

Saagar Shah, 14, was adamant on having a laptop of his own. To press his point he even went without food for three days. Ultimately, his mother Rima intervened and took Saagar to a psychotherapist. After a series of sessions, the therapist came to the conclusion that this was not a simple case of a teen, tantrum. In Saagar's case his father needed psychotherapy, not the boy...

Usually parents are the biggest role models for their children. They need to realise that their actions and behaviour have a tremendous impact on kids who seek to follow in their footsteps.

Moreover, kids are very smart nowadays

prompted to have an affair too."

Many people who indulge in smoking, drinking and extramarital relations don't pause to think that their kids will take a cue from them. Psychologists say that most teenagers caught for drinking, smoking or underage sex have confessed they have picked up these practices from their parents.

Many kids tend to imbibe rash behaviour and show disrespect for authority figures. In case of Jayesh Madhu, 18, who was booked on a criminal complaint for beating up a traffic cop when

that the parents need counseling."

(Names have been changed on request)

Kids ape bad role models

The recent award-winning film 'Udaan' raises several issues regarding inappropriate parental behaviour and its impact on children

and tend to perceive the discrepancy in what their parents preach and what they actually do.

Dr Vinod Goyal, one of the leading psychotherapists in the city who dealt with Saagar's case, said, "The boy broke down and revealed that he wanted a separate computer because his father used to watch porn sites using the same machine and not delete the history." Saagar felt a deep sense of shame because of his father's behaviour and was embarrassed in front of his peers who used to share his computer for project work.

Saagar's is not a solitary example. There is a growing group of desperate parents in town, occupied in fulfilling their own fancies and breaking taboos not realising that young, innocent eyes are watching them. And these eyes are not just observing but absorbing.

Take the case of Rajani Patel, 17, from a reputed school in the city who was recently caught drunk and nude in a car with her schoolmate. Patel's parents managed to avoid the legal complications of her act and took her to a psychotherapist. Goyal, who counselled Patel, said, "The girl gradually opened up after a few sessions and told me that both her parents are having extramarital affairs. That's why she was

he was caught for rash driving and jumping the signal, the key issue was parents' attitude towards the police.

Dr Vinod Goyal, who handled Jayesh's case, said, "During the sessions the kid revealed that both his parents were often caught for jumping signals and had often shouted at the traffic cops for demanding money. The kid learnt the trick of making allegations against others to hide his faults."

Kids are too smart and tend to perceive the discrepancy in what the parents preach and what they actually do. Dr Param Shukla, an adolescent psychiatrist said, "We often begin the counselling sessions with the kids and then realise

'Digital escape' is what they look for

Lack of warmth and attention from parents drives them to gadgets

Priya Adhyaru-Majithia

Mayank Shah, 15, watched television for about six hours a day. He gradually stopped mingling with his aunts, uncles and grandparents. When his parents realised what TV addiction was doing to him they took him to a therapist.

Dr Prashant Bhimani, hypnotherapist, who treated Shah said, "Mayank's mom would watch saas-bahu serials while his father watched news channels once they got home from work.

The boy felt neglected and began watching TV once he got back from school and tuitions. The saas-bahu serials filled with venomous characters turned him against his close relatives." Dr Bhimani counselled Mayank for a few

sessions and later diverted the counselling to his parents, who had fuelled this addiction in their son.

Many tech-savvy kids like Shah are too busy playing games, listening to I-pods, networking on Facebook, texting on their mobile or are engrossed in TV watching.

The number of worried parents who want to draw their kids away from digital entertainment devices are rising in metros and mini-metros.

But tackling this menace is not an easy task, say psychologists who ask parents whether they have the time to spend with their kids if they withdraw from the digital world.

They tell parents that kids are slipping away and looking for a 'digital escape' due to lack of warmth and affection from their parents.

"Kids want attention and time," said Dr Param Shukla, child psychiatrist.

"However, parents do not have time and try to make up to kids by buying them gadgets to keep them entertained. Later, when the kids are addicted to these gadgets parents

come running to counsellors to help them tackle the mania," he added.

However, when Shukla asks the anxious parents whether they can spend time with their kids, take them for an outing or play with them, they reply in the negative.

In another case Suman, 17, accidentally happened to retrieve chat history of her father who flirted with many women online.

She was excited and lost sleep chatting with many unknown people. Dr Vinod Goyal, the psychotherapist who treated her, said, "This affected her health and led to lack of concentration on studies. After a series of sessions, I could figure out what had prompted her to flirt on the net." Goyal, now counsels Suman's father on the same issue.

(Names have been changed on request)



Graphic: Manan Dave

Aggression breeds in UNHAPPY HOMES

At times, kids from such homes having marital disharmony also take to crime out of frustration

Eleven-year-old Rahul Verma banged his head hard on the glass door which shattered into pieces. He had severe multiple wounds. How did Rahul learn to vent his anger or frustration in such a brutal manner?

Psychologists and hypnotherapists in the city who deal with severe child aggression, depression and crime cases reveal that children who witness parental conflict and aggression in homes are more prone to such actions. In Rahul's case, his father used to throw his plate if not served properly.

Domestic violence, aggression and constant conflicts between parents are one of the prime triggers of frustration among kids. While a few succumb to the trauma that a family breakdown brings and commit suicide, many who struggle to cope with it express their frustration by indulging in rash behaviour, screaming or self-beating. Children, who witness rash and unrestrained behaviour from parents often unconsciously ape it, say experts.

Dr Param Shukla, an adolescent psychiatrist, said, "While dealing with complaints of aggression, rash behaviour or extreme irritability in kids, shrinks often begin with the intensive counselling sessions with the kid. However, on probing the matter, they often realise that the parents need counselling."

Shukla recently handled the case of 12-year-old Vihan who beat his younger sibling with a broomstick and slapped his mother. "The mother was crying inconsolably and requested me to convince Vihan that hitting was not permitted. When I began my session with the boy, he pertinently asked if that was so why his father was allowed to use the broomstick to hit his mother or slap her at will," said Shukla.

He counselled the parents and insisted that they alter their behavioural pattern. "I told them that they should control their temper and stop all verbal and physical violence, especially in the presence of kids. Otherwise, kids are bound to repeat what they see their parents do," he added.

There are a few kids who turn to crime and indulge in petty thefts to cope with the feeling of unease they develop due to their parents' misdeeds.

Nishant Thakkar, 17, was booked for stealing a bike and underage driving. While Thakkar could dodge the legal complications, he could not hide the facts from his hypnotherapist, Dr Prashant Bhimani.

"Only during the hypnotic trance, the boy divulged the fact that he stole bikes and cars for the sheer thrill of it," said Bhimani. The thrill helped Nishant overcome the deep-seated shame that he felt after he caught his father with a call-girl, Bhimani revealed. "Later, Nishant began blackmailing his father to protect him from legal proceedings each time he was caught shop-lifting or stealing a vehicle," he added.

(Names have been changed on request)

Parents can have a negative impact on their children in several ways. They can lead them astray with their own behaviour or harm them by denying love and attention. Marital disharmony marked by constant conflict, aggression and domestic violence can also have a disastrous impact on kids. All this leads them to seek comfort elsewhere such as on social networking sites and in gadgets.

In Japan, cherry blossom is a symbol of resilience



One of the country's three oldest trees blooms in the shadow of Fukushima, writes Hiroko Tabuchi

This weeping cherry tree has stood here for a thousand years, blossoming every year despite blizzards, earthquakes and, now, a nuclear disaster, say local farmers in Miharu, Japan.

The town, however, may not be as resilient. The lakhs of people who come here each cherry blossom season to view the prized tree, one of the three oldest in the country and a designated national monument, are largely staying away this year, scared off by the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, just 30 miles away. "This tree has lived through many disasters," said Masayoshi Hashimoto, 85, a local vegetable farmer whose produce has also been rendered largely unsalable by the radioactive plume. "It may survive the nuclear accident," he said, "but the town may not."

Sakura, or cherry blossom season, reaches its peak this week along the Tohoku coast, a region still reeling from the March 11 quake, tsunami and accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant. Tohoku's famous sakura trees usually draw hundreds of thousands of visitors, many from greater Tokyo, bringing precious tourist income to villages and towns that have little industry to speak of. Even though many cherry trees in the disaster zone have survived, it will very likely take years to rebuild the tourism industry, officials warn.

In Miharu, the weeping sakura has been an important source of income for an aging farming community. About 300,000 people descended on the town to view the 40-foot tree last year, spending generously at local inns and eateries, as well as on produce. This year, the town expected the number to fall by about 80 %.

Helped by sunny weather last Sunday, the tree attract-

ed a throng of visitors, though still far fewer than usual, according to officials. Asuka Kimura, 29, a homemaker and mother of four from nearby Iwaki City, said that the thrill of an outing to see the cherry tree at Miharu had outweighed concerns over radiation.

The town has been desperate to protect its prized tree. Visitors were scarce during World War II, elders recall, but villagers still tended to the tree, preparing for the return to more peaceful times. Five years ago, when a blizzard threatened to overwhelm the tree, local farmers lovingly brushed off the snow and erected wooden supports to keep its branches from breaking.

WHEN DO THEY BLOOM?

The milder the climate, the earlier the blossoms open. In Japan's southern, subtropical islands of Okinawa, cherry blossoms open as early as January, while on the northern island of Hokkaido, they bloom as late as May. In most other cities, including Tokyo, the season takes place in early April. If it is cold, blossoms open later. From year to year, the start of blooming season can vary by as much as two weeks.

They again raced to the tree after the devastating March 11 quake, which damaged some homes in the area. The tree remained intact and was far enough inland to escape the tsunami, but bad news came the next day as the plant spewed radioactive steam toward the town. Local inns, which had been booked solid with reservations ahead of the sakura season, were inundated with cancellations.

Still, as the trees bloom, sometimes amid mountains of rubble, they have become symbols of resilience. "These cherry trees blossom each year despite any catastrophe," said Noriyuki Kasai, the mayor of Hirosaki, a city on the edge of the disaster zone, some 400 miles north of Tokyo. "Like the trees, we will also recover," he said.

-NYT