**Parental pressure can be at the root of childhood depression**

**Source: Ritesh Rawal, Founder, Ritesh Rawal Foundation**

Sanjana (not her real name) was a bright and sincere primary school student who aspired to become a pilot when she grew up. She would have passed with flying colours in all her examinations. Her parents were indeed proud while they encouraged her on to improve further. Sadly, they couldn’t see the fine line between helpful encouragement and harmful pressure. Once Sanjana started slipping, she continued to derail despite having a lot of potential.

There came a time during her teens when her parents were [fed](https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/everyday-explainers/what-is-fed-and-what-role-does-it-play-us-economy-7824639/) up of her attitude towards academics. She would wake up every morning to burdening pressure and her confidence came crashing down each time, and ultimately stayed rock bottom. Her parents wanted the best for her, but they were unknowingly burying her potential; and what’s worse is that the parental pressure was the main cause for her [depression](https://indianexpress.com/article/parenting/health-fitness/why-mental-health-issues-are-increasing-in-children-5645535/).

This is what happens in most households in our country with children unable to cope with the supremely high demands set by parents. Before the child is even born, they are expected to become the best engineers, doctors, lawyers, or government servants among others that the pressure becomes unbearable for them. Our children are being brought to a world which is driven by [hyper competition](https://indianexpress.com/article/parenting/family/shah-rukh-khan-abram-parenting-sports-5544916/) and perfectionism where success means the highest status, performance and appearance.

These unreasonable standards weigh heavy on children whose mental tolerance remains far away from maturing. According to W.H.O, one in every four children between the age group of 13 and 15 in India is suffering depression. The state of academic parental pressure on our children is such that every hour a student commits suicide. Depression, anxiety, bi-polar disorders, disruptive behaviour disorders and several other mental health problems are severely affecting children’s development.

Parental pressure is like a hurricane that never leaves and can take other forms such as pressure on sports, music, drama, and even socialization as well. It takes a severe toll on children’s confidence and approach towards life. Parents must understand that their children are living in a world where they may face racial, sexual, or religious discrimination, body shaming, hormonal challenges, family or financial problems, violence, etc.

All these concerns contribute to poor academic performance, lack of motivation, social interaction problems, and even self-harm. On top of all this, the stigma behind mental health in our country is another giant that stands high above children. During such circumstances, some parents even go into denial, resorting to statements such as, “My child has no such problems and this is just a slump. He/she will get over it”. But how will they “get over it” if the pressure continues to rise until the bottle bursts? Depression is not something that is gotten over with like a rip of a band-aid; it requires months and sometimes even years to heal through constant emotional support from loved ones.

Parents must begin by taking responsibility for the pressure they have caused, before causing traumatic experiences if they haven’t already. They must understand the fragile state of children’s mental well-being and assess it proactively. Children look up to their parents, and seek their love and support. Parents can therefore bring a turnaround in their child’s emotional and mental state. They must also confide in and consult with teachers, who can help in identifying symptoms and patterns of mental issues. It must also be understood that every child’s coping mechanism is different and works on a different pace.

Demanding parents must alter their entire approach towards depressed children and hold their hand in every step of the way. They must first talk to their children and work towards becoming their confidants. Parents must ask their children what they want, how they as parents can be better, whether they required counseling and professional help, whether they want to talk to someone else in the family. If pressure hasn’t worked during early adolescence, it probably never will, which is why all signs must point to emotional and mental support while pressure is thrown out of the window.