

Health Promoting Schools in India: The Time Has Come!

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A health promoting school is a school that consistently strengthens its capacity as a safe and healthy setting for teaching, learning and working [1]. Such a school helps promote health and educational attainment in schools to better physical, social-emotional, and psychological conditions for health as well as for positive education outcomes [2]. Worldwide, schools are getting converted into health promoting schools, and India cannot be left behind in this ongoing advancement.

On 12 October, 2021, at Delhi, World Health Organization (WHO), along with several specialized agencies of the United Nations viz., United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and World Food Programme (WFP), gave a call for action for "Making every school a health promoting school: Scaling up implementation of comprehensive school health programs for promoting health and well-being of students and staff [3]." India is also a signatory to the same [3].

HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOLS INITIATIVE OF IAP-NCDPA

It is a standards-driven school health program and system for accreditation of schools in India, developed by the Non-Communicable Disease Prevention Academy (NCDPA), the statement of 10 commandments of which was endorsed by the Executive Board of Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP) in its meeting on 19-20 March, 2022. This was done with the conviction that it will be help to provide quality education and to ensure the safety and wellbeing of each child exposed to the school environment, and it was envisaged that the proposal document of NCDPA may become a role model in the formation of standards norms for "Child Friendly School" initiative. The commandments (an abridged version is listed in **Box I**), lay high focus on cultivation of healthy lifestyle early in life, and prevention of non-communicable diseases over the life span, especially those originating in childhood and adolescence.

Further details to operationalize these ten points are as follows:

1. Conducting age-appropriate activities every three months, aimed at building among all students, awareness and skills related with primary prevention of diseases (esp. healthy lifestyle, hygiene and sanitation).
2. General health check-up including assessment of vaccination status and annual body mass index (BMI) recording, tracked serially. Any deviation from normal should be reported to a health care provider, and the parents.
3. A 30-45 minutes session of age-appropriate physical activity after adequate warm-up exercises. Between successive classes, a short, around 2 minute break for few stretch exercises/moderate-vigorous physical activity.

Box I Ten Points for IAP-NCDPA-HPS Accreditation of Schools in India

1. Healthy Lifestyle awareness sessions targeted at primary prevention of behavioral risk factors skills every 3 months.
2. Annual BMI recording, serial tracking and referral if required.
3. Physical activity daily 30-45 minutes and for two minutes in between the classes.
4. Traffic light system based availability of foods in canteen.
5. Food should never be a part of reward or punishment.
6. Weight of the school bag should always be <1/10th of weight of child.
7. A peer-based school squad should exist and be available for all students alike.
8. At least one teacher trained and certified Basic Life Support (BLS) provider.
9. At least one teacher trained in screening for learning disorders (LD), and one counsellor.
10. A safe and secure environment for all students

4. Full compliance of traffic light based availability of foods in the canteen [4.]. Unhealthy food should be strictly prohibited from distribution in any event in the school, including sponsored events.
5. Food should never be a part of any reward or punishment.
6. The weight of school bag should be less than 1/10th of the weight of the child with lowest body weight in that class.
7. A peer group based 'School squad' should be engaged in ongoing surveillance for prevention, early detection, reporting and management of students getting into substance abuse, mental harassment/ bullying/depression.
8. On each working day, availability of at least one teaching staff trained and certified as a Basic Life Support (BLS) provider.
9. Availability of least one teacher trained and certified in screening children for learning disabilities.
10. A safe and secure environment for all students, including: strict compliance with fire safety norms and national building safety norms; global positioning system (GPS) and closed-circuit television (CCTV) in school buses; Installation of CCTV in school premises covering all sensitive areas, with footage preserved for 60 days; and, Compliance with all the directions of the Hon. Supreme Court of India [5] and Government of India [6] with respect to school buses, as well as

responsibilities of parents in respect thereof, must be strictly enforced.

Undoubtedly, and more so in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, time is now ripe to carve out a greater role for schools in preventive healthcare with e standards-driven approach, and IAP and NCDPA are geared up to deliver an efficient system for the same.

"Nothing else in the world...not all the armies...is so powerful as an idea whose time has come."

– Victor Hugo, The Future of Man.

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