

Head to our social media channels @spinneysdubai for a series of five-minute morning meditations by Dubai-based yogi Roxanne Seymour-Marsh (@roxymarshyoga). These include Lotus Breath to encourage emotional intelligence in young children, Mantra Meditation for teens to help increase concentration, and Nadi Shodhana to instil balance and clarity for the whole family.



BULLYING

"The best way to talk about bullying is to speak to your child openly about it. This lets them know you are there to help them," says Aggarwal. "Tell them that bullying is unacceptable and that no matter what the bully threatens, your child must never keep it a secret from you or the teacher."

It is also advisable to educate children about different kinds of bullying, including cyberbullying, and to formulate strategies for them to protect themselves. Afridi agrees: "I think we are moving away from traditional, physical bullying to cyberbullying and relational bullying – which can be far more detrimental to the wellbeing of the child."

Most schools now have iPads and laptops as part of their curriculum, and many children also have their own mobile devices. Afridi says: "It is critical for parents to spend time discussing 'netiquette', digital citizenship and cyberbullying with their children."

Afridi also recommends that parents install monitoring apps on household smart devices.

But what if your child happens to be the bully? "As parents, we often worry about our children being bullied, but we are sometimes unaware that our children could be unintentionally displaying hurtful behaviour towards others," Shakour says. "Share stories of kids playing nicely together, introduce a character that acts aggressively and discuss how the other children might deal with a person like this by telling a teacher or moving away from the situation."

SEEKING HELP

The experts agree that parents should take an active role where mental health is concerned. "I encourage parents to seek counselling first, in order to get a professional opinion on their parenting style and how it could be influencing their children," says Shakour. "We should look at ourselves and address our own issues before we do that for our children. Most of the time, we will find that when we change certain things in ourselves for the better, our children start changing their behaviour as well."

Afridi goes a step further, saying: "Parents should take a preventative approach to mental health, as we do with physical health. The world is becoming increasingly overwhelming and our children are obviously ill-equipped to deal with it, as evidenced by the sharp increase of mental illnesses in children and adolescents in the last decade."

Early intervention is key according to Afridi: "I would advise parents not to wait for problems to surface before they start working with a professional. Instead, invest time and energy to allow kids to learn about emotional intelligence, emotional regulation, their self-identities and skills for stress management."



MUNA SHAKOUR from Inside Out with Muna (insideoutwithmuna.com) says that it's important to create a **safe space** in your home. Your children need to know they can come to you with any problem, **without fear of judgement**.



SALIHA AFRIDI from The Lighthouse Arabia (lighthousearabia.com) has the following advice to help children to process and understand their negative emotions:

Notice the emotion – Feelings about the first day of school can surface weeks in advance. Start open-ended conversations about their thoughts and feelings.

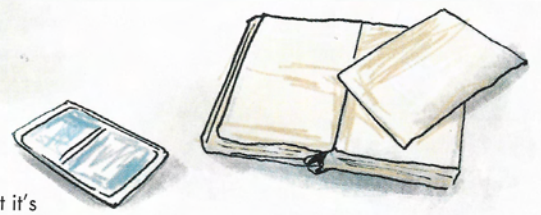
Reflect and validate – We say "name it to tame it". If you see that your child is worried or anxious, name the feeling. This helps to defuse the emotions quickly and creates an opportunity for children to develop their emotional vocabulary.

Externalise the emotion – As you talk about their school jitters, ask your kids to draw the emotion. What would it look like, what colour would it be, and how big would it be? This allows them to relate to the emotion rather than be consumed by it.

Quieten the emotion – Teach your kids calming tactics such as breathing exercises, yoga movements, drawing, writing or visualisation. Each child will have something that works for them.

Wait it out – Rather than aiming to eliminate stressful or anxiety-inducing situations, we should be teaching kids how to quieten their emotions and live with them.

Stay supportive – Offering support and equipping kids to cope with their emotions are two of the best gifts we can give them.



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