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THE WIND BENEATH THEIR WINGS

Giving children fun-filled learning experiences make for a creative vacation. There can be no limits to what children can achieve if they are given the power of uninhibited expression. Vacations then become liberating and enriching tools in children's lives.

If we are peaceful, if we are happy, we can smile, and everyone in our family, our entire society, will benefit from our peace...

—Thich Nhat Hanh

PEACE. HAS IT BECOME INCREASINGLY elusive? Why does it resemble an enigma, the mystique of which makes it nearly unattainable? How do we strike that seemingly impossible balance in our lives? Mental health statistics give us an alarming picture of India. "Every sixth Indian needs mental health help," says



the National Mental Health Survey of India (2015–16, Insights, 31 Dec 2016). A report in *Quartz India* (8 Jan 2018) says, “In the three years since 2014, over 26,000 students killed themselves in India. The number for 2016 alone stood at 9,474—that’s one suicide every 55 minutes.”

As a community we need to wake up and acknowledge the fact that we are not helping our children become wholesome individuals. The pressure to *perform* makes children’s lives miserable and there is little that adds joy and meaning to their lives during the growing-up years. It is time for a change that shifts the focus from performance to holistic development of the child, which focuses on their being whole person in mind, body, and spirit.

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their family and community. There is little that schools can do to define how the holidays should be spent. Therefore, parents can decide what their children could do.

Every family has its own constraints of time, money, and choices. Schools can, however, help parents appreciate the importance of the time they will be spending with their children and explain how it has far-reaching effects on the latter’s health and wholeness as a person. Schools can present parents with a set of ideas to choose from, ahead of the holiday season.

The most basic thing each child needs to learn is that she or he has worth and value as an individual. Knowing that they are unique and special is essential as it gives them ‘permission’ to be themselves. This is important especially if they are different from others. We need to treat each child as a treasure with gifts to



be discovered. Parents and teachers need to explore what gifts a child has so that they can be developed and honed.

The second most important thing is to help children express who they are and what they feel. Self-expression not only validates them as persons but also helps them learn that what they think and feel matters.

Many of those who contemplate suicide are usually unable to express or share what their problems are with others. They suffer from shame, guilt, anger, fear, and sadness and don't have a means to give vent to what they feel. They may feel like a failure and view themselves as worthless, incompetent, or unworthy of love since they assume that nobody understands them.



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Anger, depression, and hopelessness lead them to the brink of the Last Resort.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In many cases having a narrow, rigid way of thinking or tunnel vision also plays a role in leading them to the brink. When parents or elders say there is only one way of doing something, it prevents the child from figuring out a way to reach a solution himself/herself. This also prevents the child from developing problem-solving skills and stifles their ability to 'think' for themselves.

We need to encourage children to think and express themselves freely. We can let them choose from a number of ways to express themselves. This exercise is nothing less than providing them with a 'safety valve' that will enable them to express whatever is bothering them. It is an important life skill every individual should have.

The child can be given a list of things to choose from, to express his/her thoughts. They could write a journal or a poem or take photographs of themselves or collect pictures that mean something to them. They could make videos using their smartphone cameras to record their experiences or even record an audio file to record their feelings. The mediums are many and the options limitless.

They could also choose to dance spontaneously or choreograph a dance; draw or paint pictures to express their feelings and thoughts. They could make a collage or use things available to craft something.

Children can also be encouraged to try their hand at sculpting using clay or other materials. They can be given a free hand to choose any other medium to express themselves.



Self-knowledge is essential and, therefore, we could start with 'Who am I?' They could share what they like-dislike or love-hate about themselves. They could share their dreams and ambitions. Children can present their work before the class. Teachers need to understand that each child needs to be encouraged with a positive word no matter what they present.

Another exercise could be to ask them to write their own life story in third person as though it happened to someone else. This is particularly useful for those who have difficulty in speaking about themselves or have had a traumatic experience.

Teachers will need to be very sensitive and take the right steps to ensure that the child's dignity is protected and that s/he feels safe after sharing their experiences with them. It could mean not sharing what they wrote with the rest of the class.

BUILDING FAMILY LEGACIES

Children and parents can also be asked to do something together as a family. This could include shooting a video during the vacation, recording a song, taking pictures, making paintings, or learning a new skill together which is documented in some form. This will enrich family relationships, make children more confident, and also enable the parents to spend 'quality time' with their children. The records of these experiences become a record for posterity that, in turn, builds valuable familial legacies.

There are other ways in which children can imbibe values and learn the importance of relationships during the holidays by visiting orphanages, old-age homes, or shelter homes for children. They also could spend time with their grandparents, learn about their



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family's cultural heritage, or find out how things were when their grandparents were growing up and document them.

Today there are children who run successful channels on YouTube with tens of thousands of subscribers. There are no limits to what our children can achieve if we become the wind beneath their wings. We can inspire them to be creative and productive with their talents, skills, and time. All we need is to have an open mind to see the possibilities that are waiting to be explored. We need to #BeTheChange so our children will have a wholesome life and better future.

This vacation is the time for that change. 

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