the miniature statue of Salabhanjika (female figurine).

On descent from the fort, we encountered the gigantic rock-cut **Jain Tirthankaras** and temple caves, carved directly into the sandstone cliffs of Gopachal over a span of

nearly eight centuries. Unparalleled in their number, scale and artistry, these awe-inspiring sculptures draw thousands of Jain pilgrims and visitors each year.

However, the highlight of our visit to Gwalior Fort was the *son-et-lumière* show. Brilliantly choreographed with commentary by Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan, music by the Gundecha Brothers and compositions of legendary maestro Tansen, this is an experience that should be missed.

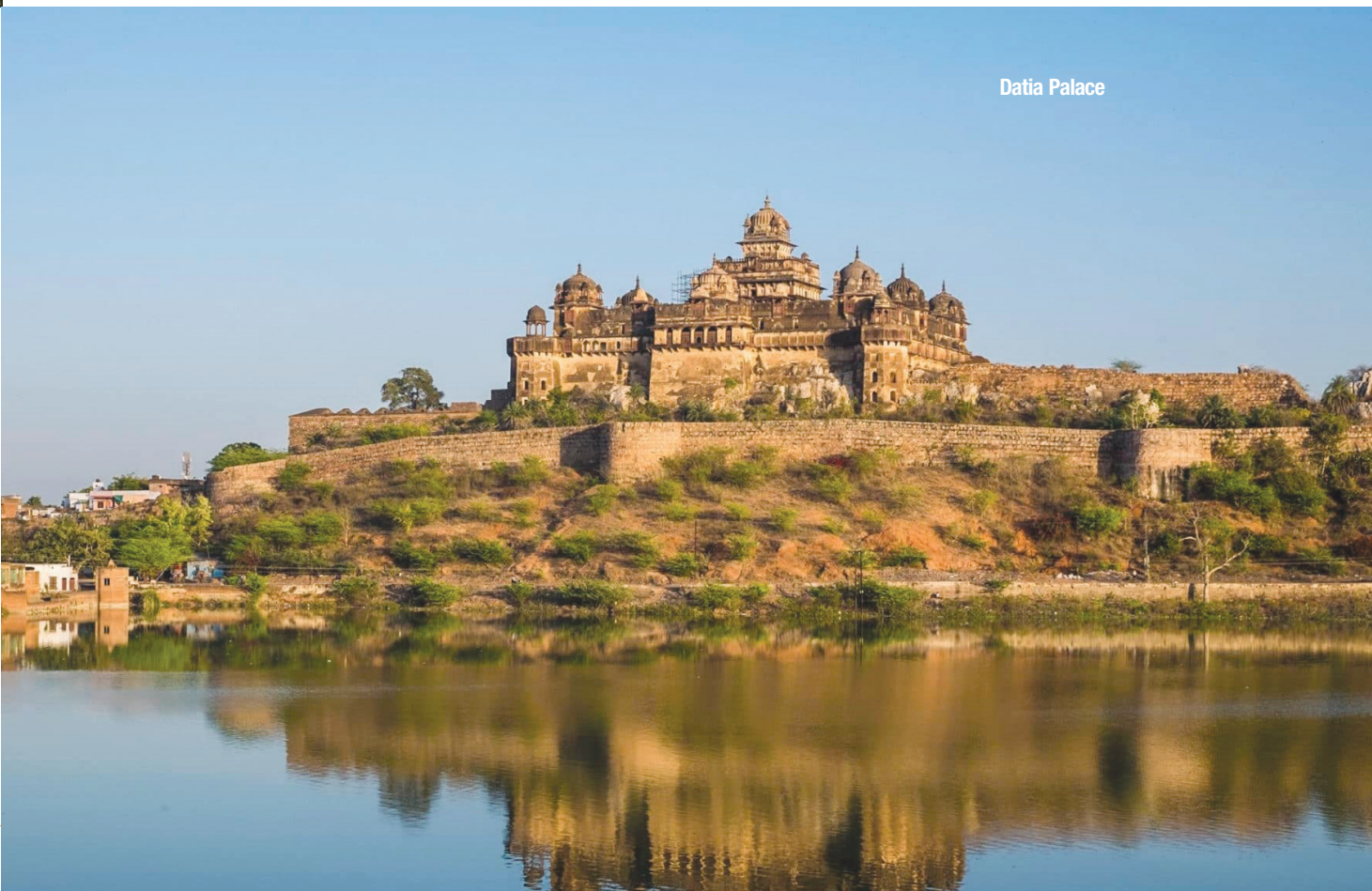
Other places of interest in Gwalior are the **Tansen memorial, Jai Vilas Palace, Sun Temple, Gurudwara Data Bandi Chhod Sahib, Rani Laxmi Bai Samadhi Sthal and Sarod Ghar**. In particular, the **Sarod Ghar**, established by legendary sarod player Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, is a must-visit. It houses an eclectic collection of old and contemporary musical instruments.

Accommodation. Tansen Hotel (Rs.4,500-6,000 per night). This is a no-frills hotel with clean and spacious rooms and attentive service.

Datia

Seventy-five km by road from Gwalior is **Datia Palace**, a magnificent seven-storeyed palace, built by Raja Bir Singh Deo (1605–1627) of the Bundela dynasty, solely to host a one-night visit of Mughal Emperor Jahangir, which was cancelled. Sited dramatically on a rocky outcrop overlooking the town, Datia Palace is made entirely of stone and brick, without use of iron or wood, and is considered one of the finest examples of Bundela architecture in central India.

Datia Palace



LEISURE & TRAVEL

Jahangir Palace

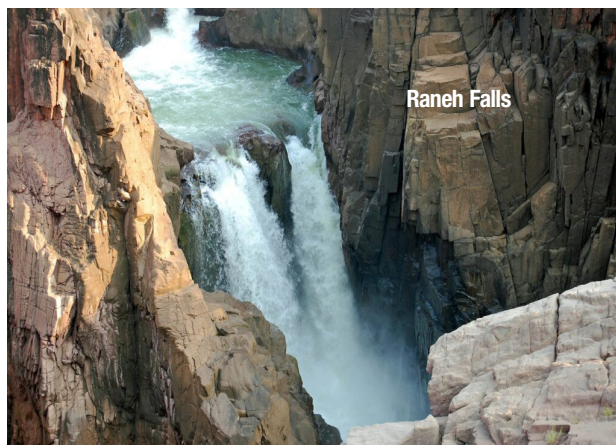


Each level of the palace has a distinctly different design in art and ornamentation, progressing from austere lower floors to increasingly elaborate upper levels, and culminating in airy terraces and pavilions that offer sweeping views of the surrounding town and countryside. Nearby is the splendid **Veer Singh Palace**, home to the descendants of Bir Singh Deo.

The **Dhubela Palace**, 35 km from Datia, was built Raja Chhatrasal, the most famous of the Bundelas, who remained undefeated in 52 battles fought against the Mughals. The splendid Dhubela palace now houses a museum. Adjacent to the museum is Mastani Mahal, a palace that the Raja built for his daughter Mastani, now a pop culture icon through the Bollywood movie *Baji Rao Mastani*. The many *chhatris* (cenotaphs) that dot the surrounding landscape, set amid tranquil lakes and pastoral scenery, create an evocative panorama and serve as a lasting tribute to the artistic excellence, wealth and cultural refinement of the Bundela era.

Orchha

The next stop was Orchha, 35 km from Dhubela. Sited on the banks of the River Betwa, **Orchha** is a medieval town where grand palaces, soaring *chhatris* and quiet temples are frozen in history. It was founded by Rudra Pratap Singh Bundela (1501–1531), the first King of Orchha, who also built the majestic **Fort of Orchha** and **Raja Mahal**. The exquisite **Chaturbuj Temple** was commissioned by his Queen, Rani Ganesh Kunwar.



Raneh Falls

His successor, Raja Madhukar Shah, built the **Jahangir Palace** during his reign (1544–1591). This palace is a singularly grand specimen of Mughal architecture built by a Hindu ruler. Every evening, the palace hosts a spectacular light and sound show narrating the enthralling history of Orchha.

In keeping with the tradition of Raja Chhatrassal, the Bundelas of Orchha also built large and magnificent *chhatris* along the banks of the River Betwa. These *chhatris* are well-maintained and situated within pristine gardens.

En route from Orchha to Khajuraho, stop at **Raneh Falls**. The crystal-clear Ken River discharges over 30 m of pure crystalline granite with varying shades of colours ranging from pink and red to grey, into a 5 m-long canyon.

Khajuraho

Founded by the Chandela chieftain, Nannuka, in the 9th century CE, Khajuraho is a serene heritage town famed for its exquisitely carved temples that celebrate art, spirituality and human emotion in stone. A Unesco World Heritage Site, it offers a rare blend of architectural brilliance, cultural depth and quiet small-town charm. The temples around Khajuraho were built during the period 885 CE and 1125 CE. The largest and most famous temple is **Kandariya Mahadeva** built during the reign of King Vidyadhara.

The Khajuraho temples are built in the Nagara-style architecture, depicting graceful sculptures of *nayikas* (Hindu mythological female protagonists) and deities representing core Hindu values of *kama*, *artha*, *dharma*, and *moksa* in various forms of meditation, spiritual teachings and relationships. Though widely renowned for its erotic iconography, only about 10 percent of the iconography in the Khajuraho temples is sexual.

From the 13th to the 18th century CE, various Muslim dynasties conquered this region and desecrated most of the temples. About 25 temples have survived the desecration. Over the centuries, vegetation and forests enveloped the region until, in 1830, local people guided the English explorer **T.S. Burt** to these temples. Thus, like Angkor Wat (Cambodia), Borobudur and Prambanan (Indonesia),

Khajuraho was saved and restored.

Built largely of fine-grained sandstone and raised on high plinths, the temples follow a precise geometric plan, with soaring *shikharas* rising in perfect symmetry and harmony. The **Western Group of Temples** — anchored by the Kandariya Mahadeva, Lakshmana and Vishvanatha temples — forms the artistic and spiritual heart of Khajuraho, best explored leisurely to appreciate the narrative panels, detailing and remarkable craftsmanship that reveal new layers with every viewing, especially in the soft light of early morning or dusk. Don't miss the *son et lumière* show at the temple.

Travel tips

Getting there. Gwalior and Khajuraho are well-connected by air/train/road.

Preparation. Good footwear, rain protection apparel, sun protection headwear and cream. Pack all essential medicines, as they are not easily available in smaller towns.

Best season to visit. October-May.

Guides: Hire the services of guides who will enhance your holiday with historical background, cultural context, and practical tips.

P.S. We used the services of the MP Tourism Board to arrange all travel, board and lodging.

Khajuraho temple



PARENTS
CORNER

Motivating children for THE NEW ACADEMIC YEAR

PW invited parents of Greenwood High, Bangalore to share how they intend to motivate their children for the new academic year



“Every academic year brings new pressures — of performing well, fitting in, and fearing failure — for my son Arsh (grade IX) but also fresh opportunities to build confidence and independence.

I believe when children feel genuinely heard at home and in school, they begin the year with assurance rather than anxiety. Schools can nurture this by offering equal opportunities and feedback so every voice counts. At home, we invest substantial time daily helping Arsh reflect, express himself, and reset, while reminding him that progress matters more than perfection. A calm study space and consistent encouragement reinforce our belief that a child thrives when he knows he is not alone” — **Amita Mathur**, entrepreneur

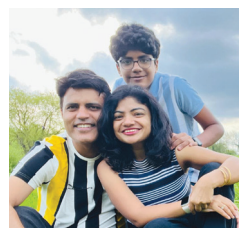


“Returning to India after 15 years in the US was a bold decision, especially as our daughter Unnati (class X) was about to begin high school in Texas. Enrolling her in the CISCE affiliated Greenwood High posed significant challenges, as she had to adapt to an entirely new

education system and environment. Catching up academically in class IX was not easy for her. Thankfully, unwavering support and guidance from her teachers helped her navigate this transition with confidence. As she began grade X, we resolved to start afresh — closely monitoring her social media use, arranging the right academic support for her board exams, and consistently reinforcing her self-belief. By standing by her with patience and emotional reassurance, we have done our best to ensure this crucial year progresses smoothly and positively” — **Anil Jain**, Chip designing engineer, AMD

“As our son Akshat enters class X, we see him navigating academics alongside growing responsibilities and the excitement of teenage life. Like other children his age, he enjoys playtime with friends, gadgets, and especially chess. Therefore,

switching to ‘study mode’ can sometimes be a challenge. However, we believe that with the right guidance, every child can find his focus. Instead of rigid schedules, we set small, daily achievable goals. We speak openly about his dreams and strengths so his motivation comes from within. Regular breaks for music, sports, friendships, a quiet game of chess keep his mind refreshed. Our aim is not to push harder, but to support him to become smarter. We celebrate his efforts and remind him that class X is a stepping stone, not a burden” — **Namrata Upadhyaya**, freelance communicator.



“Rather than setting ambitious New Year goals, we encourage our children — Ayan (grade IX) and Rohan (grade XII) — to embrace a more sustainable lifestyle: the Habit Engine. Strong academic

outcomes are built through steady compounding of small daily actions, not giant leaps. We moved the focus away from end results to consistent routines that kept both boys motivated and well-rounded. Ayan’s daily plan includes solving five challenging problems, revising a difficult lesson, practising piano for 20 minutes, and dedicating an hour to sports. Over time, these habits have delivered impressive results. Rohan, an arts student, similarly relies on daily disciplines to balance rigorous academics with his passion for competitive cricket and the guitar. This emphasis on small, daily actions creates a dependable engine for a student’s entire journey — and may be the motivation learners truly need” — **Aparajita Bhattacharya**, Sr Director of Engineering at Arm



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PARENTS CORNER

Helping children develop **HEALTHY EATING HABITS**

PW invited parents of Navrachana Vidyani Vidyalaya, Navrachana Higher Secondary School Sama, Navrachana International School Vadodara — IB and Navrachana International School Vadodara — CBSE to share how they ensure their children develop healthy eating habits



“We believe in leading by example. Helping my children — Naira (class V) and Nivaan (class 1) — develop healthy eating habits requires consistency, patience, and good example. Children naturally follow what they see, so when we choose seasonal fruits, vegetables, and home-

cooked meals, they are more likely to do the same. With so many junk food options available today, we try to replace them with healthier alternatives. Traditional pulses can be adapted with a modern touch to suit Gen Z tastes. We also involve them by asking for their food preferences and creating healthier versions of their choices. We avoid storing junk food at home, reducing temptation. Most importantly, we educate them about the benefits of nutritious food and how each food group supports overall health” — **Kruti Pandya**, Proprietor Synergy Engineering



“I have watched my daughter Miriah (class VIII) struggle with food — tiny portions, strong resistance, and growing attraction to junk. I realised that strict rules wouldn't work; what she needed were smarter alternatives. I began adding a spot of creativity, blending her favourite junk flavours

into healthier versions she could enjoy guilt-free. Alongside this, we spoke about the hidden effects of junk food and irregular eating. The real change came when I understood her taste preferences. I listed foods she genuinely liked and let her be the boss of choosing from them. Gradually, she became involved in selecting vegetables, deciding flavours, and helping with kitchen chores. Our kitchen turned into a joyful workshop of laughter and learning. Food stopped being a battle and became an adventure. With ownership came awareness, and healthy habits grew naturally, making her feel energetic, confident, and empowered” — **Lt Col (Dr.) Kamalpreet Saggi**

“As a dietician-mother, this subject is deeply personal to me. Children are growing, exploring, and forming their food preferences. Therefore expecting perfect eating habits from them is unrealistic. Instead, I focus on helping my daughter Alice (class VI) understand what balanced choices and appropriate

portions look like, so she can enjoy the best of both worlds. Healthy habits are built through small, consistent daily practices. We eat meals together as a family, involve her in grocery shopping, read ingredient labels, and let her help with simple meal decisions. Watching her peers eat well at school has also motivated her to try more vegetables, reinforcing how important positive exposure is. For tweens, involvement, autonomy, and respect work far better than strict instructions.” — **Hanova Parabia**, dietician



“Constant exposure to advertisements and food fads makes healthy choices challenging, and excessive lecturing often proves counter-productive. As parents of Advait Rahul (class VII), we try to lead by example by minimiz-

ing eating out and choosing local, seasonal produce that ensures balanced nutrition. Having family meals together without gadgets fosters healthier eating habits and meaningful interaction. We encourage mindful eating, stopping when one feels 80 percent full. Ultimately, a simple lifestyle supported by pure thoughts helps create physical, emotional, and mental balance” — **Priyanka Rahul** Thakkur, hospital management professional



12,000 Students from 15 Nations Celebrate Ryan Group's Golden Jubilee in Mumbai



Dr. Snehal Pinto, Director - RIGI, Mr. Ryan Pinto, CEO, RIGI, Ms. Liz Samuel, Mr. Diliprao More, MD & CEO, NBFC, Mr. Patrick Duffy - Consul General of Ireland, Dr. Grace Pinto, MD, RIGI, Mr. Johny Lever - Actor, Mr. Arun Samuel, Chairman & MD, Wings Group, Mr. Anang Desai - Actor, Mr. Sudhir Babanrao Shelke - Ex. Dir (HR) NPCIL, and Mr. Shashikant Prabhakar Dhame - Ex. Dir (HR) NPCIL, Chairman of AERB

Mumbai's Fine Arts Centre, came alive as the 21st Ryan International Children's Festival (RICF) kicked off, bringing together students from 15 countries namely Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Iran, Ireland, Latvia, Paraguay, Poland, Slovakia, Sri Lanka, and Zimbabwe and thousands from Ryan Group of Schools across the city. The week-long festival celebrated cultural exchange, creativity, and global friendship -- and this year, it holds special significance as the Ryan Group unveiled its commemorative 50 Years logo, marking the

beginning of its Golden Jubilee celebrations. The festival was inaugurated by Mr. Patrick Duffy, Consul General of Ireland, who declared the event open amid cheers from young participants followed by a vibrant performance, their colourful costumes symbolising unity and celebration. RICF spread over a week from 11th to 17th December witnessed international performances, collaborative workshops, students' engagement, and the much-anticipated Global Carnival -- a two-day celebration of creativity, culture, and outstanding performances.

For decades, the Ryan Group has combined academic excellence with values-driven, holistic learning.



Dr. Snehal Pinto and Madam Grace Pinto felicitating Rt. Rev. Dominic Savio Fernandes, Auxiliary Bishop of Bombay archdiocese.



Dr. Grace Pinto with Ashnoor Kaur, actor and our proud alumna, Ryan International School



Dr. Grace Pinto with team Paraguay



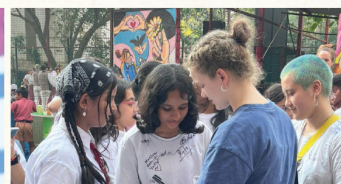
Mr. Paritosh Kashyap, Whole Time Director, Kotak Mahindra Bank



Mr. Tarun Chaudhry, Branch Banking Head, HDFC Bank



Smt. Vijaya Rahatkar, Hon'ble Chairperson, National Commission for Women



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