

The 'why and how' of imparting Life Skills among adolescents



Pre-adolescence and adolescence are critical phases in the life of an individual. This transitional phase before adulthood is marked by physical, emotional, cognitive, social and behavioural changes. Add to these recent changes in the environment – such as the disintegration of traditional family units, lifestyle changes, changing focus in education and increasing competition, dependence on technology, exposure to violent video games and everything else that can be accessed via the internet, religious radicalisation within different communities, uncertainty with regards employment and several other such forces, it is obvious that children are finding it more and more difficult to cope.

Anger, anxiety, indifference, alienation, conflict, depression, substance abuse and violence among this age group are becoming more common than they should be and it is leading to disastrous consequences. According to recent studies by the World Health Organization, self-harm is the fifth leading cause of death in adolescents, and depression is among the leading causes of disability.

It seems like we have a sizeable young population that is heading towards a precipice. This is more worrying in India, because at 253 million, the country has the largest adolescent population in the world, and every fifth person is between 10 to 19 years. It is therefore imperative that we step in before it is too late, and impart effective coping mechanisms in a proven systematic, constructive way.

Imparting Life Skills the proven way

Life Skills, just like all other skills, must be taught in a conducive environment, in a systematic manner and by qualified professionals. There is little doubt that the Indian academic system comprising more than 1522346 schools, 39931 colleges and 900 universities is the largest existing platform to roll out Life Skills programmes that will reach generations of students in the decades ahead.

Modules have been evolved to impart essential skills through activities such as classroom discussions, storytelling, role-playing within peer groups, debates, situation analysis, team games, counselling and mentoring.

UGC has developed a 'Facilitators' Guidelines for Imparting Life Skills' which details techniques modalities, illustrations, exercises and projects which can be customized for different social and cultural situations and geographies. Several policymakers, NGOs, academic institutions and government bodies are also collaborating to draw up a framework, to absorb Life Skills as part of the curriculum in schools and colleges across the country.

These inclusive techniques lead to the development of active listening, critical thinking, communication skills, accountability and problem-solving abilities. In addition, resilience, socialisation, cooperation and respect for diverse perspectives are some of the skills that will be cultivated over time, with practice.

The idea of imparting Life Skills is to equip India's demographic gold mine with all the skills that will build our youth into not merely a job-ready workforce, but also life-ready citizens of an evolving global village.

Source:

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>

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