

Counseling Services in Schools: Nurses in Forefront

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Children and adolescents constitute almost 40 percent of India's population. The forces of globalization, urbanization and free market economy have brought with them fresh challenges to provide a conducive environment to the development of children. The school plays a crucial role in the development of cognitive, social, emotional & moral functions and competencies in a child. However, in the contemporary system of education, schools have seriously marginalized and compromised on their role in guiding, regulating the psychological development of children and promoting psychosocial competence as they have to cope with heavy syllabi and curricula, poor teaching facilities and highly competitive examinations. In addition, there is limitation of resources and commercialization of education. School education has become a serious source of stress for children and parents.

Why Mental Health Care Facilities In Schools?

- Almost all children attend school at some time during their lives.
- Schools are often the strongest social and educational institutions available for intervention.

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- Schools have profound influence on children, their families, and the community.
- Young peoples' ability and motivation to stay in school, to learn, and to utilize what they learn is affected by their mental well-being.
- Schools can act as a safety net, protecting children from hazards, which affect their learning, development and psycho - social well - being.
- In addition to the family, schools are crucial in building or undermining self - esteem and a sense of competence.
- School mental health programmes are effective in improving learning, mental well - being, and channelizing management of mental disorders.
- Teachers have often received some training in developmental principles. This makes them potentially well qualified to identify and remedy mental health difficulties in school children.

Issues Related to Mental Health of School Children

Issues of well - being and psychosocial competence affect the entire school community including students, teachers, school administration and members of the surrounding community. Specific mental health programmes addressing these issues

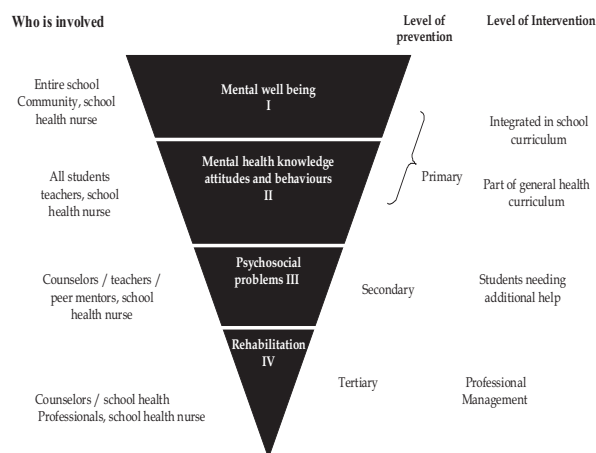
improve coping skills, decrease stress and increase support for a healthy school community. Mental health and learning go hand in hand.

Mental health knowledge, attitudes and behaviours affect all students and teachers. Educational interventions can make an important impact on the identification and handling of psychosocial and mental health problems. It is important to identify children with psychosocial problems early and target them for intervention. These early problems in school frequently predispose serious problems such as school failure and school dropout, early pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, delinquency and low levels of adult earnings. A few children develop serious mental disorders based on specific biological vulnerabilities just as some children develop other medical disorders such as diabetes, cancer and asthma.

Treatment by counselors and school health professionals is as important as a receptive and supportive school environment.

Framework for School Mental Health Programme

The following diagram illustrates the psychosocial and mental health issues in any



school system and indicates who is likely to be involved by these issues:

Levels I through IV can be linked to primary, secondary and tertiary prevention measures. Primary prevention and health promotion (Levels I and II) target the causes of healthy and unhealthy conditions with interventions, which promote healthy behaviours and prevent a disorder from developing. Secondary prevention (Level III) targets selected population of high-risk children to protect against the onset of the disorder. Tertiary prevention (Level IV) targets children who already have developed the disorder with the intent of treating the disorder, reducing the impairment from the disorder, rehabilitation and / or preventing relapse.

Counseling in Schools

Counseling is a relationship stated as non – possessive warmth, genuineness, a sensitive understanding of children’s thoughts and feelings. It is a “delicate alliance” involving empathy and good listening, which helps the counselor to understand and explore the problems, view them in varied perspective and ultimately solve them through effective rapport building.

Successful Counseling of Children & Adolescents Depends Upon

1. The level of psychosocial development of the child & adolescent.
2. The relationship the child & the adolescent share with the parents.
3. Identifiable event, which may have led to the problem behaviour.
4. Child and adolescent’s recognition that there is a conflict.
5. Child and adolescent’s ability to recognize and label feelings, emotions and consequence of behaviour.
6. Parental support.

Choice of solution remains with the child and adolescent. Each person is unique and once the counselee is able to view his/her world and

relationship objectively and clearly, he / she is competent and develops skills to handle future problems. However, counseling services can be made more effective and acceptable to children and their parents if teacher and school health nurses work in coordination and collaboration with counselors.

Role of Counselors in School

1. Vocational guidance
2. Counseling Children
3. Home school liaison
4. Coordination in school
5. Developmental group work
6. Organizing inclusive education
7. Psychological Testing
8. Diagnoses & assessment work

Role of the Teacher

- Early detection of student having problem.
- Liaison between parent and counselor
- Observation of student and feedback to the counselor.
- Maintaining therapy plan in school set up.
- Acting as a support person.

Role of a School Health Nurse

- Promoting the development and maintenance of a safe and healthful environment.
- Exploring community resources for children's health care.
- Assisting in securing physical, emotional and other examinations of children.
- Explaining to parents and teachers the findings of the medical examinations.

- Assisting parents to secure correction of defect.
- Follow all children in need of correction.
- Guidance and counseling of students.
- Referring students to other health professionals, if required.

Conclusion

Schools and institutions have unprecedented opportunity to improve the lives of young people. As nations have mood towards a commitment to universal education, school are finding it necessary to expand their role by providing health services including mental health services to deal with factors interfering with schooling. The Aim of these school - based interventions is to provide an experience that would strengthen the children's coping abilities to counter environmental stress and disadvantages with which they sometimes have to cope while growing.

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