



## The role of psychological counseling in promoting children's mental health

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### Abstract

Children in the present era are brought up in nuclear families in which both of the parents are usually busy with their professional work. This change, combined with fast digitalization, has resulted in less interaction within families, more time spent on screens, and isolation in children. These changes have increased the vulnerability to emotional distress, study problems, and behavioral issues. These issues emphasize the imperative necessity of easily accessible and efficient psychological intervention for children.

This chapter reviews the part of psychological counseling in enhancing children's mental well-being. It addresses qualitative and quantitative dimensions of children's growth, recognizes essential challenges such as anxiety, depression, stress at school, and screen addiction, and reviews evidence-based interventions like play therapy, art therapy, and cognitive-behavioral therapy. Cultural factors in India are debated, especially the impact of stigma, paucity of professional resources, and socio-religious beliefs on counseling practice.

The chapter argues that psychological counseling is not only vital for preventing mental illness but also for fostering resilience, emotional intelligence, and holistic development. Practical implications are provided for parents, teachers, schools, and communities, emphasizing early intervention and collaborative support systems. Ultimately, counseling is positioned as a cornerstone for nurturing well-adjusted children who contribute positively to national progress.

**Keywords:** Psychological counseling, children's mental health, emotional distress, intervention

### Introduction

#### APA Dictionary of Psychology (2018)

The first Prime Minister of India Shri Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said *today's children are tomorrow's citizen*. Child's growth and development are essential not only for their well-being but also for the progress of the nation. Every child is an asset for the nation. Children are building blocks of our country. Comprehensive child development in all areas of life such as academic achievement, personality development, habit formation, managing academic stress, practicing positive attitude and development of soft skills contribute considerably to community development.

"A child is a young boy or girl between infancy and adolescence."

#### Child's Development: Qualitative and Quantitative Aspects

Qualitative changes in children include improvements in abstract thinking, gaining emotional maturity, or learning to walk. There are significant aspects of qualitative change in development such as:

1. Becoming what one wants to become. A different and capable person of oneself.
2. Developing power to understand concepts or perform jobs.
3. A positive and progressive improvement that is worthy and adding value to their life.
4. Changes in thinking patterns such as critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem solving, emotional responses such as emotional maturity, and how one interacts with other such as assertive interpersonal relationships.

Quantitative change in developmental psychology is appropriate. The spotlight on growth in quantity such as

having more words or doing more difficult calculations. It involves non-stop, gradual advancement or decline. The quantitative development is quantifiable changes in number of cells in organism, height, and weight. Some instances in developmental psychology are growth in the amount of information that can be stored and retrieved in memory, growth in vocabulary building and speaking, growth in arithmetic skills.

#### Challenges Facing Today's Children

Life for children is often challenging and rarely without difficulties. Children face many problems in their school, home, and peer relationships. Now in today's digital world online education, video games like Blue Whale Challenge, increase in screen time and many other challenges pose risk to well-being.

Anger, anxiety, depression in childhood cause academic underachievement, relationship issue, and substance abuse like drug addiction. Inability to choose what they want, negligence, hopelessness, worry about future, gossiping, learning disabilities, forgetfulness, and ADHD causes low self-esteem, self-doubt, and failure.

This is a poisonous loop that will trigger mental disorders in child's future.

#### The Role of Psychological Counseling

1. "Counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education and career goals."

#### American Counseling Association

2. "Counseling refers to professional assistance in coping with personal problems, including emotional, behavioural, vocational, marital, educational,

rehabilitation, and life-stage (e.g., retirement) problems. The counselor makes use of such techniques as active listening, guidance, advice, discussion, clarification, and the administration of tests.”

**APA Dictionary of Psychology (2018)**

- Counseling is rehearsal for new behaviours, speaking skills, and emotional responses in a protective environment of therapy to prepare for applying them successfully in their real-life conditions and interpersonal relationships.
- Counseling makes a significant difference and is adaptable across cultures.
- The individual counseling, group counseling, and family counseling are conducted based on needs.
- Counseling deals with personal development, learning and education, happiness and well-being, and empowerment.
- Early identification is important to prevent morbidity, early mortality and a significant caregiver distress.
- Optimism is determined as a key factor in achieving goals, sustainable psychological well-being, and satisfaction in life.
- Psychological symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and academic stress in children are closely associated with pessimism.
- Counseling provides opportunity for growth. It ensures relevant and reciprocal feedback. It fosters clear and equitable pathways for child’s success.

**Goals of Counseling for Children**

These are goals of counseling for children

1. Developing positive behaviour change in children.
2. Enhancing reading, writing, and arithmetic skills in children.
3. Improvement in soft skills such as emotional intelligence, team work, positive attitude and self-confidence.
4. Creating awareness about mental illness and health in overall way.
5. Management of stress and applying relaxation techniques efficiently in life.

**Cultural Considerations in India**

India is a diverse, multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, and multi-religious society. While progress has reduced some harmful traditional practices, new challenges have emerged. Stigma surrounding mental health, limited access to trained counselors in rural areas, and reliance on spiritual or traditional healing often delay professional help.

Advances in technology, increased literacy, and internet access have made people more informed. Yet, digital overload has introduced new risks such as screen addiction and cyberbullying. Counseling in India must therefore adopt culturally sensitive approaches that respect diversity while addressing contemporary challenges.

**Key Concepts: Anxiety, Depression and Stress**

1. Anxiety is studied as a future-oriented, long-acting response broadly focused on a diffuse threat, whereas fear is an appropriate, present-oriented, and short-lived response to a clearly identifiable and specific threat. Aristotle said worry, doubt, fear, anxiety and self-distrust screw up the soul.

2. Examination anxiety is characterized by activity indicating an unreasonable fear of lesser performance in examination situation.
3. Depression is a familiar mental illness indicated by sadness, loss of interest, feelings of guilt or low self-esteem, disturbed sleep or appetite, feeling of tiredness and poor focus.
4. Academic stress means the perception of individual’s academic disturbance, academic pressure, and academic anxiety.

**Prevalence of Anxiety and Depression in Children in India**

In a study Prevalence of depression and anxiety among school-going adolescents in Indian Kashmir valley during COVID-19 pandemic the researchers Asif Jeelani *et al.*, (2022) found these:

Mental Illness	Prevalence	Questionnaires Used
Depression	Overall prevalence of depression to be 16%. Range from 14.5% in adolescent boys to 18% for girls.	Patient Health Questionnaire for adolescents (PHQ-9A) and Generalised Anxiety Disorder Questionnaire (GAD-7).
Anxiety	Overall prevalence of anxiety was 20% with the range of prevalence from 14% in boys and 27.5% in girls.	

**Play Therapy**

Play therapy is an evidence-based practice and it is a form of psychotherapy method uses play to support children express their ideas, feelings, and experiences, particularly when verbal communication is difficult. Play therapist give a harmless, confidential, and accepting environment with play materials allowing children to communicate difficult issues like anxiety at their own rate.

1. Play is the natural language of the children and they communicate with activities like drawing, dancing, or playing with dolls.
2. Trust and rapport building process is necessary for therapeutic relationships.
3. The children lead the play session.
4. This is a process of achieving emotional and behavioural growth through processing difficult events and developing new coping skills.

Play therapy, art therapy and Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) also used as a form of psychotherapies to treat children in psychological counseling.

**Practical Implications**

These are efficient ways where a counselor can interact with children:

1. **Career Counseling and Mental Health Support**
  - Conduct one-on-one counseling sessions with children to investigate career goals, academic activities and individual strength.
  - Involve with parents, teachers and administrators to increase active participation in student’s career planning process.
  - Arrange and conduct group sessions on career awareness and planning.
  - Administer and interpret psychometric tools.

- Create and keep schoolchildren career profiles including socio-demographic details, academic record, and personal talents and skills.
- Recognize the mental health challenges by the schoolchildren and arrange for counseling sessions.
- Offer one-on-one counseling for schoolchildren facing anxiety, depression, suicidal tendencies, stress, or other mental health challenges.
- Create workshops and conferences for schoolchildren and staff on topics like mental health awareness.
- Offer group counseling sessions to tackle age-related or social issues and foster an empathetic environment.
- Work together with teachers and parents to develop plans for addressing mental health concerns.
- Send schoolchildren to specialized services or experts when necessary in consultation with the school head.

## 2. Community Action

- Coordinate with school principals and parents to visit rural areas to know local environmental challenges impacting students.
- Connect with community organizations to create a holistic approach to student development.
- Orient newly admitted or migrated students to help them adapt to school system.

## 3. Collaboration

- Work closely with teachers to understand classroom dynamics and individual student needs.
- Periodically interacts with class teachers to discuss student progress, behavioural observations, and strategies for improvement.
- Maintain detailed and confidential records of student profiles and counseling sessions.

## Conclusion

The development and growth of children are of paramount importance in the contemporary world. When children develop healthy habits, emotional well-being, self-management, and academic success, the likelihood of violence, delinquency, and antisocial behavior is greatly decreased. On the other hand, problems like drug addiction and drug abuse establish lifelong susceptibilities and limit the potential of youth. The best solution is to raise children through encouragement, emotional and social support, and systematic development of life skills.

Psychological counseling is at the center of this endeavor by providing children with resilience, emotional intelligence, and coping skills that protect their mental health. Counseling not only averts psychological suffering but also encourages personal development, optimism, and good living. Increased mental health awareness and early detection of psychological challenges are the starting points towards comprehending and directing a child's mind and conduct. Compassion and evidence-based counseling methods must henceforth become part of educational and community environments.

To realize this vision, policymakers need to ensure integration of trained counselors in schools, have well-defined protocols to deal with bullying and discrimination, and grant equal access to mental health facilities. Future studies need to be culturally responsive interventions that are attuned to the specific needs of Indian children. With collaboration—parents, teachers, counselors, and

policymakers—society can develop a nurturing environment that enables children to flourish and contribute to the country.

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