# **The Silent Struggle: How Students Handle Academic Stress from Family Expectations**

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Oct 11, 2024

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To most of the learners, education is no longer about personal achievements; it is about doing it to the expectation of their families. To reach the top, to be the best performing student so that you can make everyone who worked hard for you proud, feels like a burden that you cannot shake off. It is weighed in secret and becomes part of who they are, what they do, how they view themselves, and who they will be. But in the quiet moments, when the pressure becomes too much, many ask themselves: Am I enough?

****The Invisible Burden****

This is a pain that comes with the feeling of the intensity of trying so hard to make a family proud. Many children feel that academic achievement is demanded from them as a result of their parent’s efforts, the sleepless nights, the studying, and the words of motivation. The message is clear, even if never explicitly spoken: Your success is our success. Your failure is our disappointment.

This can be very tasking for students especially parents who regard education as the only way out of suffering, or the only way to be of help to fellow man. It is a sort of responsibility that although originates in love may seem claustrophobic. The thing is every missed grade, and every imperfect performance feels like a failure not only for oneself but also for the people who are important.

The pressure is not only on performance, which means good grades. It’s about the terror of letting down the people who believe in you and in what you are doing. The nights awake, the hours spent studying, the partitions cried behind the door, all these depict the attempts by students to be better enough. And yet again, for some, no matter how much they spend, it is still not enough.

****The Emotional Toll****

In the case of the presented students, the pressure resulting from the expectations of families expresses itself in anxiety, self-inadequacy, and loneliness. They work more as far as each exam and every assignment is concerned, stressing that one single mistake can potentially break the facade that their family has of them. It is a tiring cycle and I believe it really weighs a lot on a person emotionally.

But the most discouraging thing is that some remain powerless to report anything. To begin to discuss the pressure, burnout and the sheer fear of failure, causes almost a sense of feeling as though one is failing everyone. So, they remain ignorant of their plight. Friday Night: They smile when their parents ask how school is going although they are just too delicate to burst at the seams with it all.

The truth is that success is often a very thinly veiled cry for help. But it’s a pain that’s private like, and thus, cannot be shared with anyone else. It’s the quiet dread of wondering: Will I ever be enough? It is the students who bear this load and in a strange paradox, they are often the most well performing; academic all-stars; students who ‘always look like they are managing it’. However, in the house, they wage invisible wars to the outside world.

****Coping With the Pressure****

The fact is that some students use stress as fuel. They cram up their books each day thinking that if only they add that extra mile, then they will feel that validation they so desperately seek. However, it only gets tiring for many. Some will avoid, procrastinate, or over prepare as a way of dealing with the oppressive feeling that comes with such cultures. Even when they succeed the relief is temporary, because the next difficulty is just around the corner.

But there is hope. The first thing to know is that you are not the only one struggling.” Now it is okay to say ‘No, I can’t take anymore, the pressure is too much’. No one is perfect it is okay to go to friends, counselors, or mentors and get some help. Thus, when opening up, students can start freeing themselves of a burden that was pulling them down.

Speaking to family members may also be useful although this is true more often than not. It takes courage to have the conversation that many avoid: as so often is the case with major China-based internet companies, answering pointed questions about their service with an emphasis on not wanting students to stress out too much and become sick. Often families do not even know the burden that they are putting on a child. By asserting their interests so that these can be heard loud and clear over the noise of performance, students can start the process of changing the criteria for success from ‘getting A’s to getting happy, getting better, and getting wise.

****Redefining Success****

This is not very hard to do and is often the case given that many things depend on how one does in school. However, the real success is much farther than the cumulative grade point average or even an academic degree. It is about endurance; about getting through struggles without being changed for the worse in those struggles. It is about the love of learning even when learning is rigorous or involves getting knowledge in hard ways. Finally, it’s about knowing that no matter what grades say, no matter what happens, you are enough.

****So What Now?****

For everyone, there will be certain moments of failure. I do know that there will be seasons when you fail to measure up or be less than you envisioned your family expected, or your school expected, or less than what you expected of yourself. But those moments do not deem you. Who you are is your strength, your determination & the courage with which you rise after every fall. Failing is not the real problem of the world, it is more important to always get back up.

To every student who feels the crushing weight of expectations: you are noticed, and your fight is genuine. But you are not alone. It’s okay to be afraid, it’s okay to be stressed and tired, to doubt yourself and your ability to continue. But let me tell you this, you are way beyond what is reflected in your grades. You are not the sum of the dreams that your family has for you. You do not need to earn love, pride, or happiness; you have the right to enjoy them because you exist.

Take a breath. Look at how far you’ve come. Finally, let me remind you, that it’s not the aim to live up to all the expectations people have of you — the goal is to take care of ‘self’ in the process. You do not need to add anything to yourself, to make you complete; you are complete just as you are now. Your future is bright, not due to average, low, or even high grades but because of the person in you in the process.

The silent struggle, however, does not have to be fought alone. Reach out. Reaching out for help in times of struggle is not a sign of weakness, but a brave step toward healing and self-care. You are strong and you will be able to survive this, slowly, one day at a time.