

POLICY PAPER FOR HELP-LINE FOR WOMEN AND GIRL STUDENTS FOR PREVENTION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT RELATED INCIDENTS IN SCHOOLS.

A. General Points

Broadly speaking this exercise would involve three areas:

1. Redressal
2. Preventive Measures
3. Administrative Action

For the purpose of redressal of complaints, the Board has already (vide its circular dated 29th October, 2001) from the Joint Secretary (Affl.), advised schools to set up a Cell and send the action taken report on quarterly basis to the Joint Secretary (Affl.) who has been appointed the Nodal Officer.

More important than this is the sensitization process of the women employees and girl students on how to prevent sexual harassment. For the same purpose it is felt that there is a need to conduct training programmes:-

- to have printed information in the form of booklets/ brochures for free distribution to the target group.
- to have nodal officers in the schools.
- It is further suggested in this regard that the CBSE has an ongoing programme on adolescents and aids education which vitally deals with the physical, social and emotional aspects of the adolescents. It would be most appropriate to broad base and establish inter-linkages with this ongoing programme for the benefit of girl students specially in the backward states. Merely coining definitions of sexual harassment will be futile unless the girls are able to understand the real meaning behind this and it seems that this objective can be achieved once they are given education by various means not only about the physical and biological growth and related aspects, but are also able to discern for themselves the 'right and wrong behaviour' of the opposite sex. Therefore, it is felt that a proper blending of these two areas is necessary whereby a girl becomes completely aware of all aspects of growth and abuse.

Regarding the literature and other information to be distributed it is proposed that the literature should not restrict itself to only defining sexual harassment and its categorisation but also highlight the fact that the harassor can also be a loser in terms of low morale, poor public image, high costs of hiring and training new employees and high legal costs and fines. As already mentioned above, it is very important to make clear that sexual harassment can be prevented. Besides other conditions it is also important to notify that conditions in respect of work, leisure, health and hygiene also need to be ensure so that the women do not feel any hostility towards themselves.

It is very important to decide the following:-

1. time frame for the redressal of complaints ; ideally it should be fixed for three months after which administration should be answerable to the Committee explaining reasons for delay.
2. nature of punishment ; this should be decided depending upon the gravity of the offence and taking the complainant's view point into consideration.
3. Compensation ; this action needs to be decided in view of the nature of offence and the opinion of the complainant.
4. identification and publicity of the harasser : the identification and publicity of the harasser will have a salutary impact. The name of the harasser and action taken against him can be put up on prominent places in the offices for the information of others. These steps may deter many others also.

B. Adolescent Sexuality

Growing up is a natural, normal process. Every living being undergoes certain changes, intrinsic and extrinsic at various stages of development. The period between the age 12 to 18 years is called adolescence, which is marked by certain physical, sexual, social and emotional changes.

At the onset of adolescence, girls and boys attain puberty i.e. they begin to develop several characteristics of adults. Some of the physical changes occurring in boys during this phase are : growth of hair on face and body, cracking of voice, increase in height and weight and rapid growth of sex organs. Girls also experience similar changes such as development of breasts, broadening of hips, growth of pubic hair and softening of voice. Under sexual development, girls experience menstruation and boys experience nocturnal emission. All these changes occur as a result of release of sex hormones in the body.

Sexual behaviour is an aspect of the total personality which is shaped not only by one's biological self but the psychological, sociocultural and ethical forces operative in the environment. It therefore needs to be viewed in totality. Most of the common problems of adolescent sexuality derive from the fact that there is widespread ignorance of body changes and natural processes that occur during puberty.

Myths and misconceptions

Adolescence is marked with several questions that lead to fear and anxieties. Most parents and teachers avoid answering these questions. There are several myths and misconceptions related to sex and sexuality which effect choices of the individuals.

Problems of Adolescent Sexuality

Development problems

1. Variations in attaining pubertal landmarks

In girls and boys the period of attaining pubertal changes will differ. One may mature faster than the other yet both are considered to be normal.

2. Menstruation(Girls)

For those who have been given no guidance, it causes deep-seated worry and anxiety arising from ignorance, superstitious talk and the fear of an incurable disease.

3. Breast Development/Dress (Girls)

Generally a girl tends to worry about the size of her breasts. The need to be attractive and to dress like others of her age-group is dominant at this age.

4. Nocturnal Emission (Boys)

Spontaneous erection and the first involuntary discharge of semen in boys (popularly known as 'wet dreams') generally occurs at night when the conscious mind is at rest. The youngster may experience fear and disbelief in such situation.

5. Masturbation

- Boys begin to masturbate generally after they have heard that it is self-stimulation.
- No physical harm is caused by masturbation which may be described as a 'universal phenomenon' among boys-chiefly between 15 to 20 years of age.
- Thousands of guilt-ridden, misinformed teenagers fear loss of virility.
- For emotionally disturbed youngsters masturbation often provides an escape from real-life problems.

6. Acne

Boys and girls worry about pimples that are caused by hormonal imbalances characteristic of this period.

Psycho-social Problems / Pre-marital sex

A majority of those who indulge in premarital sex do so because they have been persuaded and are unaware of or unconcerned about the consequences of such a relationship.

Teenage Pregnancy

It poses a serious health hazard-physically and emotionally.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases(STD)

- Young people need to have scientific knowledge of sexually transmitted diseases.
- Awareness of their own responsibility in infecting others.
- An understanding of the emotional factors that lead to promiscuous behaviour and its consequences.

Smoking, Drugs, Alcohol

- Most adolescents experiment with cigarettes, drugs and alcohol at this stage.

- Teenagers whose core-personality development is marred by insecurity, distrust, fear and anger, tend to get habituated more easily.

Teacher care

- With appropriate education and understanding, the teacher should explain how biological factors related to sexual growth and development are inter-linked with powerful emotional drive.
- Myths and misconceptions need to be cleared with accurate and specific information.

C. Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse is the physical or mental violation of a child with sexual intent usually by an older person who is in position of trust and power vis-a-vis the child.

Child Sexual Abuse includes

- An adult exposing his/her genitals to a child or persuading the child to do the same.
- An adult touching a child's genitals or making the child touch the adult's genitalia.
- An adult involving a child in pornography (which includes exposing a child to pornographic material).
- An adult having oral, vaginal or anal intercourse with a child.
- An verbal or other sexual suggestion made to a child by an adult.
- An adult persuading children to engage in sexual activity.

Alarms signals

There may be sudden behavioural and physical changes in children. These should be taken as warning signs. Look for:

- Anxiety
- Low self-esteem
- Depression
- Excessive crying
- Sleep disturbances
- Withdrawing from family and friends.
- Irritability
- Hostility
- Change in appetite
- School problems
- Running away
- Self-destructive behaviours
- Bed-wetting

- . Anger
- . Isolation
- . Fear
- . Sadness
- . Guilt
- . Shame

Teacher care

- . Believe the child
- . Try to remain calm
- . Praise the child for telling
- . Reassure the child
- . Make it clear that what happened is not his or her fault.
- . Listen to the child.
- . Respect the child's privacy. Be careful not to discuss the incident in front of people who do not need to know what happened.
- . Be responsible. Report the incident and arrange a medical checkup.

Don't

- . Don't Panic or over react when the child talks to you about the experience.
- . Don't scold the child. The child needs help and support to make it through this difficult time.
- . Don't blame the child.
- . Teach the child how to say 'no' to an older person if he/she touches him/her in a way that makes him/her feel uncomfortable, or if an adult wants to have his private parts touched, fondled etc.
- . Be familiar with child's friends and their activities.
- . Encourage the child to talk about all issues.
- . Believe what the child tells and be alert to small changes in his/her behaviour.
- . Observe the teenager or adult who is paying an unusual amount of attention to the child.
- . Ask the child not to go near strangers or be friendly to them if they offer chocolates, toffees etc.
- . Teach children the difference between good touches and bad touches.

The effects of child sexual abuse are long lasting and may leave deep scars on the child's personality. Healing is an important process which must begin as early as possible.

- Depression and feeling of isolation are very common signs of child sexual abuse. Help the child to get over depression and seek professional help. Raising his/her sense of self esteem is an important way of dealing with depression and isolation.
- During abuse a child has an overwhelming sense of powerlessness and loss of control. Help the child regain his/her confidence and sense of control in every situation.
- Expressing anger over the abuse is an important step in self-healing. Help the child vent anger at the abuser but also teach him/her to exercise control.
- It is important to rid the child of guilt and shame by convincing him/her that the abuser was wholly responsible for the abuse.
- Remember the child who was violated needs to be forgiven, accepted and loved. But not the abuser and others.

Myths and Facts about sexual abuse:

Myths

Children are rarely abused.

Child Sexual abuse occurs mostly in poor, illiterate families.

Children should not be allowed to play outside as molestation, sexual abuse generally occurs on playgrounds or other public places.

Children are often fantasizing about being sexually assaulted.

Usually the mother is aware of the fact that her child is being sexually abused.

Reporting of child Sexual abuse causes more harm than good.

Facts

Children are the most vulnerable section of our society because of their dependence on elders.

Child sexual abuse occurs in all strata of society because children irrespective of their family background are equally vulnerable

Most children are sexually abused inside their homes, and the abuser is an acquaintance, relative, a family friend a servant or the driver.

Children are ignorant about 'sex' and so cannot fantasize about being raped or sodomised.

Most mothers are not aware of the fact that their children are being abused, the reason being that children are afraid of disclosing their abuse to ANYONE.

If Child Sexual abuse is not reported then the same abuser may harm other children.

Child Sexual Abuse victims generally capitalize on the sympathy and throw tantrums.

A child should be encouraged to forget the abuse, as there are no really harmful effects of child Sexual Abuse.

Children who disclose the fact that they had been sexually abused and then retract it, are only looking for attention.

A child who has been sexually abused suffers a great deal of emotional trauma and may have occasional outbursts. This is not an effort to capitalize on the sympathy but an effort to cope with the trauma.

Child sexual abuse always has extremely negative effects. If a child is not encouraged to disclose then it may lead to severe behavioural disorders.

Children are scared of their abusers as the abusers being adults are in a position of power. So if a child retracts his/her statement then it is because of fear and bewilderment.