

# Expressing Your Emotions to Combat GBV

By Nokuthula Khoza

One's emotional intelligence plays an important role in families, social spaces, and communities as a whole. This applies to all genders, races, and age groups.

The first fifteen years of a child's life play a major role in shaping them, not only as individuals, but also as members of society, school pupils, and later adults who may pass on the same values and behaviours to younger generations. As parents and guardians, we raise children either to be emotionally aware, rebellious, or emotionally distant through the way we communicate with them, address issues, allow them to express their feelings, and behave around them daily.

These children may grow into adults who are able to handle life gently, even during difficult times, or they may become angry adults carrying unresolved trauma. Because of this, we should never overlook the different life stages that shape a person's outlook on life as they grow older.

Let us think of a see-saw. What a child experiences while growing up often appears again later in adulthood. Although some people may unlearn certain harmful habits, they may still subconsciously practise others. This can make it difficult for them to express themselves peacefully, leading them to become manipulative, aggressive, or physically violent in order to get their point across.

An adult who bullied others at school and was never corrected or assisted through professional support may later become a wife, husband, mother, father, sister, or brother who abuses those around them emotionally, physically, financially, or sexually to fill an emotional void. These individuals may also struggle to take accountability for the consequences of their behaviour, which can sometimes lead to tragic outcomes, including loss of life.

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a major issue worldwide, affecting people across all social classes. Women and children are often the most affected victims. GBV does not only cause physical harm, but also leaves long-lasting emotional and psychological trauma on individuals, families, and communities.

Expressing emotions in a healthy and respectful way can help reduce violence in homes and communities. People should feel safe enough to speak openly about pain, anger, stress, and trauma without fear of judgment. Communities, schools, families, and organisations also have a responsibility to create safe spaces where people, especially young people, can receive emotional support and guidance. Addressing emotional well-being and teaching healthy communication from a young age can play an important role in combating GBV and building safer communities.

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