

## Is blue whale eating our teens?

**Sanjeev P. Sahni**

■ feedback@livemint.com

Technology is a double-edged sword. It can enrich the learning experience and serve as entertainment for children and adolescents. However, it also brings with it a few dangers such as the Blue Whale Challenge. The Blue Whale challenge has affected adolescents from the East to West globally with cases being reported from Argentina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, China, Colombia, Georgia, India, Italy, Kenya, Paraguay, Portugal, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Spain, United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

The Blue Whale challenge is an internet game which consists of series of tasks assigned to players by administrators during a 50-day period and it culminates with suicide. Tasks include waking up at 4:20 AM, climbing on a crane, carving specific phrase on own hand, standing on a bridge etc. The term Blue Whale originated from the phenomenon of beached whales which is linked to suicide.

Globally psychologists are trying to reason “Why are only some adolescents engaging themselves in this game?”, “Will removal of Blue Whale from platforms like Google, Facebook and other resolve the mental health problems such as suicide ideation?”, “Are such games indicating us how mentally vulnerable our children have become?” or

“How can we help adolescents as adults to combat life stressors?”

Just saying that pressures on adolescents are enormous and that they are being confronted by a dysfunctional educational system, lack of parental and joint family support, overworked and over-stressed parents will not resolve the issue at large. We need to provide more love, care, affection and most importantly listen to what our children and adolescents want to tell us at school and home.

As adults, we often brush-off what the adolescents want to communicate to us, but we need to encourage them to talk and make sound decisions, encourage them to come up with ideas so that they can be creative and finally, be the role models and act in the same way as we expect our children to be.

Research studies have documented that feeling of hopelessness, feeling of not being able to contribute in school or at home, inability to perform daily routine tasks sets the route for depression in children and adolescents. Regularly reprimanding the child of all his actions sets in the sense of hopelessness.

In adolescence, academic performance is highly associated with self. Failure to perform at school may affect how adolescents think about themselves. The linkage



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between pressure to excel in school and suicide ideation in children and adolescents is established by research. Furthermore, suicide ideation increased with high experience of stress during the examination. East Asian cultural research studies mention that stress-suicidal ideation came from family lifestyle and cultural demands for academic excellence. Constant parental pressure to excel in school and score high grades affected children's thought processes. Apart from academic performance, in India few other reasons like not attending school or college, premarital sex, physical abuse at home, the experience of sexual abuse, hostile environment and psychological distress were observed to increase suicidal ideation in adolescents.

As adults we need to engage our children and adolescents in

meaningful activities and not pressurize them to excel scholastically but to learn the way of life, provide them encouraging positive feedback, ask children and adolescents to engage in more outdoor activities with peers and keep all lines of communication open. As adults and parents talk to children and adolescents, even if they may not make much sense to adults, encourage them to talk. Lastly, media too needs to play a mature role.

The Blue Whale challenge gained pace in India after media reports. This led to curiosity among teenagers and indirectly encouraging them to search information.

**Sanjeev P. Sahni is Principal Director, Jindal Institute of Behavioral Science**