

# Staying away from toxic relatives can improve your mental health

To help readers cope with their anxieties in these stressful times, TOI has launched *Talk it Out*, a series under which our panel of expert counsellors will answer your mental health queries. This week's advice comes from **Dr Roma Kumar**

■ I am a 33-year-old woman with five years of work experience. I had to choose between staying in the city where my husband was and getting a divorce. I decided to give up my job and live with him but now things are not going well. There is a lack of attraction and on top of that I am jobless. Finding a new job in this pandemic is also tough. Now, I either have to come back to the city where I was working originally or be with my husband and stay depressed and frustrated in an arranged marriage. I am in a big dilemma.

— Anonymous.

Changing marital dynamics, economic hardship and your husband's negative responses can have a devastating effect on marital affection and create more tension. I don't recommend that you do anything to jeopardise your marriage. Don't underestimate the force that you can have within the marriage to reshape things to be happier. Talk openly and honestly with him about what you are going through and what you want. You can either allow isolation to grow between you, or you can actively promote intimacy through open and honest communication.



■ I am a 26-year-old woman. I am very emotionally attached to my family. I have always been by their side, helping out my cousins. But I have been ignored and lied to by them. I am an emotional person, but I can't accept anything wrong done to me or my parents. When I confront those at fault, they blame me for overthinking. I can't detach myself from them and regret wasting time on them. Please help.

— Anonymous

There are people who will lift you up, and others may delight in causing you pain. It can be particularly disheartening when a toxic person like this also happens to be from your extended family. While you cannot change someone else's behaviour, setting boundaries can limit the interactions you have with them. It can also help you take control of the situation. Recognising difficult things about your interactions can be painful and bring up a host of unexpected emotions. You recognise the need to change for your own mental health. Reach out for help when you need it and understand that you are not alone.

■ I'm a 32-year-old, unmarried woman suffering from vitiligo since I was eight. Now it's spreading very invasively due to which I'm feeling very depressed and even suicidal at times. I don't know why but I'm unable to accept myself and I hide my vitiligo patches with makeup and full-sleeve clothes. Apart from that, I'm jobless. I was planning to move abroad for a job, so I quit my previous job and then the pandemic started, and I got stuck. I don't enjoy my work. I'm unable to balance my personal and professional lives. Now I'm too frustrated and get angry at my

family for no reason. Please guide me.

— Anonymous

I understand that vitiligo has been affecting your quality of life, making you distressed and stigmatised. Your first step in healing will be to recognise your worth and beauty. Practise consistent self-affirmation, which will make you feel self-validated and comfortable in your own skin. You can begin journaling. Being able to vent, going in for therapy, engaging in honest and productive conversation will provide you clarity. Join online support groups for body positivity. When we suppress our emotions, we deny ourselves the right to heal. Take the time to invest in yourself by paying attention to your psychological and emotional needs.

Dr Kumar is partner and co-founder, *Emotionally*

For more questions and answers, visit [toi.in](http://toi.in)



## WANT SOME ADVICE?

Sharing can help your recovery so write to us at [talkitout@timesgroup.com](mailto:talkitout@timesgroup.com) with your question, name and place. But if you wish to stay anonymous, do indicate that in your email.

■ I am a graduate, senior citizen living in Bengaluru and working in a private school. The management is likely to retire me as I am 66 though I am efficient. I have a wife who is 60 and illiterate. We don't have any children or savings to depend on. This tension is spoiling my health.

— Anonymous

Transitions in life come with a range of emotions, and retirement is a big change. You need to plan. Today, freelancing has enabled anyone with marketable skills to earn an income, regardless of age. You could take tuitions, open a shop, provide a service or even rent out a part of your house. Your wife can pitch in with cooking or tailoring classes. Having clarity about what you can do and finding ways to do it profitably takes time and effort.