



*There is a silent tragedy unfolding in our homes today, and it concerns our most precious jewels: our children. Believe it or not, our children are in a devastating emotional state! Over the past 15 years, researchers have provided us with increasingly alarming statistics about a sharp and steady rise in child-mental illness that is now reaching epidemic proportions.*

#### **Statistics don't lie:**

- 1 in 5 children have mental health problems.
- A 43% increase in ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) has been noted.
- A 37% increase in adolescent depression has been noted.
- A 200% increase has been noted in the suicide rate in children ages 10-14.

#### **What is going on and what are we doing wrong?**

Today's children are being over-stimulated and over-gifted with material objects, but are deprived of the fundamentals of a healthy childhood, such as:

- Emotionally available parents.
- Clearly defined boundaries.
- Responsibilities.
- Balanced nutrition and adequate sleep.
- Movement in general but especially outdoors.
- Creative play, social interaction, unstructured play opportunities and space for boredom.

Instead, these last few years have been filled with children:

- Digitally distracted parents.
- Indulgent and permissive parents who let kids "rule the world" and make the rules.
- A sense of entitlement, of deserving everything without earning it or being responsible for getting it.
- Inadequate sleep and unbalanced nutrition.
- A sedentary lifestyle.
- Endless stimulation, technological babysitters, instant gratification and lack of dull moments.



### What to do?

If we want our children to be happy, healthy individuals, we have to wake up and get back to basics. It's still possible! Many families see immediate improvements after weeks of implementing the following recommendations:

- Set boundaries and remember that you are the captain of the ship. Your children will feel more secure knowing that you are in control of the helm.
- Offer children a balanced lifestyle filled with what children NEED, not just what they WANT. Don't be afraid to say "no" to your children if what they want is not what they need.
- Provide nutritious foods and limit junk food.
- Spend at least one hour a day outdoors doing activities such as: biking, hiking, fishing, bird/insect watching.
- Enjoy a daily family dinner without smart phones or distracting technology.
- Play board games as a family or if the children are too young for board games, let their interests take over and let them lead the game.
- Involve your children in an age-appropriate chore or household task (folding laundry, sorting toys, hanging up clothes, unpacking groceries, setting the table, feeding the dog, etc.).
- Implement a consistent sleep routine to ensure your child gets enough sleep. Schedules will be even more important for school-age children. Teach responsibility and independence. Don't overprotect them from every frustration or mistake. Making mistakes will help them develop resilience and they will learn to overcome life's challenges.
- Don't carry your children's backpacks, don't carry their backpacks, don't carry their forgotten homework, don't peel their bananas or oranges if they can do it on their own (4-5 years old). Instead of giving them the fish, teach them how to fish.
- Teach them to wait and delay gratification.
- Provide opportunities for "boredom," as boredom is the time when creativity awakens. Don't feel responsible for always keeping children entertained.
- Don't use technology as a cure for boredom, or offer it at the first second of inactivity.
- Avoid using technology during meals, in cars, restaurants, shopping malls. Use these moments as opportunities to socialize, thus training brains to know how to function when they are in "boredom" mode.
- Help them create a "boredom jar" with activity ideas for when they are bored.
- Be emotionally available to connect with children and teach them self-regulation and social skills.
- Turn off phones at night when children have to go to bed to avoid digital distraction.
- Become an emotional regulator or coach for your children. Teach them to recognize and manage their own frustrations and anger.
- Teach them to say hello, to take turns, to share without running out, to say thank you and please, to acknowledge a mistake and apologize (don't force them), model all those values you instill.
- Connect emotionally - smile, hug, kiss, tickle, read, dance, jump, play or crawl with

them.

**Source:** Yanieski Urrutia Cuza Institutional Communicator Government Moa