

## Psychological Well-being As a Part of School Culture

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### Abstract

This document highlights best practices for Psychosocial Well-being of children as a part of School Culture considering the overall emotional, social, and mental health of students within a school environment, encompassing their relationships with peers, teachers, and the wider community, as well as their ability to manage stress, cope with challenges, and feel a sense of belonging and positive self-esteem within the school setting

**Keywords:** CPX, Unlocking potential, CPX Ideals, Integrity, Humility, Perseverance, Collaboration Service

### Integrating Life Skills and Mental Wellbeing in the Holistic Health Curriculum.

As children spend a significant portion of their formative years in school, we must prioritise their well-being and address their mental and physical health needs. A holistic approach to education encompasses a range of factors, from providing nutritious meals to promoting mindfulness practices and offering opportunities for exercise. By prioritising students' overall health, schools can create an environment that fosters growth, resilience, and lifelong learning. This paper discusses the benefits of a holistic approach to education and some practical steps educators can take to promote student wellness in the classroom.

It's no secret that the mental and physical health of students is closely linked to their academic success. Yet, for years, schools have largely ignored this connection, focusing instead on standardised test scores and tangible measures of achievement.

However, as more research demonstrates the importance of social-emotional learning and whole-child development, schools are beginning to take a holistic approach to education. This comprehensive approach recognises the importance of addressing mental and physical health to create a safe and supportive environment where students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

There are a number of ways to address mental and physical health in schools. Some key strategies include:

- Providing access to counselling and mental health services
- Incorporating social-emotional learning into the curriculum
- Promoting healthy eating habits and physical activity
- Creating a safe and supportive school climate

Each of these strategies is significant on its own, yet they become even more effective when combined. Adopting a holistic approach to education allows us to start genuinely addressing the needs of the whole child.

### The Benefits of Holistic Education

Holistic education is an approach to learning that considers the whole person—body, mind, and spirit. It is based on the belief that all three aspects are interconnected and should be considered when promoting health and well-being.

There are many benefits to pursuing a holistic approach to education. For one, it can help address mental and physical health concerns in schools. Mental health issues like anxiety and depression are on the rise among young people, and research has shown that they can have a negative impact on academic performance. By taking a holistic approach to education, we can help identify students who may be struggling

with mental health issues and connect them with resources to get the support they need.

Physical health is also important for academic success. Physically healthy students are more likely to attend school and perform well academically than those who are not. A holistic approach to education can help ensure that students have access to healthy food options, opportunities for physical activity, and safe spaces to learn and grow.

Holistic education promotes mental and physical health and can also foster social-emotional learning (SEL). SEL skills like empathy, teamwork, and self-regulation have been shown to lead to academic success, better workplace performance, and improved overall well-being. By incorporating SEL into the curriculum, we can give students the tools they need to thrive in all areas of their lives.

A holistic approach to education considers the whole person, including their mental and physical health. This type of education has many benefits, including improved academic performance, better social and emotional development, and increased overall well-being.

When students are supported in all aspects of their lives, they can thrive academically and personally. A holistic approach to education recognises the importance of a healthy mind and body for success in school and life. This type of education provides students with the tools they need to manage stress, develop positive relationships, and maintain their physical health. As a result, students who receive a holistic education are more likely to succeed in school and life.

Holistic education is an approach that considers the student's mental and physical health. It is beneficial for students because it can help them better understand and manage their own and others' health.

### **The Joy of Learning-Enabling Psychosocial Wellness in School Culture**

Historically, children were educated through life experiences; people learned from other humans. In ancient India, the basic notion of schools that all children would attend—a time and place to

intentionally structure teaching and learning—came into existence. Schools are institutions that cultivate reason and the capacity of people to improve their lives and build a better social order through individual agency and collective efforts.

All youth need to develop a set of core life skills to manage school, work, outside interests, and social relationships successfully. From the perspective of brain development, these skills include planning, focus, self-control, awareness, and flexibility. We know that early childhood is a critical time for the brain when connections are being made that become the foundation for a child's future health, learning, and behaviour.

*Adolescence is also a vital “window of opportunity” for building core life skills—and for practitioners to provide support.*

### **The Adolescent Brain: A Second Window of Opportunity**

In the earliest years of childhood, children's brains form neural connections at an unmatched rate. This represents the first opportunity to shape their brain development through nutrition, stimulation, and protection from violence and other harm.

However, a growing body of scientific knowledge shows that experience and environment also combine with genetics to shape the brains of adolescents. This presents a second, crucially important window of opportunity to influence the development of children's brains – and, thus, their futures. During this period, the brain strengthens its most-used connections, making them faster and more efficient, and “prunes” away less-used ones. As the different areas of the brain mature during adolescence, their ability to function as an interconnected system improves. Practising core life skills during adolescence helps the brain build the most efficient pathways to support these skills throughout life.

With 1.2 billion adolescents in the world today, all of us have a stake in helping them to reach their full potential. Today's independence-seeking adolescent is tomorrow's doctor.

Tomorrow's teacher. Tomorrow's worker.  
Tomorrow's leader.

### **Their Future is the Future of Our World.**

Research on the developing brain shows us that early childhood experiences build the foundation for a skilled workforce, a responsible community, and a thriving economy. A new evidence base has identified a set of skills that are essential for school achievement, for the preparation and adaptability of our future workforce, and for avoiding a wide range of population health problems. In the brain, the ability to hold onto and work with information, focus thinking, filter distractions, and switch gears is like an airport having a highly effective air traffic control system to manage the arrivals and departures of dozens of planes on multiple runways. Scientists refer to these capacities as executive function and self-regulation—a set of skills that relies on three types of brain function: working memory, mental flexibility, and self-control. Children aren't born with these skills—they are born with the potential to develop them. The full range of abilities continues to grow and mature through the teen years and into early adulthood. To ensure that children develop these capacities, it's helpful to understand how the quality of the interactions and experiences that our communities provide for them either strengthens or undermines these emerging skills. When children have had opportunities to develop executive function and self-regulation skills successfully, both individuals and society experience lifelong benefits.

- **School Achievement:** Executive function skills help children remember and follow multi-step instructions, avoid distractions, control rash responses, adjust when rules change, persist at problem-solving, and manage long-term assignments. For society, this results in a better-educated population capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st century.
- **Positive Behaviours:** Executive functions help children develop skills in teamwork, leadership, decision-making, working toward goals, critical thinking, adaptability, and awareness of their own and others' emotions.

For society, this results in more stable communities, reductions in crime, and greater social cohesion.

- **Good Health:** Executive function skills help people make more positive choices about nutrition and exercise, resist pressure to take risks, try drugs, or have unprotected sex, and be more conscious of safety for themselves and their children. Good executive function primes our biological systems and coping skills to respond well to stress. For society, the outcome is a healthier population, a more productive workforce, and reduced healthcare costs.
- **Successful Work:** Executive function skills increase our potential for economic success because they make us better organised, able to solve problems that require planning, and prepared to adjust to changing circumstances. For society, this means greater prosperity due to an innovative, competent, and flexible workforce.
- The critical factors in developing a strong foundation for these essential skills are children's relationships, the activities they have opportunities to engage in, and the places in which they live, learn, and play.
- **Relationships:** Children develop in an environment of relationships. This starts in the home and extends to caregivers, teachers, medical and human services professionals, foster parents, and peers. Children are more likely to build effective executive function skills if the important adults in their lives can support their efforts and model them.
- Research on the developing brain shows us that early childhood experiences build the foundation for a skilled workforce, a responsible community, and a thriving economy.
- A new evidence base has identified a set of skills that are essential for school achievement, the preparation and adaptability of our future workforce, and the prevention of a wide range of population health problems.
- A series of summaries of essential findings from recent scientific publications and

presentations by the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. Tests measuring different forms of executive function skills indicate that they begin to develop shortly after birth, with ages 3 to 5 a window of opportunity for dramatic growth in these skills. Development continues throughout adolescence and early adulthood.

### **Executive Function: Skills For Life And Learning**

- Engage in activities in which they practice the skills;
- Provide a consistent, reliable presence that young children can trust;
- Guide them from complete dependence on adults to gradual independence and
- Protect them from chaos, violence, and chronic adversity because toxic stress caused by these environments disrupts the brain circuits required for executive functioning and triggers impulsive, “act-now-think-later” behaviour.
- Activities—Building these abilities in young children requires communities and caregivers to provide and support experiences that promote emotional, social, cognitive, and physical development broadly, including a range of strategies that:
- Reduce stress in children’s lives, both by addressing its source and helping them learn how to cope with it in the company of competent, calming adults;
- Foster social connection and open-ended creative play, supported by adults;
- Incorporate vigorous physical exercise into daily activities, which has been shown to positively affect stress levels, social skills, and brain development;
- Increase the complexity of skills step-by-step by finding each child’s “zone” of being challenged but not frustrated and
- Include repeated practice of skills over time by setting up opportunities for children to learn in the presence of supportive mentors and peers. Places—The home and other environments where children spend most of their time must:

- Feel (and be) safe; Provide space for creativity, exploration, and exercise;
- Be economically and socially stable in order to reduce the anxiety and stress that come with uncertainty or fear.

If children do not get what they need from their relationships with adults and the conditions in their environments—or (worse) if those influences are sources of toxic stress—their skill development can be seriously delayed or impaired. That said, science shows that there are opportunities throughout development to provide children, adolescents, and the adults who care for them with the relationships, environments, and skill-building activities that will enhance their executive function capacities.

It’s just easier, less costly, and more effective to get them right from the start.

### **Embrace Teaching and Learning as a Dynamic Relational Human Exchange.**

Embracing an interplay of heart and mind between educators and students. That means shifting our focus from academic content and skills to understanding the integrated, interwoven social, emotional, and academic aspects of learning. We must balance academic expectations with a holistic perspective of who our students are as full human beings, each with their own rich story.

### **5 Ways to Help Youth Build Their Core Life Skills**

***Practice With Real-life Situations:*** Encourage youth to problem-solve around real-life challenges they face (for instance, trying to finish a project for school when a friend texts with a personal problem or handling a peer’s depression). WHY? Young people learn best when the experience is relevant to the real world, and they can test out their solutions.

#### **Skills: Focus, Flexibility**

***Spot and Plan for Triggers:*** Help youth recognise what triggers their intense emotions (for example, criticism from an adult, losing a game) and learn to take preventative actions—taking a deep breath, stopping to think, focusing on long-term goals—when those triggers come



up. WHY? This empowers youth to become more self-aware and develop coping strategies for the heat of the moment.

### **Skills: Awareness, Self-Control**

**Take another's view of stressors:** Encourage youth to ask people they trust how they cope with stress. Or suggest they look at situations from someone else's point of view. For example, if a young person is upset over an early bedtime, ask them what might motivate a parent to have a firm time for "lights out." A parent caring about youth getting enough sleep to function well feels very different from a parent trying to control a young person's behaviour. WHY? Seeing stressors in a new way can diffuse anger, frustration, and fear. Young people learn there is more than one way to view problems and solutions.

### **Skills: Awareness, Flexibility, Self-Control**

**Focus on Personally Motivating Goals:** Adolescence is a time for finding one's place in the world and forming a consistent sense of self that will serve as a framework for making choices now and in the future. Encourage youth to try new activities and discover their passions. Support them in mapping out steps for setting and reaching their goals—and for dealing with obstacles. WHY? This empowers young people to strengthen their self-identity, think long-term, and practice goal-directed behaviour.

### **Skills: Planning, Flexibility**

**Build on Positive Memories and Small Successes:** Adversity may cause youth to feel that they lack control over their lives. They may internalise negative self-talk or peer interactions like bullying. Help them recall positive memories (such as a time when they helped a friend or finished a tough assignment) to see that even small actions make a difference. WHY? This gives youth a starting point for building up their sense of self, undoing negative internalisations, viewing challenges as less threatening, and planning for the future.

### **Skills: Focus, Planning**

### **How Stress Affects Developing Core Life Skills?**

Some stress in life can be positive, but extreme, ongoing stress can wreak havoc with young people's health, behaviour, and ability to develop and practice their core life skills. WHY? Stress and adversity trigger an automatic reaction in the brain—the immediate (and at times necessary) "fight or flight" response that spurs us to act first and think later. When that response is triggered repeatedly by extreme stress or trauma, however, it can overload the brain's capacity for more reflective, intentional responses. If this occurs during childhood, the brain actually overdevelops the ability to perceive and respond quickly to threats instead of the ability to assess and respond to situations thoughtfully.

### **Extreme Stress Impacts Core Life Skills in Two Ways :**

In early childhood, extreme stress redirects brain development away from core life skills toward automatic ("fight, flight, or freeze") responses.

In adolescence, excessive stress overloads the ability to develop and practice core life skills, leaving youth to rely primarily on their automatic responses.

That's why experiencing a pile-up of adversity—such as neglect, hunger, homelessness, peer suicide, addiction, or violence—can cause youth to struggle to concentrate in school, keep track of the details in their lives, find constructive solutions for problems, and make plans for the future. It's also why interventions that add the threat of punishment or undermine autonomy are especially ineffective during adolescence. To maximise opportunities for youth to learn core life skills, we must find ways to reduce chaos and adversity in their lives while supporting their independence.

### **5 Ways to Deliver Services That Reduce Stress**

**Create a Safe Environment:** Youth need physically and emotionally safe environments. Depending on the type of services you provide, this may mean setting up spaces that maximise privacy and confidentiality or inspire peer collaboration. Tap into their need to express their creativity and independence and engage youth in creating welcoming, appropriate spaces. Enlist their help with selecting lighting and furniture

and designing the room's layout. WHY? Optimising the program environment gives youth the best chance to succeed and avoids triggering any stress or fear.

**Leverage Social Relationships:** Collaborative time with peers may put youth more at ease and reduce any perceived threat of adult judgment. Encourage them to learn when to turn to friends for help and when to seek an adult's support. Give them opportunities to develop leadership skills (for example, as peer educators or facilitators). Maintaining supportive, open relationships with adults is still critical, so encourage both when appropriate. WHY? Adolescent brains are more attuned to social acceptance and rejection than at any other period of development. Aiding them in navigating social relationships helps them learn how to respond to feedback.

**Support and Listen:** Adolescents can be hyperaware of anything that makes them feel diminished. Offering advice may send the message that you do not believe they can make the best choices. Approach youth with respect, check your assumptions, and truly listen. Give them space to think about their decision-making process without telling them what to do. Have high but realistic expectations, and use challenges as opportunities for reflection. WHY? Supporting young people's autonomy reduces the chance of activating their emotional and threat response systems. They'll learn to trust you and build self-confidence.

**Use Accessible, Familiar Tools:** Ask youth what helps them get and stay organised. Checklists, apps, and other tools may help them manage life's many demands and break down tasks into incremental steps. Let them sign up for text messages to remind them of upcoming meetings, deadlines, or classes. WHY? This puts problem-solving into the hands of young people and makes them familiar with the tools they already rely on.

**Streamline and Simplify:** Make it easy for youth to register for and attend life skills programs. They already juggle many different responsibilities and expectations. Be sure that forms and requirements are simple and meeting

times and locations are convenient. Why? This avoids putting additional stress on developing core life skills and increases the odds of adolescent recruitment and retention.

Throughout our adolescent years, we become increasingly capable of contributing to those around us in deeper, more meaningful ways than when we were younger. Opportunities to not only contribute but also reflect on the meaning of our contributions and have our contributions recognised are important to healthy development during these years.

## **Integrating Life Skills and Mental Wellbeing in the holistic health**

### **Curriculum**

#### **Guiding Principles Of The Programme**

- Uphold that children are a positive resource and are trusted, appreciated and respected.
- Anchored in a rights-based perspective and recognises that children and young people are heterogeneous, there is diversity in terms of urban, rural, caste, class, religion, region, language, cultural beliefs, disability, gender, sexual orientation and so on.
- Focus on the transformational potential of education based on principles of equity and social justice. · Integral part of the content and process of school and teacher education.
- Flexible in terms of content, context and processes to respond to the diverse and dynamic needs of learners at every stage of development.
- Create an open, non-threatening and nurturing environment which is not prescriptive and/or stigmatising.
- Enable learners to understand, adapt and negotiate existing and constantly changing realities.
- Empower learners through participatory, process-oriented, non-judgmental approaches that build on their experiences and provide them with opportunities to think critically, analyse and draw inferences.
- Contribute towards enhancing the physical, mental, emotional and social well-being of

learners by taking a strengths-based approach rather than a deficit perspective.

- Create opportunities for and support educational functionaries, school administrators, and teachers to unlearn and learn about content, attitudes, and pedagogy.
- Sensitise different stakeholders, particularly parents, community and media, to the needs and concerns of children and young people and respond to them in positive ways.

### **Sustainable Peer Leadership Approach for Life Skills Education.**

#### **Methods Used by ODM Sapphire Global School**

##### ***Peer Educators Led Activities***

- *Case studies:* Case studies allow students to analyse an event experienced by someone else, use this analysis and apply the lessons learnt. Analysis of these cases individually or in a group leads to fostering skills like problem-solving, decision-making, critical thinking, creative thinking, and effective communication.
- *Role Plays:* Role plays help students understand real-life situations by engaging with other participants while enacting these situations. This helps develop diverse perspectives of the situation and understand alternate ways to deal with them. Interactions and reflections after role play help inculcate skills like self-awareness, critical thinking, creative thinking, empathy, and effective communication.
- *Guided Discussions:* Group discussions of the eight life skills modules allow students to share their perspectives on significant topics with others and appreciate others' points of view. These discussions encourage students to become more confident in asking questions and speaking up. They are also effective in developing skills such as empathy, managing emotions, effective communication, and critical thinking.
- *Stories and picture books:* Stories and picture books enable students to learn complex issues interestingly and engagingly. When images are paired with the text, it leads to better learning and retention. Therefore, learning becomes better and faster. The use of stories and picture books leads to building skills such as creative thinking, managing emotions, and self-awareness.
- *Yoga:* Students derive many benefits from age-appropriate yoga activities. On the one hand, yoga builds physical strength and flexibility. On the other hand, it enhances compassion, concentration, relaxation, reflection, and calmness, making students more self-aware. These activities help develop skills like self-awareness, emotional management, and empathy.
- *Theatre:* Theatre is one of the most powerful methods for teaching life skills and preparing people to face real-life challenges. Students learn to think creatively and behave confidently through enacting different plays and collaborating with others. Skills like creative thinking, effective communication, managing emotions, self-awareness, and empathy can be effectively taught beyond the classroom in a theatre.
- *Art:* Art activities enable students to explore and understand what defines their art object by examining scenery, people, or situations more closely. A work of art can be extremely engaging and interesting, helping students learn how things look from the other side. This medium of self-expression helps develop skills like empathy, self-awareness, problem-solving, emotional management, and creative thinking.
- *Sports:* In this competitive environment, children often learn that putting their best foot forward will yield the desired results. Sometimes, this may not be the case in real life because no matter how hard we try, there is always someone better than us. Sports help us learn to get along with others and accept failure while building confidence and team spirit. They also help foster skills like decision-making, problem-solving, effective communication, empathy, and emotion management.
- *Quizzes:* Quizzes help teachers & peer educators to check and further build students'

understanding of various life skills in areas like gender equality, nutrition, health and sanitation, safety and security. On the one hand, it provides an opportunity to assess their basic understanding, and it helps create awareness of the other. Quizzes help in decision-making, critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-awareness.

- *Puppetry*: Puppetry can be a powerful way to stimulate imagination, encourage creative play, and bring interesting stories to life in an engaging manner. It helps build students' confidence and critical thinking while they learn complex topics. It also fosters skills like creative thinking, critical thinking, emotional management, empathy, and self-awareness.
- *Human library-Expert talks*: Inviting experts who can engage with the students on various themes like growing up healthy, sexual and reproductive health, emotional well-being and mental health, value education, safety and security is an effective way to impart knowledge leading to building skills like problem-solving, self-awareness, critical thinking, effective communication.
- *Exposure visits*: Exposure visits are an effective method for enabling students from a particular setting to interact with and learn from others from different settings to understand real-life situations. These visits help build diverse perspectives on situations and people, enabling the acquisition of skills

like critical thinking, empathy, and effective communication. Visits to neighbouring villages, Old age homes, and schools help students gain real-life exposure by investigating their problems and providing solutions.

- *Reflective Exercises*: Peer-led mindfulness activities, such as breathing exercises and anti-stress activities, help people reflect on their thoughts, emotions, and actions. Reflecting on one's thoughts, emotions, and actions leads to a much deeper understanding of oneself. Looking within also helps people build better relations with others by becoming more compassionate and empathetic toward themselves and others. Reflection on a regular basis helps build skills such as self-awareness, empathy, managing emotions, problem-solving, and decision-making.
- *Teacher-parent circle: Engaging parents*: A supportive and congenial environment at home is critical for a child's healthy upbringing. Engaging parents in various activities in and outside school, with a focus on building their understanding of life skills and enhancing their child-rearing practices, is important for a child's emotional well-being.

Let your preparations be wise, correct and of such kind that will lead to your true welfare, supreme good and lasting satisfaction and happiness. This must engage your active, enthusiastic attention throughout your youth life.

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