COVID-19 taking an emotional toll on children

Context

- The **fear of losing loved ones** to the coronavirus (COVID-19) infection is most apparent among children who dabble with **immense anxiety and emotional stress** brought by the **ongoing pandemic and lockdown**.
- Doctors say that the toll on the **mental health of the young ones** is way more than the **physical symptoms of COVID-19**.

Stress and anxiety rise amid coronavirus pandemic

- “**Every age group** is processing the events in a different way,” said Dr. Soonu Udani from SRCC Children’s Hospital, that has treated over 45 minors with COVID-19 over the past weeks.
- She said that **children below 10 years** don’t know much and are **picking up tiny bits from the television and family conversations**, while those **above 10 years** have **more fear of death** as they try to **comprehend the severity of the infection**.

Struggle to understand

- As most children are asymptomatic or display **mild symptoms**, they also struggle to **reason why they have to be hospitalised**.
- The hospital has started using **play therapy, drawings and charts** to tell children about the virus, and the **importance of being in isolation or quarantine**.

Parenting in a post-COVID world

- Two to three-year olds, separated from their parents, show **signs of anxiety** through **extreme clinginess** after their parents return from quarantine.
- “A mother told me that her child is not even letting her go to the bathroom. In slightly older children, three to six-year-olds, a common thought is ‘did I do something wrong that my parents went away’,” said Dr. Sengupta.
- **Teenagers** are also facing a **hard time with lack of social circle and no privacy** at home.
- It was important for **parents and caregivers** to not brush aside the queries of their children.

Psychosomatic symptoms

- In some cases, children whose family members had COVID-19, **reported abdominal pain, twisting of neck, headaches and myalgia or muscle pain**, but as soon as their report returned negative, they **start feeling better**.
- “We have seen four such cases of **psychosomatic symptoms** in children who were anxious due to a family member testing positive,” said Bengaluru-based child neurologist Dr. Minal Kekatpure.
- The interaction with doctors and nurses clad in **alien-looking PPE** suits fascinates children but also **frightens some** of them.