Times Now

Children's Day: What Are We Really Giving Our Children?

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Children's Day is celebrated on 14 November every year. We try to provide the best schools, facilities, and plans for our children's future and celebrate their achievements with pride. But what is interesting is that the child we celebrate for his or her talents is also the one whose questions make us uncomfortable in our homes. We want our children to be courageous, but when they start questioning our beliefs, we get worried about discipline.

We want our children to have all the things we didn't have. But are we giving them the fears and insecurities we haven't been able to come out of? Children see our ambitions, our prejudices, who we look up to, who we look down upon, and what makes us anxious. A lot of what we pass on to our children won't find mention in the school-fee receipt or in their report card.

We Want to Correct Our Children, but Who Is Spoiling Them?

Children aren't listening, studying, or leaving their phones alone. Some concerns are valid, but before correcting the child, let's see what we are doing to make matters worse.

You tell your child to speak the truth and then ask them to say 'Daddy isn't home' when someone calls. You want them to respect everyone but treat the domestic worker differently. You tell them not to compare, but you ask how many marks a classmate got. The child is seeing all of this. What you do every day is much more than what you say occasionally.

You are anxious about your promotions, about the competition, and about your job security the whole day. Are you a different person when you come back home? The child sees the same person at the dining table and learns that the aim of life is to get ahead. And when your child gets a disappointing result in the exams, it's like someone has hurt you personally. Why do you have to feel personally humiliated by the marks your child got?

There's a deeper issue here. We start seeing our children as extensions of ourselves. Their achievements become our achievements, and their failures become our failures. The ego claims something external as its own, whether a house, a profession, a religion, or a child. Through this possession, you want to be somebody. If I need my child to be successful so that my life feels worthwhile, then I'm asking my child to make up for what's missing in me.

Let's say a child wants to study something that doesn't have the immediate promise of a huge salary. But the parents insist that the child must study something else. It's a valid concern to have financial security, but is that the only concern? Or are they also worried about social

prestige? Why does a child have to complete the life that a parent couldn't live?

Just because we've taken care of a child, educated him or her, and made sacrifices, doesn't mean we own their life. Love is about the welfare of the other. Possessiveness is about getting fulfilled through the other. The problem is that possessiveness can also make sacrifices. So, when the child's true interest goes against what we want, then whose welfare are we protecting?

The Screen, the Parent and the Question of Discipline

We are worried about children watching videos while they eat and crying when they can't have their phones. The Indian government's Economic Survey is also worried about digital addiction and suggests that families should limit screen time. Of course, young children need limits. But when the child cried, we gave the phone. When the child didn't want to eat, we put cartoons on. When we wanted some peace and quiet, we gave the screen. Now we are worried about the habit we've formed. A 2026 study from rural Haryana found excessive screen time in about half of children aged two to four, associated with screen use during meals.

It takes time to engage with a child. You have to listen, you have to play, and you have to help them explore. Many families are busy with jobs, household chores, and real financial struggles, so it can't always be said that it's because of negligence. But we have to question the life we've made for ourselves, where we have so little time for the people we claim to be working for.

Major social media and video services also collect large amounts of user data while inadequately protecting young users, according to a 2024 US Federal Trade Commission report.

Why is a child so eager to get to the screen after school? As adults, we also seek entertainment after a stressful day at work. We've filled the child's day with marks, rankings, tuition, and exams. We keep warning them that if they fall behind, their future is ruined. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, there were 14,488 student suicides in 2024. In 2014, it was 8,068. We can't say that the reason for such deaths is just one thing. But we must look at the kind of pressures young people are under. When a child is seeking refuge in videos or games, do we ever wonder what they are trying to escape from?

Even when we don't have anything urgent to do, many of us pick up the phone within minutes. We find it hard to sit quietly with ourselves. The child learns this habit from us. Let them play and explore without making everything into an achievement. And see why you pick up your phone.

Once, a mother was complaining that her daughter was following online trends instead of reading good books. But the daughter felt her mother didn't know anything about her interests. How do you talk to a child when you refuse to understand her world? Something isn't good or bad just because it's popular. If the child is into a sport or technology, then learn about it. Maybe then you can help them see something about their interests that they didn't see.

The issue of discipline is also there. When children don't listen, some parents resort to threats or physical punishment. But what are we trying to build in them? Is it about understanding, or is it about submitting to someone who is stronger? According to the World Health Organization, physical punishment carries risks of harm without benefits.

A young child might need boundaries for protection, but not pain or humiliation. If our response to difficulties is anger, how can we develop understanding in the child? Children have bodily needs, fears, and attractions. They also get conditioned by family, society, and the market. They need help in understanding the difference between what they truly need and what they want because they want to feel superior to others. Discipline must help them develop this discrimination. It's not just about obedience.

Freedom, Conditioning, and the Purpose of Education

Let's say a child is asking for an expensive phone because all his or her friends have it. Does the child need a useful phone, or does he or she want to feel that they are as good as their friends? Just saying 'it's my choice' doesn't mean it's a free choice.

The market tells us what to own, society what success is, tradition what boys and girls should be. But we can't just blame external factors. Why are we so keen on getting importance through our possessions, titles, and approval of others?

Just because someone else suggested something doesn't mean it's wrong. And just because we've come up with something doesn't mean it's free. A child being pushed into engineering by parents can be conditioned. A child who wants to do music mostly to gain admiration can be conditioned too. Even rebellion can be about depending on the approval of a different group. We must look at what we are trying to get from our choices.

Imagine two children running a race. One child enjoys running. He or she puts in the effort. He or she accepts the result. The other child thinks that if he or she wins, then he or she is worthy. If he or she loses, then he or she is worthless. The second child has made the result about personal worth. This is where the ego comes in.

It's not about protecting children from all influences and desires. Help them see when the enjoyment is turning into a struggle to prove their importance. A parent might know social prestige is hollow, yet pressure a daughter into a marriage she doesn't want because relatives might disapprove. What's the point of this understanding if it doesn't change anything? Acting on it might mean accepting uncomfortable consequences.

We spend a lot on schooling and coaching.

According to a government education survey in 2025, 27 per cent of school students were taking private coaching. It's 30.7 per cent in urban areas.

Maths, science, history, and languages are important subjects. But education is not just about preparing for exams and jobs. A child might be great at science but not care about an injured

animal. Or a child might know about the history of injustice but accept discrimination at home. Good marks can tell us about academic achievement. They can't tell us if a person understands his or her own mind.

A sharp intellect can serve a frightened ego, helping someone acquire wealth, power, and professional success without questioning why these things have become so important. Who is using that knowledge, and for what?

Give children good books. Let them do scientific inquiry. Let them be exposed to the wisdom of Saint Kabir and the Buddha. Let them test what they read. Don't just accept something because it's ancient, because it's fashionable, or because some respected person says it.

Let them ask why people are hungry. Why some people are seen as inferior. How what we consume affects animals and nature. Let them also look at their craving for admiration, their anger at disagreement, and their need to feel important. Otherwise, even a noble cause can be a way of promoting oneself.

The problem starts when this questioning is applied to the home. Why do I have to do this career? Why are the rules different for girls? Why do I have to accept a belief just because my parents have it? We celebrate intelligence. But we get uncomfortable when the children question us. We want them to be courageous. But we might call it indiscipline when they challenge our authority.

Age brings experience, but not automatically wisdom. A mistake made for forty years doesn't become right.

Admit when you don't know something. Encourage children to explore instead of just depending on the authority of a teacher or a parent.

What Future Are We Giving Them?

Parents want children to have secure jobs, good incomes, and comfortable homes. Material hardship is real. But we also ran after marks, salaries, and status. Did our achievements put an end to comparison and restlessness? Or did they give us new things to worry about? If this race hasn't given us peace, then why are we showing this as the only worthwhile path? Earning a living is important, but earnings don't have to measure your worth.

We celebrate women who win medals. But when our own daughter wants to pursue a sport seriously and wants to train away from home, we ask if it's appropriate for a girl. Safety is important. But are we looking for ways to make her pursuit safer, or reasons to stop her? Boys also have different pressures. They must earn early. They must never look weak.

They must maintain the family's reputation. Both are taught to judge themselves according to some expectations that they haven't examined. Traditional or progressive, the expectations still leave children dependent on social approval.

Their future also depends on the world we leave behind. According to UNICEF, in 2024, climate-related events disrupted schooling for about 55 million students in India. According to a 2026 report by UNICEF, 97 per cent of India's children were exposed to at least two climate hazards. We want our children to earn more and consume more. But what if our pursuit of comfort is damaging the conditions they have to live in?

Speeches about the environment don't mean anything if we don't look at our own consumption. Teaching compassion for animals is not very useful if that compassion has no bearing on what we buy or what we eat. We can't say that we are giving our children a better society if we pass on the caste prejudice, the religious hostility, and the contempt for the less fortunate.

Parenthood is an opportunity to look at our lives. Our fear of failure can become the child's anxiety; our hunger for prestige, the child's burden. Trying to be the perfect parent can itself become another pursuit of ego. We'll make mistakes. But can we recognize them? Can we correct the decisions made out of pride? Can we accept the truth even when a child points it out? It's not the child's job to reform us.

Give children books. Let them play. Let them have every reasonable opportunity to learn. But can they come to you with a failure without feeling worthless? Can they disagree with you without being accused of being disloyal? When you talk about their success, have you thought about what you expect that success to do for your sense of importance?

Sometimes, loving them can mean giving up a prestigious ambition, refusing an unreasonable family expectation, and admitting that we were wrong.

We call children the future. But their childhood is now. We can't spend these years teaching them about fear, comparison, and obedience. And then expect freedom to suddenly appear when they are adults. Before we again resolve to correct our children, let's see what we need to stop doing.

We pass on more than wealth, education, and comforts. We pass on the direction of our lives. If that direction is wrong, then the advantages we give our children might just help them go further on the wrong path.

Perhaps the greatest gift we can give them this Children's Day is to ask, with some seriousness, what we ourselves must cease to be.

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