

Key factors to avoiding social rejection

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Washington, Jan 22 - American scientists have claimed to have identified three key factors that may help children in avoiding social rejection, which leads to academic failure, depression and experimentation with drugs.

Researchers at Rush University Medical Center said that the ability to pick up on non-verbal cues and social cues in social interaction as well as recognize the meaning and respond appropriately to them are key to helping children develop skills to maintain friendships and avoid a host of problems in later life.

A pair of studies indicated that some children have difficulty picking up on non-verbal or social cues. They simply don't notice the way someone's shoulders slump with disappointment, or hear the change in someone's voice when they are excited, or take in whether a person's face shows anger or sadness, said lead author Dr Clark McKown.

A second major factor is that some children may pick up on non-verbal or social cues, but lack the ability to attach meaning to them. The third factor is the ability to reason about social problems, Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology said.

Some children may notice social cues and understand what is happening, but are unable to do the social problem solving to behave appropriately, McKown added.

Because it is not known exactly which behaviors set a child up for failure, or how to measure these skills, it was difficult to provide support, he said, adding now, it will be possible to pinpoint which abilities a child needs to develop and offer help.

Children's ability to develop positive peer relationships is critical to their well-being. Compared to children who are accepted by their peers, socially rejected children are at substantially elevated risk for later adjustment troubles.

A child who can take in social cues, recognize their meaning and respond appropriately, and who is capable of self-regulating, or controlling behavior, is more likely to have successful relationships, the study said.

The number of children who cannot negotiate all these steps, and who are at risk of social rejection, is startling, said McKown.

Only in America nearly 13 per cent of the school age population, or roughly four million children, have social-emotional learning difficulties, he added.

In the studies, the team observed two groups of children -- one was a random sample of 158 children in the Chicago school system and the other group was a random sample of 126 clinic-referred children.