



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

The necessity of having mindful conversations with parents

OHONA ANJUM

Growing up in a household of nine, I often felt like my voice got lost in the daily chaos. My mother was always caught up in an endless cycle of chores, and my father, away for work, would return home too drained to engage in conversation. Eventually, I stopped trying. There were times I wished my parents would ask how school was, celebrate my small victories, or simply check in on how I was feeling. But their attention was always pulled elsewhere. Over the years, that silence became second nature. Now, even when I want to express myself, I hesitate, unsure of whether my words would truly reach them.

I soon realised that this wasn't something I experienced alone. My friends, cousins, and even acquaintances shared similar stories, narratives of feeling unheard, of conversations cut short, or of the fear

that their words would be dismissed. It became clear that the gap in communication between parents and children is not just a personal struggle but a widespread issue. Despite living under the same roof, many of us grow up feeling emotionally distant from our parents, unsure of how to bridge the divide.

Now that many of us stay away from our parents for university or work, the communication seems to be harder. Trina Talukdar, a student of Leading University in Sylhet, shares her relationship with her parents. "As the years passed, I found myself becoming more reserved. I started holding back, unsure of how to communicate certain emotions or problems. It's not that my parents became less approachable, but somewhere along the way, I developed a hesitation either out of fear of judgment and misunderstanding or simply the feeling that they might not fully grasp what I was going through."

The rarity of situations where both parents and children actively listen to each other forms the very foundation of the hesitation that exists between them. In many households, conversations are often one-sided — either dominated by parental authority or limited to surface-level exchanges. As a result, children grow up feeling unheard, while parents remain unaware of the emotional distance that gradually forms.

"One of the biggest issues is that young people feel neglected when meaningful communication is missing. The way parents interact with their children, both in terms of tone and engagement, has a lasting impact," says Mostak Ahamed Imran, a play therapist and educational psychologist. He adds, "In the first five years of a child's development, they need to be treated as individuals with emotions and thoughts of their own. Empathy plays a crucial role during this stage, as children are highly perceptive. They can

easily sense coldness in a parent's tone or lack of engagement, which may lead them to feel unheard or unimportant. If this pattern continues, it can shape how they express themselves in the future, making open conversations more difficult as they grow older."

As a result of this lack of open and vulnerable conversations with their parents, many teenagers and young adults struggle to navigate relationships outside their family as well. When meaningful dialogue and emotional expression are not encouraged at home, children grow up without the necessary experience to communicate their thoughts and feelings effectively. This not only affects their ability to form deep connections but also shapes the way they approach relationships, leading to the development of different attachment styles.

Aman Shahbaz, a student of Chhatak Govt. College, shares his struggle with expressing emotions, saying, "I

am willing to talk to people about my feelings, but I don't know how to. So, I end up not saying anything at all."

This sentiment speaks to the experience of many young individuals who, despite wanting to open up, find themselves unable to articulate their thoughts and emotions. The absence of early practice in meaningful conversations leads to hesitation and self-doubt, making it difficult to engage in honest discussions, even with close friends and family. Over time, this silence can create emotional barriers, reinforcing the cycle of isolation and unexpressed feelings.

To avoid the emotional exhaustion of unsurfaced emotions, it is necessary to create a space in each home where all members' opinions and say is equally heard and valued. Mostak Ahamed emphasises the importance of compassion in family interactions. He advises making mindful conversations, where each member of the family listens to others talk about their experiences without judgement, a daily practice that is free from distractions and built on genuine attentiveness.

"Being actively listened to boosts self-confidence. When individuals feel that their thoughts and emotions are valued, they develop a stronger sense of self-worth, making them more comfortable expressing themselves in different social settings. This, in turn, contributes to a more positive worldview, as they grow up believing that their opinions matter and that meaningful connections are built on mutual understanding," says Imran.

Tanbir Ahmed Mahin, a student of North South University, shares his positive experiences in this regard.

"Living alone can sometimes feel isolating, but having my parents to talk to makes a huge difference. They provide a sense of comfort and security that no one else can. Whether I'm struggling with personal issues, career decisions, or just everyday stress, opening up to them helps ease my worries. They don't judge me; instead, they listen, guide, and remind me of my strength."

He adds, "When I started to converse with my parents, it went better than I expected. I was hesitant but sometimes it only takes a little effort from both sides. Parents often understand more than we give them credit for."

At its core, having mindful conversations is about fostering a culture of mutual understanding and emotional depth. Whether it's a simple inquiry about one's day or a profound discussion on life's challenges, these moments of genuine connection strengthen relationships and contribute to the emotional well-being of all involved. Open and intentional communication nurtures trust, deepens empathy, and transforms familial bonds into sources of unwavering support. It is never too late to initiate these conversations because sometimes, all it takes is a single step to realise that understanding and connection have been within reach all along.

Ohona Anjum writes, rhymes, and studies English literature.

Keeping up with your vaccines

The immune system of children, while growing up, needs to be strengthened. The measles and rubella (MR) vaccine at nine months provides critical protection against these highly infectious diseases. A second dose of the measles vaccine at 15 months reinforces even greater and longer-lasting protection.

AHNAF TAHMEED PURNA

A world where polio, measles, and tuberculosis, once life-threatening illnesses, are just a distant memory is as near as it has ever been, thanks to vaccines. Vaccines are one of the greatest feats of modern medicine, preventing millions from disease, death, and devastation so that we, as humans, can lead healthier lifestyles. They work by basically "training" the immune system to recognise and eliminate dangerous pathogens, often even before we have been in contact with the pathogens. In Bangladesh, too, people are protected throughout their lives, from infancy to adulthood, by a well-organised and structured immunisation programme, protecting communities from outbreaks of fatal diseases.

Dr ASM Mahamuduzzaman, Assistant Professor of the Department of Pediatrics at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital, states, "Now, vaccination coverage is so huge in Bangladesh that hardly anyone is at risk of vaccine-preventable illnesses. Most kids are vaccinated now, very few are not and there should be even fewer. The vaccination rate in Bangladesh is very high now." Widespread vaccination has virtually eliminated these diseases, and vaccine-preventable diseases rarely cause severe illness compared to years past.

Vaccines are effective for a lifetime, starting from birth. The BCG vaccine against tuberculosis and the first dose of the oral polio vaccine (OPV) are administered to all newborns under the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI). These are important interventions that foster long-term immunity. The pentavalent

vaccine, which confers immunity against diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, hepatitis B, and Haemophilus influenzae type B, is administered at six weeks. There is a pneumonia vaccine called the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) whose follow-ups are given at 10 and 14 weeks, primarily to enhance immunity.

The immune system of children, while growing up, needs to be strengthened. The measles and rubella (MR) vaccine at nine months provides critical protection against these highly infectious diseases. A second dose of the measles vaccine at 15 months reinforces even greater and longer-lasting protection. Vaccines like DPT and TD provide 100 percent protection against tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis whooping cough, with their booster shots given between one and five years.

Although our vaccination rates are high, vaccine-preventable diseases do not disappear completely. While serious diseases are rare, Dr Mahamuduzzaman says, "The absence of vaccination results in hepatitis A, smallpox, typhoid, cholera, and rotavirus diarrhea. Those who have not kept up with their required immunisations are also at risk of hepatitis B, tetanus, and mumps."

This underlines the need for full immunisation and awareness programmes.

The HPV vaccine, offered to teenage girls by the government, is a potential game-changer. This is a paradigm shift in the prevention of cervical cancer, soon to be available in Bangladesh, where cervical cancer is the second most common cancer and a leading cause of death in women. This one-time vaccine leads to thousands of



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

lives being saved by preventing cancers associated with human papillomavirus before we pass through the prime years of infection between the ages of 10 and 14. Older females should especially be encouraged to receive medical consultation for the HPV vaccine's alternative options.

Extra protection is necessary for women of childbearing age, especially when they are pregnant. The TT vaccine protects infants against potentially fatal neonatal tetanus and is given in five doses, often at wide intervals. The seasonal influenza vaccine should also be given to pregnant women to prevent flu-related complications that are particularly dangerous during pregnancy. But when people become adults, they still need vaccines to prevent disease.

Older adults and people with chronic diseases are at higher risk of serious complications from influenza and, therefore, as we said, each year they are strongly advised to receive a yearly flu vaccine. Depending on individual risk factors, travel, and occupation, cholera, typhoid, hepatitis A, meningococcal disease, and rabies vaccines are also recommended. Extra shots are given at very specific locations to help protect more carefully where the infection is most likely to spread. But vaccination is not just a matter of protecting oneself, it is a community effort.

Herd immunity is the result of a reduction in the spread of contagious disease when enough of a population is immune to the disease through vaccination. This is particularly important for individuals who are unable to get vaccinated due to medical conditions, so immunisation is everyone's responsibility.

The near elimination of some diseases is an indication of how effective vaccination is, according to Dr Mahamuduzzaman. "With timely vaccination, polio and smallpox are already essentially eliminated. The incidence of diphtheria, measles, and tuberculosis with severe symptoms has declined," he points out. These success stories show how immunisation has great short-term and long-term effects on public health.

Although lifesaving, vaccines have traditionally been greeted with scepticism due to misinformation. Misconceptions and myths can fuel vaccine hesitancy, putting individuals and communities at risk unnecessarily. It is important to be trusting of science and consult with healthcare professionals for accurate

information about vaccines.

Maintaining up-to-date vaccinations is vital for long-term immunity and preventing disease resurgence. While Bangladesh has high vaccination rates, gaps remain, particularly in influenza and hepatitis B coverage. A study found that only 66.6 percent of healthcare workers had received the hepatitis B vaccine, with coverage as low as 38.8 percent among cleaning staff, despite over a quarter experiencing needlestick injuries. Influenza vaccination rates are also low, even though 86.2 percent of healthcare workers expressed their willingness to get vaccinated.

The COVID-19 pandemic made us realise the importance of vaccination, with Bangladesh's coverage rising from less than 4 percent in mid-2021 to over 68 percent by mid-2022, yet sustaining immunity requires adherence to booster schedules and tackling vaccine hesitancy. To ensure long-term immunity and prevent disease resurgence, continuous efforts are necessary to close these gaps, particularly among healthcare workers.

A dividend from immunisation is a future free from the diseases that rob communities of health and well-being, a future free of these unwanted ailments. One cannot overlook the wonders vaccines can do. So, embrace them, trust them, and let them help you in protecting yourself and your loved ones.

Purna is a third-year student at Shaheed M. Monsur Ali Medical College, Sirajganj. Reach her out at ahnafpurna@gmail.com