

## School Mental Health Programme: Adolescent Identity Crisis Versus Social Expectations

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### Introduction

Adolescence is the age of shifting from childhood to adulthood and the young adolescent start to face physical, emotional, mental and social changes in his or her behavior. It is a time where the students start to battle between their upcoming adult roles on one hand, while still having the need to receive love, acceptance, and protection from parents. It is a time where children also undergo an Identity Crisis. They want to be a representation of their 'selves,' and showcase their ideas, thoughts, and habits to the world. However, this search for their own identity and ways to express themselves often conflict with the roles expected from them by their parents, teachers, relatives, peers, and other members of society. This leads to a role conflict between what the adolescents want and what society expects from them. If not guided properly, adolescents are forced into a state of ambiguity and are left with little opportunity to become confident, responsible and healthy adults.

They may choose wrong paths for themselves such as drug abuse or violent behavior or may slide into depression under continuous social pressure. Thus, it becomes imperative to enable students in expressing their identities in socially constructive ways and using their beaming energies towards more positive outcomes. Thus, this mental health program will aim to develop necessary social, thinking communication, and self-expression skills among students of class 9<sup>th</sup>, most of them ranging from 14 to 17 years of age. The age gap among the students of the same class exists, as many students of this class failed to get promoted to the next class. It is also important to note that students who fail in developing positive social relationships with their peers, parents, or teachers also miss the opportunity to learn skills such as resolving social conflicts, understanding the perspective of others, identifying and analyzing major social problems, caring for others, etc. Every student has the capability to positively contribute to social development, however, lack of necessary skills to identify social issues and failing to consider them as one's own responsibility lead to mere wastage of their individual skills and competences.

Adolescents usually go through a dynamic transformation both at internal and external level, which requires that, the teacher and parents follow an adolescent-friendly approach. It is therefore important to ensure that the needs and wants of students are given priority in the process of learning, self-growth and development. When we identify the need for adolescents to take up responsibilities, maintain commitments, transform challenges as opportunities and understand their own selves better, it is equally important for teachers to respect and value the curious, adventurous, bold, risk-taking nature of the adolescents who are equally friendly, helpful, joyful and sincere if approached and guided in the right manner. There is a need for the teachers to act as role models, guides and facilitators to be able to build trust among students to create more fruitful relationships with them.

This mental health program will thus be an attempt to guide the energies, capabilities, and talents of the students into more constructive fields. The students will be allowed to share their views about the world, their opinions about self, and how they can try to create a balance between the two. An attempt will be made to guide the students to express their unique skills and at the same time, being able to understand the perspective of others. These students are the future of the nation and thus, it is significant for them to value the relevance of their abilities in the nation-building process.

### Rationale

I chose class 9<sup>th</sup> for my Mental Health Program with the students ranging from 14 to 17 years of age. The reason being that during substitution periods allotted to me for this class, I noticed a strong urge among the students to reflect their true selves in terms of their dressing style, behavior, bodily gestures, gait, and other classroom interactions. Some of the students wore fancy caps, had very narrow fitted trousers, girls wore their Kurtis/suits with a shorter length than was prescribed, applied Kajal, kept a ponytail instead of braids. Rings and ear studs were prominent among both the genders. All this took place despite the principal being a strict disciplinarian who gave extensive attention to uniform. I noticed that most of these students were either scolded or beaten during the morning

assembly when the school principal checked the uniforms of the students. The principal also asked many students to go back home for a breach of uniform discipline. Despite such disciplinarian measures, many students continued to follow these practices by finding alternative ways like turning their braids into ponytails, wearing caps, rings, and ear studs once the uniform check was over.

On interaction with students during substitution classes, I found out that two of the students of this class were very good at calligraphy, but were often scolded and punished by the teachers when they got caught doing calligraphy during classes. Though I believe that every institutional setup runs on some basic rules and regulations for its effective working, at the same time, it is also essential that the school conveys the relevance of school regulations to the students in an effective manner. The students were not able to draw lines of distinction between self-expression and code of behavior as per school guidelines. When students questioned such regulations, they got suppressed through scolding, beating, or other such punishments leaving the students in a state of ambiguity. This ambiguity leads to behavior that does not fit within the rigid frameworks of school and is taken by the teachers and parents as rebellious behavior.

We infer from the above discussion that despite restrictions, the young adolescents kept finding ways to express themselves through their dressing style, eating habits, expressions, and choice of their prospective careers. However, they are expressing their identities in a way that was socially unacceptable and violated the rules of an institutional setup (For example, wearing fancy caps in schools is against uniform discipline). Such a form of expression is influenced by many factors such as peer pressure, effects of media and social media platforms, group pressure, and other similar reasons.

Thus, the rationale behind this program is to identify various problems faced by adolescents in adjusting to their society and finding the reasons for the same. It will also try to find out how they deal with these problems. It is also significant to know how the students want to express themselves and finding a midway between their self-expression versus conflicting social roles expected from them. The program will also focus on students' empowerment and capacity building by finding out how their means of social expression can connect to the real world and finding ways to enable the students to

utilize their uniqueness to make more positive and fruitful social contributions.

### **School context**

#### ***Name of the school:***

Government Co-Education Senior Secondary School, Delhi

#### ***Average socio-economic backgrounds of students:***

The students mostly belong to lower economic groups. The parents of most students are involved in manual work or petty jobs like working as domestic help, labor, fruit seller, hairdressers, painters, drivers, and hospital non-technical staff, and so on.

#### ***Location and locality:***

The school is located in an industrial area, well connected to various means of transport such as buses, auto-rickshaws, e-rickshaws, decent roadways, and a nearby Metro station. Most of the students came from neighboring areas. They came either on foot, on rickshaws, or with parents who escorted them on their way to their respective workplaces. While the school is situated in an industrial area, the backside of the school is mostly residential. Also, a few of the students work after school hours in nearby factories or at construction sites with their parents. I discerned this through my interaction with students as well as their teachers.

#### ***Other factors***

My experiences in the school have directed me to the fact that the school principal laid great emphasis on discipline. The principal was against any new activity that could have possible negative consequences on school discipline. During assembly, the principal often screamed over the microphone and asked teachers to keep checking the bags of the students and to update their Diaries for each minute misconduct or rule violation by the students. Sometimes, the principal also used abusive words during morning assemblies that were directed towards both students and teachers. The principal blamed the teachers for not keeping a tight grip on students' behavior. The teachers, however, seemed to be indifferent to the principal's messages and ignored him on most occasions. Some teachers even smiled at each other to disregard the orders of the principal.

Even though discipline is an essential element of every school, the school principal seemed to consider that maintaining discipline was the sole pillar that will lay the foundation for the efficient working of the school. On interaction with

teachers, I observed that most of the teachers perceived that the principal followed inefficient practices. They complained that the principal relied exclusively on written records as a measure of the efficient running of the school, for example, students should be given some form of written homework daily. He believed in the carrot-and-stick approach as a tool to enhance learning. Minimal emphasis was laid on assessing the students on other standards such as classroom interactions, improvement in performance, Co-curricular participation, and other individual talents and abilities. Events that required students to have an adequate degree of freedom, to express and communicate such as debates, discussion, and art competitions were arranged passively for mere formality. As a result, the students were left with zero opportunity to express themselves in ways other than traditional forms of evaluations such as written and oral tests.

### **Details of the class**

Class: 9<sup>th</sup>

Strength of class: 52 (31 boys and 21 girls)

Age group: 14 to 17 years

### **Reasons for choosing the class**

My very first interaction with the students was through a substitution period during one of the constitution's curriculum classes, where I was required to discuss the constitutional value of the month "Liberty".

Though this first class had a very rough start as the students tried to create unnecessary commotion in my presence as a new teacher. However, after 20 minutes, I was able to settle their class and initiate a meaningful discussion. I heard from the teachers that this class had a very notorious image in school and was referred to as a "class of failures" by many teachers. Surprisingly, the students gave me a meaningful and positive response, when I tried to initiate a positive engagement and discussion to know their personal views and perspective regarding their ideas of Liberty.

It was noteworthy that most of the students of this class looked drastically different from other sections of the class 9<sup>th</sup> as these students wore fancy caps and shoes, gold-framed spectacles, Kajal, ear studs, and similar fashion accessories. I had also heard that 2 to 3 students of this class were suspended for a few days for using the pencil sharpener's blade and bulletin board pins during a class fight, causing injuries to one of their classmates. The students regarded

themselves as the worst class and said this is what others considered them to be. It was unfortunate that the students had formed such views for themselves based on the remarks from students of other classes, teachers, and the school principal.

Despite all the negative views that prevailed about the class I sensed a great potential in these students. The students of this class behaved more naturally as against other students who were successfully able to mould themselves into the rigid frameworks laid down by school and society. The students of this class represented a more heterogeneous character where each student reflected vibrant characteristics that they displayed very explicitly. Even though, certain aspects of these students' behavior were not socially and morally acceptable, such as entering into violent situations, rebellious arguments with teachers and classmates, etc.

These students appeared to be fighting to become a version which was closer to their own self rather than their socially imposed identities. Further interactions with the students also displayed some internal and external unrest, where they were seeking answers to the questions that they had about the social restraints imposed on them such as, why they had to wear uniforms in school, how can they positively contribute to their own as well as social wellbeing etc. Also, although those students were shouting and screaming unnecessarily at the beginning of the class, they failed to keep their views when I called them to share their Individual experiences. This represented their lack of confidence in putting their individual perspective which probably aroused from the shortage of self-expression opportunities that they received.

Thus I chose this class for implementing my School Mental Health Programme because I felt that these students were full of potential but lacked proper guidance and direction. This made them behave in a questionable manner. Thus, a program like this might help them in assessing their own skills concerning their capabilities in social development.

### **Mental health plan**

#### **Objectives**

The key objectives of the mental health plan will be:

1. To understand the problems faced by young adolescents during interactions with their parents and teachers.

2. To identify the reasons behind such conflicts.
3. To provide a platform to students to identify their capabilities and analyze how they can be utilized in a positive social construction.
4. To build sensitivity among students regarding their own actions and how it can impact others.
5. To develop communication and analytical skills through providing various situations to students for discussion

**Preparation required and resources**

1. One of my peer student-teachers would be requested to accompany me during all the three sessions to support me in managing the classroom to ensure smooth implementation of the plan.
2. In the second session of the plan, the students will be divided into four groups represented by 4 seating rows and each group will be given one stimulation-based situation as mentioned later in the plan in detail.

**Process**

**Survey Questionnaire**

**(Mental health program)**

The Mental Health Program will be divided into 3 sessions of 35 minutes each. Following is a brief overview of the three sessions which are discussed in detail later:

*Session 1:* A survey will be conducted with the help of a self-prepared questionnaire to know the choices, thoughts and perspectives of students regarding themselves, their peers, society, and teachers.

*Session 2:* Situations given to students in the group to analyze and create perspective towards different social situations that they encounter or may encounter in real lives.

*Situation 3:* Experience and talent sharing session.

**Session 1**

The following survey will be given to the students and the students will be introduced to the meaning and rationale of the survey along with a brief introduction session on how to answer the questions. The student-teacher along with her peer will assist the students. 20 minutes will be given to the students for the same.

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Age</b>
<b>Gender:</b>	<b>Parent’s Occupation:</b>
<b>Residence:</b>	

- Q1. What career would you choose for yourself if you had no restrictions on you?  
 .....
- Q2. Will your parents accept the career choice you mentioned above?  
 .....
- Q3. What are your hobbies?  
 .....
- Q4. Do you ever face a situation where you and your parents differ in opinions or choices? If yes, then mention any two such situations  
 .....  
 .....
- Q5. Have you ever felt that your teachers scold you for no reason? If yes, then mention any two such situations.  
 .....  
 .....
- Q6. Are you on social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat etc?)  
 .....  
 .....

Q7. Will you add the following to your friends list on social media accounts if they send you a follow request?

	YES/NO
TEACHERS	
PARENTS	

Q8. What is the reason for your answer above?

.....  
 .....

Q9. What are the 2 things you would like to change about your school?

.....  
 .....  
 .....

Q10. What is the importance of school in your life?

.....  
 .....

Q11. Do you think that you can make a contribution to national development? If yes, then how?

.....  
 .....

**Session 2**

In order to promote critical thinking, analytical and communication skills among students, the teacher will give the following situations to the students and the class will be divided into four groups according to their seating arrangement.

The situation will be written on a piece of paper and distributed to each group. A time of 15 minutes will be allocated to each group to discuss the matter and choose two representatives to share the key points of their discussion with the class. The student-teacher will support and guide the discussion.

Following situations will be given:

*Situation1:* A boy from class 9th wants to dress up in a feminine manner, shop a lot of clothes and wear makeup. His friends think that he speaks in a girlish tone. His parents and teachers scold him for his behavior and tell him that he should behave like a “boy”. As a result, he is depressed and stays alone all the time. As his friend, how will you help him? How do you think the boy feels about himself? How can this conflict be resolved?

*Situation2:* Hobbies are an important part of one’s life. We all have some hobbies that we engage in to pass our time. Are hobbies merely for time pass? Or can they be used into more productive ways? Discuss among your friends as to how our hobbies can be used to deal with the many social problems, we see around us?

*Situation3:* A student of XYZ School was told continuously that the viewpoints and perspectives that he puts in his essays and other assignments are not correct. Every time he or she tried to put his or her perspective in class, the teacher rejected it saying that he must provide viewpoints that are similar to the ones provided in his textbooks and course. The student thinks that his or her views are not respected by the teacher. How can these conflicts be resolved in the class?

*Situation 4:* The students of class 9<sup>th</sup> of a school are preparing a play for their annual function. However, one of the members of the group is not a confident person in public speaking and is scared to perform. What should his or her friends do to solve the situation question?

After the discussion of the problem among themselves, 20 minutes will be given to the students for classroom discussion where the representatives from each group will come one by one to share their views with the class.

**Session 3**

In this session, 20 minutes will be allotted to a discussion initiated by the student teacher to allow the students to express their views in an open-ended form.

Following questions will be used to promote and guide the discussion:

1. What are the activities you do at home?
2. Would you like to share any experience or situation from which you learned something?
3. What are the key social problems that you see around yourself and want to change?
4. Do you ever feel stressed? How do you cope with it?
5. Which is your favorite TV program, web show or game? Why?
6. What is that one social media trend you love or hate? How do you think the Internet affects our lives?

In the above discussion the students will be chosen randomly to come in front and share their views. Further discussion will then be built over these viewpoints.

After the discussion, remaining 15 minutes will be given to the students to showcase and share their talents and discuss how they can be used for their own benefit and positive social construction.

### **Analysis report of the program**

#### ***Analysis of session 1***

The survey was conducted on 35 students (18 girls and 17 boys) of 9<sup>th</sup> class. The responses of students analyzed and the analysis report given as under:

In the analysis it has been found that: The most of the students felt that their parents allowed them to follow their own choices, the teachers imposed greater restrictions over their choices and more than 75% students denied to add either their parents or teachers on social media accounts and mentioned that it will hinder their privacy and limit them in expressing their views.

When asked about the things they want to change in their school, most mentioned their dissatisfaction with the strict attitude principal. Some expressed that they disliked when the principal beat or scolded them without providing adequate opportunity to students to justify their behavior. Some mentioned that they would prefer it more if the principal tried to initiate healthy conversations with them before taking disciplinary actions.

Around 30% students laid stress on providing midday meals to all students which is provided only to the students till class 8<sup>th</sup> while many students acknowledged the importance of schools in their lives to get jobs, to brighten their future or to gain respect for themselves and their

parents, there were many who chose to skip the question. When the students were asked about how they can work for social upliftment most students directed towards charity and related things which indicates that the students are unaware of the various other ways through which they can contribute to national development such as investing in developing oneself and working sincerely in businesses, organizations etc. Also, the students want to change the teaching methods followed in school and the disciplinarian attitude of the principal. This desire reflects that the students feel restricted in school. Some students mentioned that school should have lesser roles in fixing their dressing sense. They should be allowed to keep hair styles or clothes of their choice and present their unique self. (We can write it as “the school should have directed to minimize their role in deciding the dressing sense, hair style or clothing and let it be the choice of students, so that they can present their unique self.”

Or flexibility should be given to the students in dressings and hairstyle of their own choices, so that they can present themselves in a unique way.)

#### ***Analysis of session 2***

*Situation 1:* the students initially said that they will try to stop the boy from using makeup as it does not fit in the roles expected from males. However, other students of the class stated that makeup should not be restricted only to girls and both genders must have equal rights in all forms of expression. The teacher also guided the discussion by taking the examples of male TV and movie actors who wear makeup. It was also discussed that makeup is a form of art, a means to liberation and self-expression. The discussion also went around Section 377 and gender being a social construct. The students understood after some discussion and one student even shared how he works at a beauty parlor and is proud of the same.

*Situation 2:* the students actively shared their hobbies such as biking, calligraphy, singing, dancing, beat-boxing (using mouth to create music) and writing rap songs. The students also laid stress on how they did not get enough opportunities in school to express their talents. One student who sings and composes rap songs stated that in previous school he used to get many opportunities to present his talents, however he misses such opportunities in this school. The student also complained that he was not allowed to participate in school functions as the teachers did not consider rap music to be a fit

form of expression for school functions, even though the lyrics offered rap music were based on education.

*Situation 3:* some students focused on the point that students must discuss their problems with the teachers. However, the majority denied the same and shared their poor experiences when they were beaten up or scolded if they asked questions in class. The teachers then laid stress on the importance of effective communication and explained that the students must politely ask questions, avoid chorus discussions and may ask questions at the right time. The students must also try to understand the perspective of the teacher and must politely discuss their issues with teachers. However, the counselor feels that it is very important for a teacher to maintain a congenial classroom atmosphere, where the students feel free to express their views, give constructive criticism and don't feel fearful.

*For situation 4:* a good response was seen from the students where they enlisted many ways to involve students who face straight stage fright such as:

- Explaining him or her importance of participation for self-development.
- Suggesting deep breathing and other measures.
- Using the student's capabilities through other means like involving him in script writing direction music etc.
- Motivating the friend through cheerful statements and affirmations.

### **Analysis of session 3**

The third session was the most meaningful session of the plan and I got two subsequent periods and there was an elaborate experience and talent showing session.

First 35 minutes were used to discuss the various questions as mentioned in the plan with an active yet disciplined participation from students. It was heart-warming to see that the session had left a positive impact on students and a few students even volunteered to discipline the class to ensure the program went smoothly.

One of the students showed that he has written a rap song on his school life and education and volunteered to sing it for the class. He did not just sing well, but it was surprising to see that the student had even covered important aspects of what education is like and how it should be. It mentioned how the student felt disturbed when teachers scolded him for no reason and how he wants to break the boundaries to reach a world where his imperfections are valued. He desired

to raise the name of the nation to international fame through his songs.

Another girl performed a dance and discussed that she felt confident when she danced and wanted to become a dance teacher. This was followed by other students, showcasing their talents through singing, dancing and poetry. One student shared his love for biking and travel. However, I explained to him to use appropriate safety measures and wait till 18 before starting to ride on roads.

### **Challenges faced**

The implementation of the plan was not without challenges, especially session one, which included an interview-questionnaire session. It was a less effective decision as most students of the class could not write in either English or in Hindi. Thus, the teacher had to assist each student while the answers were provided orally by the students. The questions were thus explained to the students who orally dictated their responses while the teacher filled the form. Many students even cheated and copied the responses of their friends despite being explained several times.

Classroom management was an issue in the first session; however, students were self-regulated and disciplined in the later sessions.

### **My experiences and students' reactions**

The plan enabled me to engage more deeply with the students, understand their issues, perspectives, and view-points and have a closer look at the various factors that affect the mental health and behavior of students. The chief lesson was that I learnt the importance of informal communication and relationships to create a sense of trust among students. The students may seem to be rude and undisciplined from outside but they had a very soft core, an innate goodness and many forms of talents and capabilities which were otherwise ignored in an academic setup where students were judged merely on the basis of marks.

Many students of the class approached me after the programme and thanked me for taking up such a program. Some even called me and my peer student-teachers to take up three free periods more often. Two boys also came to me to ask if they were allowed to perform hip hop dance on the annual function. The school event coordinator immediately denied that no performance should be arranged from this class as the students will create chaos during practice and performance as was reflected in their notorious image of the class. Eventually the

event coordinator agreed to merge these students with a Bhangra group where they two will perform a hip hop mixed with Bhangra. It was good that the students showed interest in school activities and also got an opportunity for the same.

Though, it is difficult to comment on the long-term impacts of the program, I sensed some positive changes in some of the students during daily school interactions. All in all, it was a learning experience to know the complexities of students' behavior and their viewpoints. It is important for all teachers to understand the context and background of each student and then create his or her teaching pedagogy to suit the requirements of the class. This will also enable the students to identify their individual skills and analyze their importance in real life.