

# Leading Schools Towards Having Happy Class Rooms for Promoting Healthy Minds

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## Introduction

Schools are, generally, the second social institutions, after the family, with which the children remain deeply associated for about 14 to 15 years of their lives in their formative period. They join the schools at the age of about 3 years and remain connected up to the age of 17 to 18 years of their age. It is during this period that they lay foundation of their lives. They learn to read, write, speak formally, socialize and start developing skills - mainly the live skills. They largely shape their personality and attitude towards their lives and society in this period; and based on the grooming done in the schools that the children establish themselves as independent and responsible persons in their lives.

It is, therefore, essential that the children get adequate and the right supports in their childhood in schools. Understandably, the happy class rooms, safe school environment and proper healthcare of the students especially in their adolescence (10 to 19 years of age) virtually promote their proper growth and development.

## Theme for the ASISC's Annual Conference 2017

Association for School for Indian School Certificate (ASISC), a national association for ICSE Schools of India, having about two thousand members, organizes its annual conferences for all members to deliberate upon the burning issues relating to school education in which generally about one thousand five hundred members participate. The association, in its 60<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference 2017, has kept the theme - 'Happy Classrooms and Healthy Minds'. The conference was held from November 29, 2017 to December 01, 2017 at Jaipur, Rajasthan. The organizers selected eminent speakers to deliberate and suggest ways and means to help create happy class rooms for the students of the ICSE schools so that they can live happy lives and spread happiness across the globe.

The three day conference witnessed lively deliberations by

outstanding professionals. The organizers gave maximum emphasis on the deliberations on students' health besides educational technology, methodology of teaching, philosophy and sociology of education as a means to bring out the strategies of creating healthy class rooms and happy lives for the students. A panel of five eminent speakers deliberated on health and safety, which was the main focus of the conference, for a reasonably long time.

## ASISC's coining of the Panel Discussion Topic

The ASISC believes that growing ill-health of the school going children is the greatest menace to the academic progress for the ICSE schools. Besides, the concern of safety of the children has been adding to the anxiety in the society and taking toll on the happiness of the children. The association emphasizes that to make the children of today successful and happy the association should promote among them the good health and provide them safety. The ASISC seem to be right in choosing the topic for the panel discussion based on 'Health' and 'Safety' to do justice to the theme of 'Happy Classrooms and Healthy Minds'.

The selection of such topic by ASISC reveals that association is in the line of the thinking of the WHO which holds, "The healthy children who become healthy adolescents are more likely to become healthy adults".<sup>1</sup> By saying so, the WHO emphasizes on a comprehensive overall growth of children through protection of their health by their schools through 'The School Health Programme' clubbing with the supports of the family and the community. It emphatically states that such joint efforts "can simultaneously reduce common health problems, increase efficiency of the education system, advance public health education and promote social and economic development in each nation."<sup>2</sup>

## The Definition of Health and its Implication

The World Health Organization (WHO), a wing of the United Nations' Organization (UNO), has defined health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing

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and not merely the absence of diseases or infirmity”<sup>3</sup>. The WHO has added ‘Mental Health’ and ‘Social Wellbeing’ along with ‘Physical Health’ as the key components of the ‘Health’. While the meanings of physical and mental health are easily understandable; the inclusion of ‘Social Wellbeing’ as a component of health could be elaborated in the way that a person could be considered ‘Socially Healthy’ if he possesses life skills like effective communication, interpersonal relationship, empathy towards others and concerns about his surroundings and he makes efforts to keep his environment clean and unpolluted. A socially healthy person carefully and judiciously protects the phenomena like flora and fauna in their optimum state, maintains cordial and caring relationship with the people in the society considering them to be the essential components of sustainable development.

## State of Global Health of Present Time

Across the globe, it is an open secret that economic affluence coupled with sedentary lifestyle, tobacco, alcohol, changing food patterns are contributing to several chronic degenerative diseases such as diabetic, cardiovascular diseases, cancer and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Diseases (COPD). One and a half billion obese and overweight people, fastest growing diabetic and cardio vascular epidemic are challenging not only for the sufferers but also their families, communities, societies and Governments.

### State of Health of Indians in Present Time

Coming to India, about 60% of the deaths of present time are contributed by the life style disorder – mainly the Non Communicable Disease (NCD) like Cardio Vascular Diseases, Diabetic Mellitus, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Diseases and Cancer. Economically, this state of health has been causing loss of national income of our country.<sup>4</sup> In the year 2005, India experienced the ‘highest loss in potentially productive years of life’ worldwide. Since the turn of the century cardio vascular diseases have become the leading cause of death making India a ‘Diabetic Capital of the World’. In 2012, an estimated 600,000-700,000 deaths in India were caused by cancer.<sup>5</sup> About 41 million Indians are suffering from cancer at present. About 8% of adults suffer from depression.<sup>6</sup>

### Global State of Adolescent Health at Present

At present globally about 80% adolescents do not conform to the WHO’s norm of good health. About 3% adolescents are found depressed and they are suffering from obesity, aids, various chronic diseases, taking to smoking and drinking, taking drugs, losing their lives in road accidents and many committing suicide. The 80% of the ailing adults are suffering from their diseases today due to their adolescent time ill-health.

### State of Adolescent Health in Indians at Present

The state of adolescent health in Indian is utterly unsatisfactory. In a survey carried out by Indian Association of Adolescence Health (IAAH), New Delhi in a public school in a semi-urban area of Karnataka near Bangalore in November 2015 found that out of 481 students studied, as large as 475 students had some problems or the other. The problems were classified by the Association in four categories namely -- Educational Problems (61.12%), Psychological Problems (18.30%), Physical Health Problems (16.63%) and Fear about Future and Surrounding World (2.7%). On further analysis of the educational problems, it was found that 61.12% children of the school had problem of concentration in study; 13.51% had poor memory; 6.65% were experiencing stress while attending classes and writing examination; and 1.70% children were having apprehension of poor performance in academics. The types of psychological problems they had were anxiety (9.98%), depression (5.41%) and excessive concern about physical appearance (2.91%). The health problems that came onto the surface were headache (8.31%), eye ailment like -- low vision, watering and irritation (3.71%) etc. The problems like acne, whitening of hair and hair fall were found in 2.91% children. The types of sleeping disorder found among 1.66% students were like having excessive sleep, less sleep and disturbed sleep etc. The study also detected fear and concern about future and surrounding world in 2.70% students.<sup>7</sup>

In a survey carried out by All Indian Institution of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi in 2016 on the students of private and Government schools of Delhi, the institution has found 18% of the private school and 2% of the Government school students obese respectively. They described the cause of it as improper life style and changed food patterns. They elaborated its cause by saying that not playing regular and adequate games and consumption of non-home-made junk food were their reasons.

In course of examining ninety six thousand students in the schools in the city of Bangalore in 2016, a team of doctors from an organization named ‘Address Health’, Bangalore have found 20% students overweight and 9% underweight. As to the diseases, 13% students have been found to be having some chronic diseases or the other, while 30% were having oral health problems. About 14% children had vision related problems too.

### The Life Skill Management by Adolescents

The WHO feels that life of a person is most precious for the individual, his family as well as for the country. It is, therefore, essential that the schools provide the students the necessary awareness about it and make each and every student capable of saving their lives and live healthy. The WHO has prescribed that the schools should help the

students to master ten life skills as the following which would help them save their lives and make them successful, healthy and happy:-

### Self Awareness

The school students should be made to realize the value of their own lives and save their lives from all evils. They should have forward looking and progressive approach and grow healthy to make the society healthy thereby.

### Empathy

The school students should feel compassionate about the difficulties of others and help solving them as if those problems are their own problems. They should find joy in making others happy.

### Critical Thinking

The school students should be made to think in-depth on any matter and should develop a nature of taking steps forward only after examining the consequences. This approach would help them avoid taking drastic steps of self-harm and taking narcotics and other substances.

### Creative Thinking

The school students should be taught to become dynamic and create new things. They should never ever feel helpless and remain stuck with stereotype ideas. They should believe that every existing thing could be done in different ways.

### Decision Making

The school students should be groomed in such a way that they learn to take decisions even if there is certain amount of risks involved. They should learn to take calculated risks. This attitude would help them to become confident and competent.

### Problem Solving

The school students should develop an aptitude to create solution of a problem than to become part of the problems. They should be aware of the problems that are affecting the environment, peace and harmony in the society and they should develop interest in creating solution for them.

### Effective Communication

The communication is one of the main functions which one needs to master to be successful in life. The higher one wishes to grow efficient he should be in communications. Our young generation needs to be made eloquent in public speaking and effective in written communication.

### Interpersonal Relationship

The present era is an era of team work. Each one of our school students should be taught to work as of members

in teams and wherever needed they should be able to lead the teams. They should learn to be compassionate about others needs, feelings and sentiments and remain tolerant.

### Coping with Stress

The school students should learn to take responsibilities but not to be the victims of excessive stress because of it. They should learn the art of managing stress in their pursuits of achieve their goals.

### Coping with Emotions

Emotion is a quality if it is used in positive ways and controlled manner. If it is not kept under control, this may prove to be detrimental for growth of our young generations. Schools should carefully nurture the emotions like fellow feeling, kindness etc. among the students and groom them in such way that they can manage their emotions productively.

### The Composition of Speakers for the Panel Discussion

The conference of the second day i.e. November 30, 2017, commenced with five-speaker panel discussion. The sub-topic for the panel discussion and the details of the speakers are the following:

- 'The Necessity of Launching Adolescent Health Programme in Schools' by Dr Jugal Kishore, Director Professor and Head of the Department, Vardhaman Medical College and Safdarjung Hospital, New Delhi as well as the Secretary General, Indian Association for Adolescent Health.
- 'The Necessity of Promotion of Mental Health of School Students' by Dr Vikas Gaur, Professor and Head, Department of Psychiatry and Telemedicine, Mahatma Gandhi Medical College and Hospital, Jaipur.
- 'The Necessity of Having Nutritious Food by the School Students' by Dr (Mrs) Nimali Singh, Associate Professor, Department of Nutritionology, Mahatma Gandhi Medical College and Hospital, Jaipur.
- 'Necessity of Keeping the School Children Away from Cyber Addiction' by Mrs. Vidhushi Dahga, Educational Consultant, Mumbai.
- 'Necessity of having Physical Safety Measures in the School Campus' by Dr Senthil Kumaran, Chief Confluence, *I the Learner Confluence*, Bangalore.

### The Necessity of Launching Adolescent Health Programme in Schools

Dr Jugal Kishore, who chaired the session, in his opening speech, mentioned that the health of the students was the pre-requisite to satisfactory academic performance and happy future lives of the students. But he brought out that, globally, the state of health of the adolescent was unsatisfactory and position of India was equally

frightening. As per him the state should be treated as a 'Global Epidemic'. He mentioned further that the adolescent time ill-health were the causes of unhealthy state of youth worldwide as well as in India.

He urged that to protect the interest of the society schools needed to launch 'School Health Programme' by taking following actions:

1. Carrying out 'General Wellbeing Check' of all students annually using appropriate questionnaire.
2. Carrying out 'Annual Medical Check' of all students which should include mental and social health check components
3. Carrying out a 'Social Violence Check' for students using appropriate questionnaire.
4. Conducting of regular lecture session and programme for students to ensure development of their life skills as recommended by the WHO.
5. Conducting 'Awareness Programme' exclusively for the adolescent girls helping them manage their puberty related issues.
6. Carrying out survey of 'Community Health' in the locality involving students.
7. Carrying out 'Annual Health Check' for all staff members including necessary pathological tests.
8. Carrying out survey of teachers of the school to find out their level of awareness and interest to undertake 'School Health Programme' related tasks.
9. Conduct regular workshop for the teachers to make them understand the concept of 'Live Skill Management' and necessity of launching 'School Health Programme' in which they have the major roles.

Dr Jugal Kishore expressed that if the 'School Health Programme' were followed meticulously the children would improve in their life style which implies that there would be positive change towards taking healthy food, playing games regularly and keeping away from the life risks factors. He mentioned that the 'Indian Association for Adolescent Health', the profession of body, would also be ready to help the schools to launch the school across the country and abroad.

### **The Necessity of Promotion of Mental Health of School Children**

Dr Vivek Gaur highlighted that the mental ill-health generally hamper the academic progress and balanced growth of the children even it existed in minor form. He mentioned that while the Dyslexia, Dementia and Dyscalculia are the extreme state of learning disabilities, there could be several other mental disorders which could hamper the academic progress of the students and affect their future health. As per him regular checks were necessary in the schools through questionnaires; and wherever required, the students should be brought to the psychologists and

psychiatrists for counseling. He mentioned that it was advisable to take remedial measures at the initial stage of the occurrence than to wait. He offered free online counseling to the schools from his centre.

### **The Necessity of Having Nutritious Food by the Students**

Dr (Mrs) Nimali Singh mentioned that for happy life one needed to have good health and the good health comes through good food. He highlighted that the good food may not necessarily be the tasty food, but the children should develop liking for the healthy food without any exception. According to her, the schools should educate the parents to such an extent that the students get healthy food from their homes. Due to the falling adolescent health state she urged the schools to take this matter seriously. She observed that children suffer from both extremes like obesity and anemia in that cases the food component should be designed accordingly. She felt that the schools should ban first food in the school canteen and in the surrounding areas for the promotion of right food habit and contribute towards having healthy class room happy minds.

### **Necessity of Keeping the School Children Away from Cyber Addiction**

Mrs Vidhushi Dahga cautioned against the children going in for excessive cyber activities. She mentioned that excessive use of internet had been causing harm to the children and causing deaths of large number of adolescents. She urged the schools to take measures to ensure that the children were kept away from cyber addiction. The school should have in-house cyber security policy and watch on misuse of the internet facilities. She provided several tips of protecting adolescents from cyber addiction.

### **Necessity of having Physical Safety Measures of the School Campus**

Dr Senthil Kumaran suggested that the schools should have certain physical facilities such as proper boundary walls, multiple stair cases and elevators in the building to be used during emergencies, firefighting equipment, visitor's check posts and school infirmary etc. to promote safety in the school. Besides the necessary infrastructure, the school should have laid down safety policies and procedures relating to each and every aspect of safety such as fire fighting, evacuation, visitor monitoring etc. Most importantly the school personnel should be trained at regular intervals to make them safety minded.

### **Conclusion**

To make the ICSE schools' classrooms healthy and children of the schools happy, concerted efforts shall be needed right from the level of the school staff, principal, school management, schools' associations, the Council for the



Indian School Certificate Examinations and the community. If Council continues to promulgate suitable policies and directives, the associations arrange regular deliberations, school managements take interest and the principals and schools staff implement them in letters and spirits creation of 'Healthy Classrooms and Happy Minds' would certainly be a reality in ICSE schools.

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