

MIND SHIFT EDUCATION  
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2026 EDITION

# State of Parenting in India

A data-driven snapshot of how Indian families are raising children in 2026 — screen time, mental health, academic pressure, nutrition, and the evolving landscape of modern parenting.

**2.22 hrs**Avg. daily screen time for  
under-5 children

src

**7.3%**Children 13–17 with  
diagnosed mental disorder

src

**14,488**Student suicides in 2024 —  
record high

src

**127%**Rise in childhood obesity  
since 2006

src

Sources: NFHS-5, UNICEF Child Nutrition Report 2025, NCRB 2022, National Mental Health Survey 2016, PubMed peer-reviewed research 2024–2026, WHO, Indian Academy of Pediatrics.

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## A Word from the Author

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India is in the middle of a quiet parenting revolution. Families are smaller, cities are faster, screens are everywhere, and the pressure on children — and parents — has never been greater. Yet the conversation about *how* we parent, supported by real data, remains rare in Indian homes.

This report brings together the best available research to give parents, educators, and practitioners a clear picture of where Indian families stand in 2026 — across screen time, mental health, nutrition, academic pressure, and parenting styles. Every statistic here comes from peer-reviewed research, government surveys, or major international organisations.

Our hope is that data creates empathy. When a parent understands *why* children behave as they do, and what conditions are shaping that behaviour, guilt gives way to informed action.

— **Soma, Founder, Mind Shift Education**

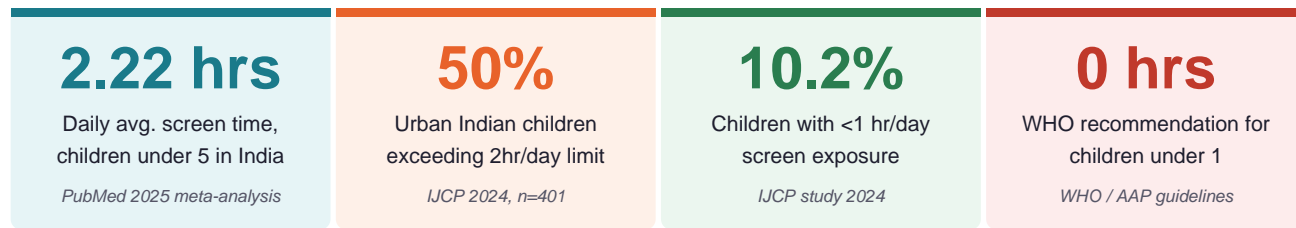
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*"The goal of parenting is not to raise a perfect child — it is to raise a whole human being."*

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SECTION 01 **Screen Time in Indian Homes** *Digital childhoods & developmental risk*

India's children are among the most screen-exposed in the world. Rapid smartphone penetration, affordable data, and the normalisation of devices as pacifiers or reward tools have created a generation whose nervous systems are shaped by screens from infancy.



- **Parental screen time influences children:** A 2026 Manipal Hospital study (n=123) found that young children model parental screen habits. Parents' own usage patterns are a primary predictor of child screen time.
- **Developmental risk is real:** Excessive screen time is linked to vocabulary delays, attention deficits, behavioural problems, sleep disruption, and reduced outdoor play time. (BMJ Paediatrics Open, 2025)
- **Sleep is the hidden casualty:** Higher socio-economic status children in India report sleeping nearly 1.5 hours less than low-SES peers — driven by screens, tutoring, and academic load. (Leiden University study, Pune)
- **Parents know, but struggle to act:** Despite awareness of harms, parents report conflict between the immediate benefit of a quiet child and long-term developmental risk. (BMJ Paediatrics, 2025)

**What MSE recommends for families:**

- ✓ No screens for children under 2 years (except supervised video calls with family).
- ✓ Use a visible, child-controlled timer for all screen sessions from age 3 onwards.
- ✓ Watch together: co-viewing reduces harm and builds media literacy.
- ✓ Keep all charging devices outside bedrooms — for children *and* parents.

SECTION 02  
**Children's Mental Health in India** *The silent crisis parents must know about*

Mental health challenges among Indian children are widespread, significantly under-treated, and growing more acute every year. The NCRB's 2024 report — released just weeks ago in May 2026 — confirms what parents, teachers, and counsellors have feared: student suicides have hit a record high, rising every year since 2022. Cultural stigma, a severe shortage of school counsellors, and the conflation of emotional distress with weakness mean most children suffer without support.

<p><b>7.3%</b></p> <p>Children 13–17 with a diagnosed mental disorder</p> <p><i>NMHS 2016, Govt. of India</i></p>	<p><b>14,488</b></p> <p>Student suicides in 2024 — a record high (NCRB)</p> <p><i>NCRB ADSI Report 2024</i></p>	<p><b>1 in 7</b></p> <p>Young people (15–24) often feeling depressed</p> <p><i>UNICEF / Gallup 2021</i></p>	<p><b>95%</b></p> <p>Treatment gap for common mental health conditions</p> <p><i>NMHS India</i></p>
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**Student Suicides in India: A Decade of Escalation**

Year	Deaths	Trend	% of total
2016	9,478		7.2%
2019	10,335		7.4%
2020	12,526		8.2%
2021	13,089		8.0%
2022	13,044		7.6%
2023	13,892		8.1%
<b>2024</b>	<b>14,488</b>		<b>8.5%</b>

Source: NCRB Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India reports 2016–2024. 2024 data released May 2026. Student suicides have risen **52.8%** in eight years.

**What the 2024 NCRB Data Tells Us**

- Record high in 2024: 14,488 student suicides** — 8.5% of India's total suicides and a 4.3% rise over 2023. Student suicides are rising at twice the rate of overall national suicides. (NCRB ADSI 2024, released May 2026)
- Exam failure drives deaths in the under-18 group:** Of 14,488 deaths in 2024, 'failure in examination' was the leading cause among children below 18 (1,071 cases). Family problems contributed to 3,101 deaths in this age group. (NCRB 2024)
- Secondary school students are most at risk:** 25.6% of student suicide deaths were among Grade 10 students, followed by Grade 12 (18.3%) and Grade 8 (17.7%). The board exam years are the deadliest. (NCRB 2024)
- Girls are closing the gender gap — dangerously:** Of 14,488 deaths, 47% were female — far higher than the 26.5% female share in overall suicides. Girls are uniquely vulnerable to academic and family pressure. (NCRB 2024)
- Delhi is India's student suicide capital:** 13.01% of Delhi's total suicides involved students — the highest proportion of any state or UT. Bengaluru and Mumbai metros also show alarming rates. (NCRB 2024)

■ **72.9% rise since 2014:** In absolute terms, student suicides have nearly doubled in a decade — from 8,068 in 2014 to 14,488 in 2024. Coaching culture, social media pressure, and inadequate school counselling are primary drivers. (NCRB + Business Standard 2024)

■ **Depression is the most prevalent diagnosis** in Indian school children, followed by anxiety, behavioural problems, and ADHD. (Cureus systematic review, 30,970 children, 2024)

■ **Only 41% of young Indians** believe it is helpful to seek mental health support — the lowest of any country in the UNICEF/Gallup 2021 survey. Stigma is the primary barrier to care.

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*"14,488 students did not fail. A system failed them."*

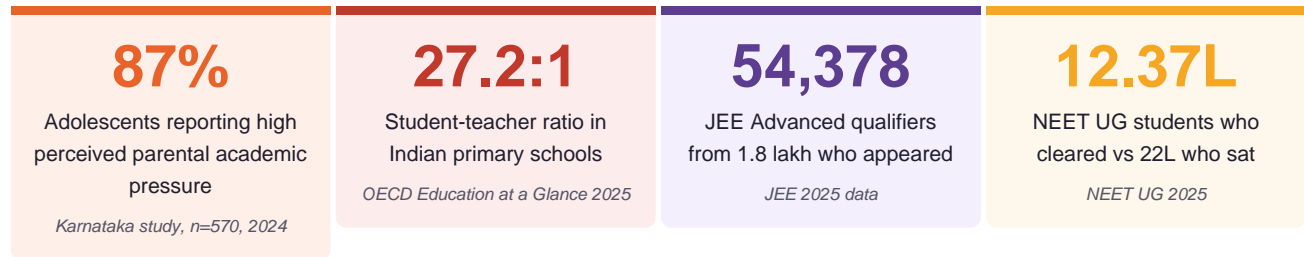
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### What parents can do — starting today:

- ✓ Say explicitly: *'No exam result will ever change how much I love you.'* Children need to hear this before exams, not only after.
- ✓ Watch for warning signs: withdrawal, giving away possessions, talking about being a burden, declining grades, or sudden calm after distress.
- ✓ Name emotions at home — *'I see you're overwhelmed'* builds the vocabulary children need to ask for help.
- ✓ Normalise seeking support: *'Even grown-ups talk to someone when they feel sad.'*
- ✓ Create a no-agenda daily check-in: 10 minutes of full presence, no phones, no advice.
- ✓ If concerned: contact iCall (9152987821) or Vandrevala Foundation (1860-2662-345), available 24/7.

SECTION 03 **Academic Pressure & The Coaching Culture** *When ambition becomes burden*

In India, education is the primary vehicle for upward mobility. The result is enormous intergenerational pressure — from society to parents to children — that begins before a child can read and intensifies through their teens.



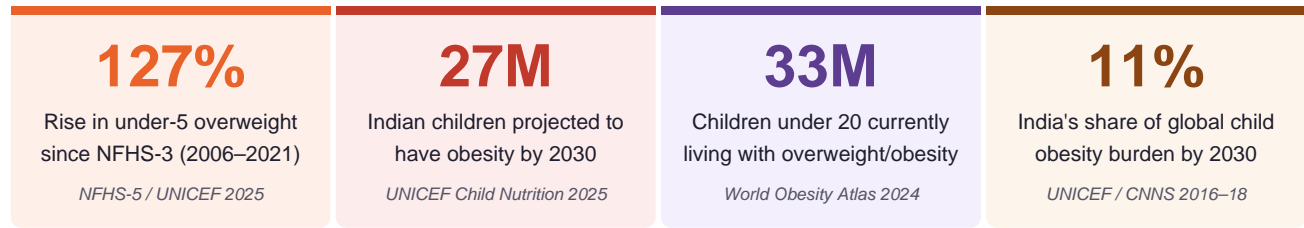
- **Academic stress begins early:** Parental pressure related to competitive exams is perceived as high by 87% of adolescents in South India — and is directly associated with reduced well-being scores. (J Educ Health Promot, 2024)
- **The 'Bache ne kitne marks laye' culture** — the social obsession with marks — is a documented driver of anxiety, depression, and school avoidance among Indian adolescents. (IHBAS psychiatrists, 2025)
- **High-SES children sleep less:** In Pune, the highest income children reported ~1.5 fewer sleep hours than low-income peers, due to academic workload, tutoring, and screen exposure. (Leiden University, 2016/replicated)
- **Most schools lack counsellors:** Despite NEP 2020 recommendations, a majority of Indian schools — particularly government schools — have no mental health professional on staff.

**A message for parents:**

- ✓ Protect sleep above grades. A rested brain learns better than an exhausted one.
- ✓ Ask 'What did you enjoy today?' before 'What marks did you get?'
- ✓ Success has more than one definition. Help your child discover theirs.
- ✓ Limit tutoring hours — unstructured play and rest are not wasted time.

SECTION 04 **Child Nutrition & Physical Health** *India's double burden: undernutrition meets obesity*

India faces a paradox: millions of children remain undernourished while childhood obesity rates surge — driven by ultra-processed foods, screen-linked sedentary behaviour, and changing food environments. Both extremes are a parenting challenge as much as a policy one.



**Ultra-processed food consumption surged** from USD 900 million (2006) to USD 37.9 billion (2019) — growing at 33% annually. Children are the primary target of digital food marketing. (Indian Economic Survey 2024–25)

**Screen time → sedentary → obesity:** The same study that found 50% of urban children exceed 2hr screen time also found significant correlation with higher BMI, withdrawal behaviours, and aggression. (IJCP 2024)

**Unhealthy food is more available in schools than fruit:** A UNICEF U-Report poll across 8 South Asian countries (2023) found processed snacks and sugary beverages more common in school environments than fresh produce.

**Obesity cost India ~USD 29 billion in 2019** (1% of GDP). Projected to reach USD 479 billion by 2060 if trends continue. (World Obesity Federation)

**At the family table:**

- ✓ Cook together — children who help prepare food are more likely to eat it.
- ✓ Reduce but don't ban treats; restriction increases craving and sneaking.
- ✓ Build movement into every day — not as exercise, but as play.
- ✓ Model the relationship with food you want your child to have.

SECTION 05  
**Parenting Styles Across India** *Authoritarian roots, authoritative futures*

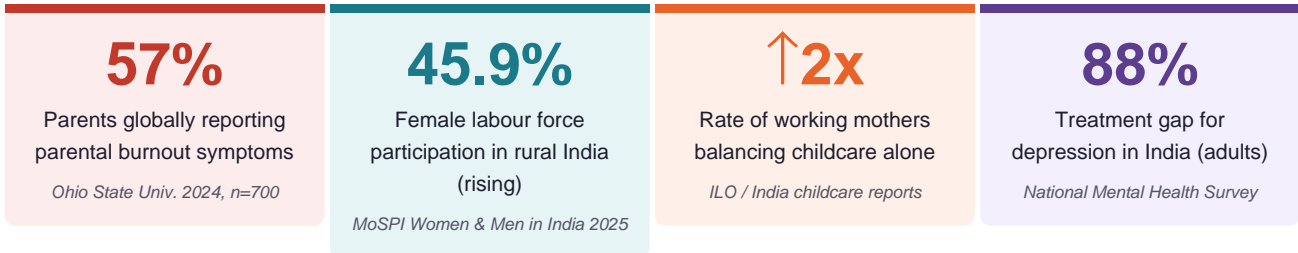
Research consistently shows that **authoritative parenting** — warm, structured, and respectful of a child's voice — produces the best outcomes across cognitive, social, and emotional domains. Yet India's dominant parenting tradition has historically been authoritarian. That is changing.

Authoritarian	Authoritative	Permissive
High control Low warmth 'Because I said so'	High structure High warmth 'Let's talk about it'	Low structure High warmth 'Whatever you want'
53% of rural adolescents (Karnataka)	Rising in urban India; linked to higher self-esteem & well-being	Less common in India; associated with poor boundary-setting

- **Authoritarian style is most common in rural India:** A Karnataka study (n=445) found 53% of adolescents perceived their parents as authoritarian — significantly associated with higher stress scores. (JMHHB 2022)
- **Urban education and income predict authoritative style:** Higher income (■1 lakh+) and urban residence are significantly associated with authoritative parenting. (Rawalpindi cross-sectional study, 2025)
- **Authoritative parenting works:** Of adolescents with authoritative parents, 56% reported high self-esteem vs. significantly lower rates in authoritarian households. (JPNS India study)
- **India is shifting:** Urban, educated, higher-income Indian parents are increasingly adopting authoritative approaches — combining cultural respect with emotional responsiveness.

SECTION 06  
**The State of Indian Parents** *Burnout, dual income, and the invisible load*

The wellbeing of parents is inseparable from the wellbeing of children. Yet in India, the rapidly changing structure of families — nuclear households, dual incomes, missing grandparents, absent domestic support — is creating a generation of parents who are overwhelmed, isolated, and often guilty.



- Working mothers bear the invisible load:** Research across Indian sectors shows that family-work conflict, absence of domestic help, and work-family guilt significantly reduce job satisfaction and parenting quality. (SAGE Journals 2024)
- Nuclear families = reduced village:** The breakdown of joint family systems in urban India removes grandparental caregiving, social support, and lived wisdom — leaving parents without a net. (Urban Childcare Crisis report, 2026)
- Parental burnout is real and rising:** Globally, 57% of parents in a 700-family Ohio State study (2024) reported burnout. Indian studies in Bangalore show similar patterns, especially post-pandemic. (EducationWorld 2024)
- Parent mental health = child mental health:** A dysregulated parent cannot co-regulate a dysregulated child. Self-care for parents is not selfish — it is the foundation of effective parenting.

*"You cannot pour from an empty vessel. Taking care of yourself is one of the most important things you can do for your child."*

## Key Takeaways for Indian Parents in 2026

- **Screen time is a parenting challenge, not a moral failure.**  
Set limits with empathy, model the behaviour you want, and watch together when possible.
- **Children's mental health needs are invisible, urgent, and worsening.**  
14,488 student suicides in 2024. Create emotional safety at home. Normalise big feelings. Say explicitly: no exam is worth your life.
- **Academic pressure is not motivation.**  
Chronic stress shrinks the brain's learning capacity. Connection and rest are academic strategies.
- **Food and movement are medicine.**  
Eating together, cooking together, and playing together are the most effective interventions.
- **Your parenting style shapes your child's brain.**  
Warmth + structure + voice = authoritative parenting. It is learnable at any stage.
- **Your wellbeing is your child's wellbeing.**  
You matter too. Burnout is real. Reaching out for support is strength.

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