
UNIT 2 EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

Children and adolescents experience a range of emotional disturbances and have a variety of behavioural disturbances. For the convenience of scientific communication, these disturbances are put under the categories of syndromal emotional and behavioural disorders. Children can be anxious, depressed, fearful, aggressive, hostile, can have scholastic backwardness, psychosomatic problem, severe mental illness etc. In the majority of childhood psychological disturbances or problems, the family has varied role to play. Family environment, quality of parental relationship, disciplining style, interpersonal communication within family,

family reactions to child's behaviour pattern, experience of stress in the family, problem solving mechanisms used by the family are some of the important aspects of the family system which influences children's psychosocial development and adjustment.

Objectives

After studying this Unit, you will be able to:

- Appreciate problems of children and adolescents in the context of the family;
- Analyse the need for counselling and family therapy;
- Develop primary skills of identifying and assessing emotional and behavioural problems in children and adolescents;
- Understand various intervention techniques available for the management of emotional and behavioural problems; and
- Develop intervention skills for managing emotional and behavioural problems of children and adolescents through working with the family.

2.2 EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS

Children spend their time in studies, play activities, interacting with parents, siblings, and peer group and other such activities. If they are emotionally healthy, they get involved in these activities and enjoy them, they remain cheerful and satisfied, they tend to listen to their parents and teachers, they concentrate well in their studies, they are well adjusted, and grow up as well integrated individuals with positive characteristics. There are many factors which contribute to healthy psychosocial development of children such as temperament of the child, quality of parenting, home environment, child's competence, adequate positive experiences, adequate resources, optimal role models within and outside family etc. A psychologically healthy child experiences sense of achievement, affection, and affiliation which promotes further healthy development and adjustment.

Unlike psychologically healthy and well adjusted children, there are children who are emotionally disturbed and have variety of behavioural problems. These children have difficulty in adjusting with both home environment and school environment. Due to their emotional and behavioural problems, these children don't relate well with their family members, siblings, and friends; they don't participate in and enjoy play activities; they experience difficulties with their academics, suffer many aches and pains, failure in school, non-rewarding situations around them, and severe adjustment problems. Emotional and behavioural problems in children are seen related to activity, academic skills, emotions, psychosomatic manifestation, conduct, sexuality, and addiction.

2.3 IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT

Early identification and proper assessment of psychological disturbances in the child help in effective management and effective family counselling. The counsellor and therapy needs to make specific effort to identify the nature and type of problems, possible determinants of the problems, maintaining factors, effects of the problems, and various positive factors in the child and environment which can further be promoted as part of counselling strategies.

2.3.1 Sources of Emotional and Behavioural Problems in Children and Adolescents

The sources of emotional and behavioural problems in children can be child-related, family-related, school-related and related to other environmental situations. Problems in the child like poor intelligence, sensory defects, mild brain damage, and acquired defects can be the source of problems. A family with parents who are quarrelsome and difficult, are very anxious and ambitious and expect too much from the child, are indifferent to the child, and use excessive punishment is likely to be the source of problems in the child. Besides, sibling rivalry and jealousy, financial problem at home, parental interpersonal problems, and unusual home environment (conflict, extra-marital relationship, and alcoholism) make children emotionally disturbed. School related factors such as academic pressure or stress, punitive and critical teacher, bully classmate or senior etc. contribute significantly in the development of emotional and behavioural problems in children. Similarly, there are factors present in neighborhoods, which may create psychological problems in children, for instance bad company, conflict with neighbourhood, inequality, violence etc.

2.3.2 How to Identify and Assess

Identifying that a child is suffering from emotional and behavioural problems is essential for a counsellor in order to provide his or her services to the child and the family. Some problems can be identified easily but some problems require specific skills and techniques in order to identify them. A counsellor can look for some indicators of emotional and behavioural problems in children; some of them are listed here:

- Frequent absence from school
- Irregularity in homework
- Poor or no participation in play or recreational activities
- Staying alone
- Complaints of various aches and pains during classes
- Complaints from others regarding his/her conduct
- Poor test performances
- Not attentive in the class
- Being irritable, stubborn, and/or aggressive
- Refusal to go out of home
- Frequent crying spells
- Frequent fights with friends and/or siblings
- Poor appetite and/or sleep

Presence of any of these indicates possibility of emotional and behavioural problems. Careful observation of child's behaviour & his academic performances, use of screening tools, parent's interview, and use of psychological/behavioural tests are some of the methods of identifying and assessing problems of children. Children's

Mental Health Screening Questionnaire can be used for identification of psychological problems or mental health problems in children.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE
(Sinha, U. K. & Kapur, M., 2006)

Name: _____ Age: _____ Gender: M / F
Regn No: _____

Instruction:

Here some questions are given regarding the behaviour and feelings of the child. Kindly think of the child's behaviour in last few months or weeks and provide answer either in 'Yes' or in 'No' to all the questions. Remember this will help in the detection of possible emotional and behavioural problems in the child. Thanks for your co-operation.

1. Has there been any problem in his/her behaviour? Yes / No
2. Does he/she remain confused or lost? Yes / No
3. Does he/she appear sad or gloomy? Yes / No
4. Does he/she get angry easily? Yes / No
5. Does he/she have many complaints against other children? Yes / No
6. Does he/she have difficulty in concentrating in studies? Yes / No
7. Is he/she stubborn? Yes / No
8. Does he/she have various aches and pain? Yes / No
9. Does he/she have sleep problem? Yes / No
10. Does he/she have difficulty in sitting still at one place? Yes / No
11. Does he/she become violent or aggressive? Yes / No
12. Does he/she break rules frequently? Yes / No
13. Is he/she excessive fearful? Yes / No
14. Does he/she smoke or chew tobacco? Yes / No
15. Does he/she have difficulty in understanding? Yes / No

Total Score
(No. of Yes)

Examiner's Signature

Once it is identified that the concerned child is likely to have emotional and/or behavioural problems, a systematic effort should be made to explore the sources of these problems through an interview with the child, the parents and other significant persons. You as a counsellor/family therapist must try to establish a convincing explanation about the relationship between the sources of the problems and the emotional and behavioural manifestations of the problems in the child. This explanation must be based on the elicited facts and not on assumptions or any kind of bias. Assessment of children's problems also includes scaling the intensity, frequency, antecedents or triggers, and immediate and long-term consequences of specific behavioural or emotional problems. Use of Visual Analogue Scale can be the simplest method for assessing severity of problems. Psychological tests help in identification and assessment of the nature and the severity of the problem.

Methods of Assessment:

- Observation
- Academic Performance
- Screening Tools
- Interview with Parents
- Use of Psychological Tests

In order to use family based intervention strategy, it is vital to explore some of the important aspects of family structure and functioning including quality of interpersonal relations among the members, interaction and communication pattern, disciplining and controlling mechanisms, problem solving strategy, regulation of emotions, availability of rewarding and non rewarding experiences within the family, presence of aberrant situations like domestic violence, alcoholism, mental illness, chronic and disabling physical problems, ongoing stress etc., as these factors have significant influence on children's emotional and behavioural problems.

Family factors to be explored:

- Communication
- Problem solving
- Interpersonal relations
- Rewarding experiences
- Stressors

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: a) Read the following question carefully and answer in the space provided.

b) Check your answer with that provided at the end of this Unit.

1. For each of the following statements, state whether it is 'Correct' or 'Incorrect':
 - i) Children with emotional and behavioural problems are well adjusted at home and school. _____
 - ii) Early identification and assessment of psychological disturbances in the child can help in its management through effective counselling and family therapy. _____

2.4 MANAGEMENT

2.4.1 Play Therapy

Play therapy is a form of psychodynamic therapy, which provides children an opportunity to deal with their emotional difficulties and develop control over their external problematic behaviour. In play therapy, play is used as an adjunct to communication as well as a vehicle of communication between the child and the therapist. The child is introduced to specific play setting with different play materials with the aim of achieving a therapeutic effect with a cathartic resolution of conflict or tension through the child's play. Play helps the child develop and sustain relationship with the therapist, which has central therapeutic significance. In guided play therapy, the therapist guides the child's play in an effort to help the child achieve psychological integration.

Play therapy as used by Axiline (1947) is considered as most effective play therapy for children. Based on the ideas of Rogerian concept of 'Client-centered therapy' Axiline's play therapy uses play to reflect back to the child his states, wishes, or convictions without attempting interpretations of unconscious motives or conflicts.

2.4.2 Behaviour Therapy

Behaviour therapy refers to a set of related assumptions, principles, and techniques that are rooted in learning theories and used to change human behaviour. Behaviour therapy assumes that most behaviour develops and is maintained according to the principles of learning. Therefore behaviour can be modified with the help of the same learning principles. In behaviour therapy, observable target behaviour is attempted to be changed with the help of different behavioural techniques. Modeling, shaping, exposure, behavioural practice, differential reinforcement techniques, time-out etc. are some of the important behaviour therapy techniques used with children.

2.4.3 Cognitive Therapy

Cognition plays a very important role in the way individuals feel and act, and this is true for children too. Cognitive therapy believes that behavioural and emotional problems are a result of dysfunctional, irrational beliefs and distorted cognition. Identification and exploration of irrational and dysfunctional nature of cognition and intervention to make it functional and rational are the essence of cognitive therapy. Cognition here means the process and manner of interpreting experiences and events around us and assigning meanings to these events.

2.4.4 Supportive Therapy

Many a times individuals are so entrapped in their psychological disturbances that they find it difficult to handle situations on their own; they need encouragement, guidance, and support to sort out their problems and to deal with their difficulties. Supportive therapy helps such individuals come out of their sufferings effectively. In supportive therapy, the therapist focuses on the present situations and sufferings and helps the client by providing opportunity to ventilate, share, and release pent-up feelings; by providing guidance, suggestion, encouragement for positive action, education, clarification, and environmental manipulation.

2.4.5 Parent Training

Parent training empowers parents to deal with emotional and behavioural problems of children through the process of parenting. Parents are trained by the therapist to attend to the positive behaviour of the concerned child, to reward positive behaviour, to ignore some of the unwanted and maladaptive behaviour, and to exercise control and punishment for highly undesirable behaviour. Parents are also trained for using behavioural techniques of positive reinforcement, distraction, punishment, and skills training.

2.4.6 Family Therapy

Structure of family, quality of relationship among the family members, quality of communication, emotional bond, value system, conflict resolution, disciplining pattern, rituals and taboos of the family have significant influence on the mental health and psychological problems of the family members. Family therapy attempts to look at the problems of any member as manifestation of dysfunction in family system including disruption of bond, communication problem, disruption of boundary, pathological handling of conflicts, and other such difficulties within the family. Nature and sources of interpersonal conflicts and their manifestations within the family are identified, explored and measured and relevant interventions are made in family therapy with the participation of each significant unit of the family. Different techniques including behaviour techniques, cognitive and problem solving techniques are used in family therapy.

2.5 FAMILY BASED INTERVENTION

2.5.1 Education to the Family

Acknowledgement of problems and acceptance of responsibility for solution are prerequisite for the family for initiating the process of professional counselling for emotional and behavioural problems of children. Acknowledgement of the fact that the child has problems and needs specific intervention sets appropriate ground for help seeking behaviour of the parents and significant others. It also ensures proper compliance to the process of counselling and therapy. Parents of disturbed children need to be educated by the counsellor so that they can understand the nature of problems the child has and possible remedies for these problems.

Many a time parents have difficulties in accepting that their children have emotional and/or behavioural disturbances and they require counselling/family therapy. Such difficulties may arise due to stigma, ignorance, fear and guilt due to their perceived contribution/role in the development of problems in the child, and some other worries parents have. Counsellor/family therapist is required to be aware of any such reason for parents' resistance to acceptance.

The counsellor/therapist must explain to the parents the problem of the child, the factors that are contributing to and maintaining the problem, the solution available, their role and responsibility in helping the child to come out of the problems, importance of parenting and family environment in controlling child's problems etc. While educating the family on these aspects, the counsellor:

- Communicate in simple understandable language
- Allow adequate time for information to set in
- Show confidence, acceptance and patience
- Satisfy their queries
- Avoid argument
- Tell them with clarity that it is not their fault
- Wait for their reaction and respect their reactions
- Assure reasonable commitment
- Avoid false promises
- Help them take appropriate decision regarding intervention

2.5.2 Communication Training

Proper and healthy communication between parents, children, and other significant family members play an important role in maintaining sound psychosocial development of children. Faulty communication creates difficulties and spoils relationship and subsequently contributes to emotional and behavioural problems. A large amount of work is required in counselling for emotional and behavioural problems of children and adolescents. A simple, direct, and focused communication is considered better than a difficult, indirect, and vague communication. Adult to adult faulty communication has devastating impact on children. Similarly communication full of critical comments and hostility is considered unhealthy from mental health point of view. Pathogenic communication between parents and other adult family members provide a model for children to emulate. Hostile, critical, vague, and unnecessarily elaborative communication from parents or others to the child, may lead the child to be angry or hostile or confused or stressed. Thus communication training is an important area to work with in counselling of affected family.

In communication skills training you must identify faulty nature of communication being practised in the family. After identifying this, the family has to be clearly explained the link between communication and its consequences indirectly without putting any blame on anybody. Then after appropriate ways of communication are suggested, the family members are encouraged to practise them.

2.5.3 Behavioural Management Training

Adequate behavioural management is the most essential aspect of helping the family with an emotionally and behaviourally disturbed child through counselling and family therapy. The counsellor can help parents/family members learn skills to manage behavioural problems of children by explaining and demonstrating simple procedures to them. The components of behavioural management training include behavioural analysis and assessment, identification and attention to positive behaviour, reward for positive behaviour, weakening or elimination of maladaptive behaviour with the help of appropriate behavioural techniques. **Behavioural assessment & analysis** is done to record nature, frequency, severity, origin, and maintenance of behavioural problems in children. Parents may be trained to record all these in a particular manner on the following formats including A-B-C format (Table 2.1) and behaviour record (Table 2.2). This recording and analysis help the parents understand as to where intervention is needed, at A or C level and how one's behaviour is changing over time with intervention.

Table 2.1: A-B-C Record Sheet

Antecedents (A) Situation immediately before problem behaviour has occurred	Behaviour Problem (B) Exact description of what is expressed as problem behaviour	Consequence (C) Situation after the problem behaviour has occurred

Table 2.2: Behaviour Record Form

Description of Problem Behaviour	Frequency of Occurrence Per Day					
	Day1	Day2	Day3	Day4	Day5	Day6

2.5.4 Parenting Skills Training

Parenting is a process of providing complete care to the child, in order to foster the child's physical, emotional, social, occupational, and interpersonal growth and competencies. In order to provide adequate parenting, parents must ensure that the child gets adequate attention, affection, stimulation, exposure, reward, and encouragement. Principle of 'love, limitation, and let them grow' popularly known as **Three L's** is a highly recommended strategy for parents to facilitate sound psychological development of children. Parenting children and adolescents today demands specific interactional skills. A healthy parent-child interaction helps, parents create a conducive context for their children to grow and mature; and children to build enough confidence and self-esteem, to develop competence - life skills, and to expand potentials to their maximum. Needless to say that healthy interaction between parents and children protects against a variety of negative conditions including conflicts, stress, anxiety, addiction, violence, rage, failure and maladjustment.

Specific parenting behaviour and skills have been examined, particularly in relation to the development of aggressive and disruptive behaviour. Parents of aggressive children are characterized as highly punitive and critical to their children and more likely to attribute their children's misbehaviour to more dispositional, intentional and stable causes compared to parents of non-problem children. These attributional processes tend to become more pronounced over time. Child-focussed, responsive, and moderately controlling parenting attitudes have been positively associated with self-esteem, academic achievement, cognitive development and fewer behavioural problems. Parents of children with emotional and behavioural problems need to be encouraged and guided to opt and use such parenting style. Counsellors can use the following as guidelines for interacting with children to suggest to parents of disturbed children.

Suggestions for parents of disturbed children:

- Accept that your child has grown-up to the stage where one's independent identity begins to develop.

- Remember that your child has a strong need to be independent and to have own personal space.
- Teenagers have a lot of inside work to do that does not relate to you; allow them some freedom to complete their work.
- Observe and notice their interests and respect them both in words and in action.
- Be available and emotionally involved with your teenager.
- Tell your teenager that you are always there to support and help whenever there is difficulty.
- Spend time with your teen-aged child discussing and sharing together.
- Convey in clear words to your teenager that he/she is important for you and you care for him/her.
- Remind teenagers that they are studying and working hard for themselves; not for you. Yes, tell them that you feel happy and satisfied seeing them study hard.
- Be flexible in setting guidelines for your teenager by allowing reasonable negotiations but be firm in their enforcement.
- Validate and support emerging mature and autonomous behaviour of your child.
- Help them take their own decisions after providing them with all necessary information.
- Look for and find opportunities to praise, congratulate, reward, and respect your teen-age child.
- Listen to them and ask questions.
- Allow some responsibilities to them and trust their capability.
- Validate and encourage their own capacity to cope.
- Help them learn from their mistakes through self-reflection and discussion.
- Avoid labeling, judging, and devaluing.
- Don't take interactions personally.
- Help them ask and explore important questions.
- Support their dreams, while helping them to plan, organize, and follow activities to completion.
- Ask if something is wrong when behaviour changes.
- Respect (you don't have to like) their peer choices.
- Low-key, accepting, calm parents hear more. Kids keep talking to them.
- Permit conflict and guide discussions.
- Help adolescents develop disciplined conformity to society's necessary rules and expectations.

- Value stimulating conversations with different points of view.
- Encourage them to adopt a personal value system.
- Remember and remind them that adolescence is a process.
- Foster a sense of comfortable continuity.
- Let them set the pace and timing of close and distant interactions

Children are different temperamentally, they have age specific psychological needs, and adolescents often have lots of anxiety related to their own development, career, future, relationships and physical appearance. The parents need to be made aware of the fact that a balanced understanding of all these facts and wise use of interactional style from the list above will help them to interact effectively with the child.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: a) Read the following questions carefully and answer in the space provided.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of this Unit.

1. What is the significance of play therapy?

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2. Why is it important that counselling and therapy provided in case of emotional and behavioural problems in children and adolescents, be family based?

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2.6 SPECIFIC ISSUES

2.6.1 Cultural Sensitivity

You as a counsellor/therapist must be sensitive to the cultural values of your clients. In the absence of adequate cultural sensitivity, counsellor are likely to be incomplete in their endeavours.

2.6.2 Referral to Specialist

The counsellor should have adequate clarity about her or his professional liabilities and limitations. An objective assessment of the severity and complexity of problems of a particular child is essential and given the possibility of diagnosable psychological

problems, the counsellor must be able to decide and suggest referral to the specialist. If the given child has signs of depression, expresses suicidal wish, harms himself, is hostile and violent, has experienced severe trauma or abuse, is suffering from a long time, has severe behavioural disturbances; the counsellor should prepare the parents of the child and/or other family members for consulting a specialist e.g. Psychiatrist.

2.6.3 Optimization of Expectations

Many a time parents of disturbed children keep and display unrealistic or too much expectations from the counsellor. And many a time counsellors are influenced by the expectations of parents and they also set their expectations high. The counsellor should always try to keep his/her expectation from the counselling at optimal or realistic level. Unrealistic or too much expectation may lead to frustration and a sense of failure. In addition, the counsellor should help parents to keep their expectations realistic by educating them about the nature of problems and what can be achieved through various methods.

2.6.4 Mental Health of the Parents

While identifying problems in children, a careful attempt to recognize mental health problems in parents is highly advisable in the interest of effective management of children's problems. Mental health of parents influences mental health of children by affecting the environment in the family, by providing a particular role model, by shaping quality of parenting process, by affecting parent-child bond in particular manner, and by influencing their involvement in help seeking process. A parent suffering from anxiety may not be able to provide secure attachment with the child; similarly a parent with depressive disorder may not be able to offer adequate parenting, and a parent with alcohol or substance abuse problem will not be able to keep the environment within the family healthy and to provide an ideal role model for the child. Mental illness in parents can be a contributory factor for emotional or behavioural problems in children, can negatively affect intervention process, can trigger non-compliance to counselling/family therapy techniques, and can further complicate the situation of the child. Hence a careful scanning of parental mental health is necessary for the counselling process to attain its goal.

2.6.5 Maintenance of Professional Relationship

A mutually trusting, supporting, warm, and confidential relation between the counsellor and the client is essential for effective counselling. However, it is necessary for the counsellor/therapist to work with the client within professional boundaries. The moment personal elements enter professional relation; it no longer remains a professional relation and loses its professional effect on the client. You as a counsellor must always keep the following points in mind when you practise counselling with your client:

- Work with a specific time frame and have a fixed time for the session
- Always focus on your target in the counselling session
- Allow only relevant aspects of discussion in the session
- End session on time and appreciate client to cooperate
- Never take undue advantage of your client's position

2.7 LET US SUM UP

This Unit sensitizes us to the sources of emotional and behavioural problems in children and adolescents, and provides guidelines regarding how these problems may be identified and assessed. It then highlights the various therapies that are beneficial in the management of these problems. The significance of family based intervention – counselling and family therapy, has been emphasized, and various related specific issues enumerated.

2.8 GLOSSARY

Behaviour therapy : Refers to a set of related assumptions, principles, and techniques that are rooted in learning theories and used to change human behaviour.

Optimization of expectations : Expectations being neither too low nor too high.

2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1. (i) Incorrect
2. (ii) Correct

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1. Play therapy is a form of psychodynamic therapy which provides children an opportunity, through play, to deal with their emotional difficulties and develop control over their problematic behaviour. The specific play setting provided to the child is aimed at achieving a therapeutic effect with a cathartic resolution of conflict or tension through the child's play. Play also helps in therapeutic rapport formation and communication between the child and therapist.
2. It is important because:
 - i) the child's emotional and behavioural problems could well be a manifestation of dysfunction in family system.
 - ii) It sets the ground for appropriate involvement of parents and other family members;
 - iii) It ensures proper compliance to the process of counselling and therapy.

2.10 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1. What are common sources of emotional and behavioural problems of children? How important it is for the counsellor to identify them in counselling process?
2. What are different methods of assessment a counsellor can try to carryout appropriate assessment in counselling?
3. What are different therapies available for management of emotional and behavioural problems of children and adolescents?
4. What are different aspects of family education in counselling for emotional and behavioural problems of children and adolescents?
5. What measures can a counsellor take to maintain professional relationship with the clients?
6. Why it is important to pay attention to parents' mental health in family counselling and therapy for children's problems?
7. What are important components of behavioural management training?

2.11 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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