



SPOTLIGHT

The modern-day language barriers

Sharmin Sultana did not know that the major reason behind her teenage boy acting out in class was largely due to his unsupervised time spent on the Internet. She did not know that her niece's speech delay was also caused by the same reason. Sultana certainly had a lot to learn, especially in a world that is almost unimaginable without the world wide web and smart gadgets.

With thousands of children exposed to an unhealthy amount of screen time, most are suffering from unwarranted cases of depression, language distortion, aggressive behaviour, and even developing harmful personalities — those that lack empathy and social intelligence.

Musammat Sharmila Khan, a working lady and a mother of three, already has a lot on her plate. She finds it even more taxing to find individual time for all her children on a daily basis and also go through the household chores at the same time. "I sometimes think gadgets are the ultimate saviour. If it weren't for these miraculous

smart gadgets, I wouldn't be able to keep my sanity intact," Khan confessed.

However, a deeper probe reveals problems within Khan's home — her youngest is too dependent on the internet and has to listen to nursery rhymes during every meal; the middle child is no different, a 10-year-old boy who prefers to play online games rather than socialise with neighbourhood children over a game of football; and the eldest, a teenager who wakes up late in the morning because he loves listening to music on his phone all night. The teenager also gets upset at the slightest

trigger that attempts to break his unhealthy cycle of everyday life.

Tarana Anis, Child Psychologist, Child Development Centre, Apollo Hospitals Dhaka, referred to all these symptoms as being typical, and caused by excessive use of smart devices.

"Gadgets provide us with a one-sided communication with very little stimulation, often resulting into speech delays and creating obstacles to standard intellectual growth. Children always require a two-way communication to thrive, they learn from the reactions of people around them. It's not always about letters and numbers,

sometimes we need to learn about emotions and that cannot be grasped from a handheld device.

"As for older children, too much involvement with the virtual world derails their thought process and in turn, they begin to have pipe dreams; they start living in a make-believe world of games and get frustrated at minimal discomfort, as in the world of gaming, the reward levels are consistent and with every positive move, one gets some reward points which may be dissimilar to what we experience in reality — there's not always a reward for every sensible move," the psychologist said.

