**Essential skills for life**

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The pandemic affected the schedules of educational institutions across Pakistan and the world. During 2020, schools and colleges conducted online classes, which was a new experience for the students, their parents and teachers. Students—especially those belonging to the nursery and primary classes—had to adhere to the new rules of attending classes.

Their parents, too, had to learn new ways of using technology. In certain cases, senior faculty members took quick lessons to learn how to operate online video conferencing tools and to use learning management systems.

Everyone—irrespective of age or profession—was affected by the pandemic which compelled us to use innovative technologies. Some researchers opine that the pandemic is here to stay and that the ‘new normal’ will eventually become the ‘normal’ we should accept to live with.

Teenagers and university students along with adults working in various capacities will accept the new normal and adhere to the online and hybrid model of education and work. The problem will be faced by children pursuing education in nursery and primary classes.

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Parents are concerned that online education will not be enough for children to learn through lectures. Furthermore, teachers do not provide ample attention to each student. The truth remains that school education was never meant to bring out the best among the students. Children indeed learn to live with discipline but the content of the syllabus was never meant to produce the next Einstein. It is designed to create workers to fulfil the capitalistic demands of the corporate sectors.

The lockdown and shutdowns, online and hybrid models of education, must be seen as opportunities by parents to teach their children insights useful for life. The students must be taught essential skills of life that include activities to accept the importance of life and to bring discipline. These include writing, reading, speaking, painting, sculpting, gardening, sewing, exercising, drawing, swimming, etc. They must also be well versed in communication, time management, stress management, crisis management, financial management, relationship building, etc.

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These learning activities are taught in university classes but they must be inculcated in the young minds from an early age. Parents must instruct, coach, and teach their children about these essential skills of life at home through storytelling and with their experience. An inclusive learning environment must be developed at home where parents and children sit together and learn about such skills.

Parents must not worry about their children earning good grades at school. The changing times and the future will value those who know life skills instead of those who gain grades through rote learning or otherwise. The pandemic and the online learning system is an eye-opener for the parents to ensure that their children do not stay behind in learning. Indeed, the first school of a child is the lap of their mothers.

The home must be the first and primary institution where children must be exposed to learning—through conversation, watching videos, or listening to their adults’ experiences. Eventually, all will fall in place if the parents and children work in unison. Textbook knowledge is important but not as indispensable as the essential skills of life that children learn first-hand from their parents and elders at home.