

19 BODY & MIND



IMAGINE
BY SHELJA SEN

Woo your teen back

Who said they need all that space?

speaking properly, be polite etc, etc. The list is endless and so when the teenagers roll their eyes and hold up their hands and ask us to put the brake on our parenting, part of us is comforted and we get down to finally getting back our lives. Mothers start thinking of getting back to work, finding time to do what they loved doing before the whirlwind of parenting swept their lives away. After all, the children have grown up and can manage on their own.

But in reality, they cannot manage on their own at all. Our teenagers need us in their lives as much as they did earlier when they were little. Children who disconnect from the parents and start seeking peers as their compass in life are much more vulnerable than those who still have their parents as their guiding force. *They are basically bringing each other up or worse, by the latest social media feeds.*

As Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Maté, authors of the book, *Hold On to Your Kids*, commented, "Children are generating their own culture, very distinct from that of their parents and, in some ways, also very alien. Instead of culture being passed down vertically, it is being transmitted horizontally within the younger generation."

I agree that we all did that when we were teenagers but nowhere in history has this switch been so drastic. In the absence of their parents' attentive involvement, our children are more vulnerable to seeking approval from their peers which can come at the cost of high-risk behaviour for acceptance. Precocious sex, early exposure to smoking, drinking, drugs, pornography and all the damaging things we want to protect our children from.

Now, do not get me wrong, I am not suggesting that we come down heavily on our children by checking, micromanaging, intruding, imposing more rules, interrogating every move of theirs. That will make them push back even further. What we need to do is woo and reclaim our teens before it is too late.

Boost your connect: Teenagers might like to put up this facade that they do not need you, but behind all that 'I don't care' is this little child still craving for your love. But experience has made them wary of your interest in their lives so you will need to sense your way in. I generally go and plop myself in my children's bedrooms now and then with my laptop or a book. Invariably, they start a conversation and before you know it, we are chatting away. Take genuine interest in their lives, their friends, hobbies, interests. Accept them as they are, listen to them without judgement. Do not let your hidden agenda take over (though it is tempting). Arrange special dates with your teens and let them know you will come without any lectures or advice up your sleeve. Leave little love notes on post-its, plan surprises and if they are open to it, steal a hug whenever you can. Try to give them your complete attention when they are around, show them through your words how you appreciate their presence in your lives. They might roll their eyes and call you "lame" but somewhere deep down, it will start working its magic. If at any time they share some troubles with you, try not to jump in to fix things for them. Instead, empathise and ask them what they are going to do about it or how you could help.

Ground yourself like a tree: At times



Illustration: Suvajit Dey

when you have to set boundaries, do it without fuss or anger. For example, if your daughter wants to go to a party and you do not want to send her as you do not know the parents very well, you can tell her, "I know you might be disappointed but I cannot give you permission to go to this party as I do not know the parents." She might rant, get angry at you and tell you how unreasonable you are and how amazing her friends' parents are who do not have any such restrictions. Do not take her "I hate you" personally and let her know, "You might hate me right now but I love you." Empathise with her disappointment but

stand there like a tree, completely grounded yet still nurturing.

Be mindful of the jealousy monster: Do you remember the time when your children spent hours making 'I love you' cards for you in their shaky handwriting? Now you might get a hurriedly sketched out card while their friends get painstakingly designed stuff on their birthdays as you sigh from afar. Let's admit it, we are a little jealous of these friends. They spend hours with them, chat to them endlessly and still they can't get enough of them whereas spending time with us is such a drag for them. It would be so tempting to hold on to

grudges, be full of self-pity ("After all that we do for you..."), make a jab at these friends and run them down but it really does not work. It can actually boomerang when they are pushed to choose their loyalty (you know where they will go) and create a bigger wedge between you.

Detox your relationship: By the time our children get into their teens, the intensity of our emotions can reach a toxic level especially with their "I don't give a shit" attitude. We are angry at their behaviour, fearful of their future and disappointed at how they could not be all that we wanted them to be. These emotions leak into our relationship and start contaminating it. No wonder they push so much for space as sometimes being in the same room can trigger intense reactions on both sides. They will press your riling buttons (they are experts at that) but our emotions are our responsibility so do not let them muddy the waters of your relationship with your children. Stay mindful and keep the emotional climate 'chill' and you will be surprised how much they will want to hang out with you.

'I have your back': This is a simple message every teen needs to hear from their parents. They will mess up, cross boundaries, break rules, go against the core values that you stand for and almost push you over the edge. But hang in there as they need you there through these times more than any other times. You might want to walk away, give up in exasperation and let them clean up their own mess. Of course it is their journey, their milestones that they have to cross and they will do that and come out stronger as long as they know you are in their corner. No matter what.

(Dr Shelja Sen is therapist, writer and co-founder of Children First, a child & adolescent mental health institute)

write to shelja.sen@childrenfirstindia.com

DIET DIARY

Can't control your cravings? Don't blame yourself

Most people crave carbohydrates and sugar; many are trapped in poor eating behaviour and diet patterns



BY ISHI KHOSLA



Getty Images

Start with

Avoiding

■ All processed food, wheat, corn, dairy and all forms of sugar, fruit juices and artificial sweeteners. Limit fruits to no more than one a day.

■ Avoid sugar-sweetened beverages, coffee and alcohol

Including

■ As many brightly-coloured non-starchy vegetables as you want in all meals and snacks. Try to include raw vegetables as juices and salads as well.

■ Good quality proteins in the form of sprouts, lentils, pulses, nuts, eggs, fatty fish and organic meat.

■ Healthy fats, coconut, avocado, nuts, seeds, cold pressed oils, butter, ghee and nut butters

Look out for food sensitivities like gluten and dairy. You may also have an imbalanced gut flora. Add detoxifying Epsom salt baths, deep breathing exercises, meditation, yoga or any other kind of movement you enjoy, and ensure good-quality sleep in the night. When needed, supplements and probiotics must be taken under the supervision of a qualified practitioner. Finally, remember the old adage which says 'you are what you eat'. Simply put, you can change your relationship with food. It is worth working towards curbing your nagging cravings, as well as identifying and fixing your trouble areas for a lighter, leaner, happier and healthier you.

Author is a clinical nutritionist and founder of www.theweightmonitor.com and Whole Foods India

GRETCHEN REYNOLDS

POETS AND politicians have long known that hearts and minds are linked. Now neuroscientists and cardiologists have shown again, in a study published this month in *The European Heart Journal*, that the connection is more than metaphorical. It turns out that those afflicted by a rare, serious condition known as "broken-heart syndrome" have brains that work differently from those of healthy people, suggesting that what happens in the head can hurt the heart.

The condition, known medically as Takotsubo syndrome, usually follows the experience of extreme stress, such as that felt after the loss of a loved one. It is marked by an abrupt weakening and bulging of the heart, until it begins to resemble a narrow-necked Japanese octopus trap called a takotsubo. (The doctor who first described the syndrome was Japanese.)

The scans suggest that broken-heart syndrome probably begins in the brain with its reactions — or overreactions — to stress

Researchers have suspected that the disorder — which mostly strikes women and which, while occasionally fatal, tends to resolve over time — is connected to the brain and its control over how the nervous system handles stress. The sympathetic nervous system revs up the body, including the heart, in response to danger; the parasympathetic system calms things back down; and the limbic system generates and controls emotional responses. The brain regions that regulate these systems communicate closely with one another in order to keep basic, autonomic processes, like the beating of our hearts, running smoothly.

A group of Swiss cardiologists wondered if a disruption in the interplay among these systems could be connected to broken-heart syndrome. They recruited 15 volunteers who had survived Takotsubo syndrome within the past

It's not in your head: 'Broken heart syndrome' is real

The disorder mostly strikes women and can be occasionally fatal



Illustration by Celia Jacobs

few years and another 39 unaffected subjects; neuroscientists then conducted functional MRI scans of each brain. In the healthy volunteers, the parts of the brain associated with the emotions and the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems lit up synchronously, as expected. But the communication among those areas was relatively slight in the Takotsubo survivors. The dimmed neuronal activity was most notable between the brain regions that control the sympathetic and

parasympathetic nervous systems; the physiological calming that should occur after stress was apparently less likely to take place.

The scans suggest that broken-heart syndrome probably begins in the brain with its reactions — or overreactions — to stress, says Christian Templin, the professor of cardiology at University Hospital Zurich who led the study. It's unclear if stress changed the brains of people with Takotsubo in ways that then led to heart damage or if their brains were

instead predisposed to handle stress poorly. Nor is it clear how the disturbed brain remakes the heart. But, Templin says, "stress hormones are released, which might affect cardiovascular response." The study underlines the fact that our brains and hearts are connected even more intimately than scientists have believed, Templin says. Biochemical cross talk between them affects both. Grief can break a body, so no one should hesitate to seek help in handling stress.

For people with well-controlled heart disease, living alone isn't linked with a higher risk of cardiovascular problems, a large study suggests. For five years, researchers tracked more than 32,000 patients from 45 countries. All were living with stable coronary artery disease, which means the arteries that carry blood to the heart were narrowed or clogged but hadn't been causing problems for at least several months. After accounting for factors that might influence the risk of heart problems, the researchers found that overall, compared to participants who lived with other people, those living alone had no higher risk for heart attacks, strokes, heart failure or death.

SHORT COURSE

[0-10 YEARS] Girls more likely to be affected by 'maths anxiety', says study

GIRLS TEND to be more affected by 'maths anxiety' than boys, according to a study which shows that teachers and parents may inadvertently play a role in a child developing the fear of numbers. Scientists at the University of Cambridge explored the nature and resolution of 'mathematics anxiety'. In a sample of 1,000 Italian students, the researchers found that girls in both primary and secondary school had higher levels of both maths anxiety and general anxiety. More detailed investigation in 1,700 UK schoolchildren found that a general feeling that maths was more difficult than other subjects often contributed to maths anxiety, leading to a lack or loss of confidence. **PTI**

[10-20 YEARS] Anxiety in early years may up alcohol use disorders later

CHILDREN AND teenagers who suffer from anxiety may be at an increased risk of developing alcohol use disorders in later life, a study has found. According to the research in the journal *Addiction*, about 43 per cent of associations were positive, meaning that anxiety was associated with a higher likelihood of later alcohol use disorders. Researchers noted that it is important to establish which anxious individuals consume more alcohol and develop alcohol use disorders in order to develop targeted interventions. "The evidence is suggestive but not conclusive of a positive association between anxiety during childhood and adolescence and subsequent alcohol use disorder" said a researcher. **PTI**

[20-50 YEARS] Sugary drinks linked to increased risk of early death

DRINKING SUGARY beverages is associated with a slightly increased risk for early death, a new study has found. Researchers used data about more than 1.18 million men and women and their consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages. Over about 30 years, there were 36,436 deaths. The more sugar-sweetened drinks people consumed, the higher their risk for death. After controlling for many health, behavioural and dietary characteristics, the researchers found that each additional daily 12-ounce serving of sugary drinks was associated with a 7 per cent increased risk for death from any cause, a 5 per cent increased risk for cancer death, and a 10 per cent increased risk for death from cardiovascular disease. **NYT**

[50+ YEARS] Living alone does not appear to worsen heart disease

FOR PEOPLE with well-controlled heart disease, living alone isn't linked with a higher risk of cardiovascular problems, a large study suggests. For five years, researchers tracked more than 32,000 patients from 45 countries. All were living with stable coronary artery disease, which means the arteries that carry blood to the heart were narrowed or clogged but hadn't been causing problems for at least several months. After accounting for factors that might influence the risk of heart problems, the researchers found that overall, compared to participants who lived with other people, those living alone had no higher risk for heart attacks, strokes, heart failure or death. **REUTERS**