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.