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‘EMOTIONAL LITERACY’ WILL ENSURE A HAPPY NEXT GENERATION

India is experiencing a surge in mental health concerns among children and adolescents, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, 50 million children in India were estimated to be struggling with mental health issues (UNICEF 2021). 43% of students reported mood changes as per the National Council of Educational Research and Training’s (NCERT) 2022 survey, highlighting the extent of the mental health crisis among children.

Interventions in mental health encompass prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration, but are challenged by limited resources, low availability of trained counsellors, less awareness and stigma associated with mental health, which lead to reluctance in seeking treatment.

National policies like National Education Policy (NEP) and the School Health and Wellness Programme under Ayushman Bharat prioritise mental health interventions; the impact of these is still unfolding. Following CBSE guidelines, most private schools have appointed a counsellor; but the staggering number and remoteness of government schools makes it difficult to appoint a trained counsellor in every public school, thereby posing a large unmet need. To counter this, the best approach is one which encourages healthy behaviours and prevents the very onset of a mental disorder, namely prevention and promotion.

The ambit of preventive mental health covers the emotional, behavioural and social well-being of a child. WHO recognises Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and life skills as important ways of preventing mental health issues. Efforts are underway by state governments, central bodies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to promote mental health and SEL interventions in schools for strengthening coping abilities of children, enabling them to manage stress and preventing negative health behaviours.

Towards this, the governments of Delhi and Uttarakhand have implemented the “Happiness Curriculum” in schools (Nursery–Class 8) involving meditation for self-awareness and resilience, value education for character building, and mental exercises to reduce anxiety, depression and intolerance. To prioritise whole child development, build children’s abilities to cope with life situations and collaborate with others, the government of Jharkhand introduced the “Harsh Johar curriculum” (Class 1–12) as



part of its Schools of Excellence initiative.

Building on SEL and other educational initiatives, Compassion Centre, Emory University, US—launched the Social, Emotional and Ethical Learning (SEE Learning®) curriculum for school (Primary to Class 12). Through compassion-based practices, SEE Learning builds resilience, attention, self-awareness, self-regulation and relationship skills that enhance children’s ability to care for themselves and others.

for children and nurture their emotional resilience. Teachers must prioritise their own well-being to effectively deliver curricula and create a safe space for children. For this, they need to engage in reflective experiential exercises that foster a strong teacher-student relationship, preparing them for their role as facilitators.

Emotionally low after taking disciplinary action against a student, Ritu, a teacher from Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, began practicing grounding and resourcing activities in SEE Learning which helped her identify her own emotions and restore a positive environment in the classroom.

Addressing mental health requires different competencies, which can be supported by a cadre of master facilitators in each district to build a capacity of headmasters, teachers and government officials for implementing SEE Learning across schools and to help children and parents connect to services at Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs).

Parents and family members directly influence behaviours of children, especially when living in unsafe environments with inherited vulnerabilities and facing discrimination. Sensitising parents about mental health through school activities such as PTMs (Parent Teacher Meetings), sessions on mindfulness and SEE Learning can make them aware of their role in supporting their child’s well-being.

Engaging parents through digital platforms such as WhatsApp groups have proven to be useful for disseminating resources, thereby enabling parents to create a safe support system for their children.

Addressing mental health is key to building a happy and peaceful future generation. The escalating mental health concerns among children necessitates innovative approaches such as SEE Learning in classrooms, facilitated by trained and emotionally resilient teachers. What is also needed is a supportive and nurturing community of parents, caregivers, etc., to foster emotional resilience, create a safe environment, and ensure the well-being of children.



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Piramal Foundation implements the SEE Learning curriculum in Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, helps teachers and principals become SEE Learning ambassadors, coaches and facilitators, and enables integration of SEE Learning in the state education agenda. In Jammu and Kashmir, it has partnered with the Union Territory to create a cadre of 150+ SEE Learning facilitators to impact schools across 40 districts.

Khushi, a Class 9 government school student in Jhunjhunu, learned to control her anger by regulating her emotions using various “help now strategies” under a SEE Learning activity. She also learned to practice forgiveness and build relationships.

Strengthening emotional resilience of children calls for building teacher capacity to understand the importance of preventive methods and the active participation of parents and community to build a safe cocoon