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.