


**INTERPRETER OF MALADIES**

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# PARENTING SKILLS

Parenting is quite a challenging job that most of us sign up for without even realising the responsibilities and pains attached to it. Humans are biologically wired to reproduce and love the baby for the greater purpose of continuity of the species "Homo Sapiens". However the fun part tends to get shorter as the child grows and become more independent.

The maternal brain is flooded with Oxytocin (the love hormone) during pregnancy and nursing period to facilitate the important task of bonding with the baby. Nature versus nurture is the key issue to success in raising emotionally healthy children.

It would be interesting to explore the animal kingdom a bit to see how it works in other species. Giraffes are widely known as the most emotionally cold animal and have been found to parent their calves collectively.

The mother giraffe does not differentiate her own babies from another giraffe's babies (echoes "joint family" concept or "it takes the whole village to raise a child" concept).

The mother giraffes do shift work, while one mother stays home to protect the babies from other predators, the other mothers go out searching for food (they have babysitting service too!).

The moose nurtures her calf and teaches the basic life skills, however as soon as she becomes pregnant again she abandons the first one and forcefully drives the calf away if it tries to come back home!

The cow gives her message loud and clear: I've done my part and now you are on your own! The calves leave home by the end of a year maximum. A moose starts to give birth as early as when they are 2-3 years old!

We are humans and proudly call us "the best creation who rules the animal kingdom". No wonder we always worry about the best way of raising our kids so that our genes can propagate long after we are gone!

It is also interesting to note that the human babies are born probably as one of the weakest in whole animal kingdom. They take years to learn the basic life skills like walking, talking, eating, cooking and being safe in order to preserve their lives. The cortical part of human brain continues to grow well into mid twenties; unfortunately emotional growth takes so much "mirroring back" from a significant other that it might take forever to complete the process in some cases! Obviously our superiority in animal kingdom comes with a huge price tag! We know what happens when a human mother abandons her child at age one year, baby simply dies! Even if a child is abandoned at adolescent stage, they fall prey to other human perpetrators in our civilised jungle!

Adolescents' mood swings are partly because of hormonal changes and partly an attitude problem. It can be mild, moderate or severe. Fortunately they usually grow out of it by early twenties. It is no fun to be around excessively moody adolescents who act impulsively on their bad moods, they can surely ruin the environment with their negative energy. It is important to set firm rules at an early stage to contain the problem. Knowledge, understanding, communication strategies, family dynamic, etc. play

important roles in curtailing or lingering this issue.

Setting firm rules include a clear message of what is acceptable and what is not. Messages like "I understand you are not in good mood but that doesn't give you the right to behave inappropriately with others or not to have manners!" should be supported by consistency and logical consequences.

Children must be taught how to own their emotions by role modeling. It is not the word but the action that speaks louder when it comes to parenting. If the words and actions don't match consistently (e.g. one day you start yelling for misbehaviour and another day you just ignore as if it hasn't happened at all!), then the adolescent becomes confused and learns not to take words seriously. On the other hand, if the parents demand their children to behave but they themselves fly off the handle when they are ticked off, children learn to cope with emotions from practical demonstration in real life situations by their parents. Home environment is the laboratory which determines the quality of the product! Children growing up in highly tensed, stressful, high expressed emotional environ-



ment often mirror back the same emotional tone long after leaving that particular home environment.

I'm writing this not to put blame or guilt on parents because most parents do their best given what they know best and how resourceful they are. Hard wiring of the developing brain usually can't seem to automatically create healthier neuronal circuits. Human brain is highly impressionable at an early stage of life and right brain (does parallel processing of sensory stimuli) develops faster than the left brain. Immediate environment, covert memory, non-verbal communication etc. play a big role in establishing the neuronal networks involved with emotional responses. Some recent research reveals that Insula (hidden fifth lobe of the brain) has a role to play with anticipation (of reward or punishment), risk assessment by comparing conflicting stimuli and decision making in collaboration with other parts of brain (e.g. limbic system and frontal lobe). A child is supposed to learn which behaviours can bring negative consequences or punishment and avoid those behaviours by taking fewer risks in decision making process when it comes to choosing how to act on emotions.

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