

Subject:- Prevention of Bullying and Ragging in Schools

There have been reports in the media of instances of bullying and ragging in schools. Recent research in school education indicates that a major issue and cause for concern among students in schools is bullying. In addition, MHRD had also received requests to commission a report and initiate prevention programme on bullying / ragging in schools.

Bullying/ ragging is a damaging feature in schools. Nature of bullying can be, diverse and complex. It is often not recognized as a major problem and same assume it is negligible and therefore do not pay much attention to its occurrence.

Bullying can be directly from the bully to the victim (eg, through physical intimidation or attacks, verbal abuse, unwanted attention and advances, damaging property), or it can be indirect (eg, through spreading malicious rumours). It can also include cyber-bullying (eg, sending unpleasant sms messages, photographs or emails, to the victim or to others).

Bullying has severe detrimental effects on those who are bullied. The effects can be immediate. They can also be long-term and can cause lifelong damage. In every bullying situation, there are typically three key parties: the victim, the bully or bullies, and those who stand by, who are aware of the bullying. Each of these three parties is affected negatively by bullying.

The responsibility of preventing any undesirable aspect of bullying and ragging rests jointly and also individually on all stakeholders, which includes the head of the institution teacher, non-teaching staff, students, parents and local community.

A systematic response to the bullying problem is needed within schools, backed up by systems and processes at the State and District levels. Where necessary, these should also be instituted at Cluster and Block levels.

Some indicative interventions which States might consider at State, District and School level are outlined below.

State level interventions.

1. Develop an appropriate Action Plan based on anti-bullying policy and effective strategies, including both preventive and intervention measures and integrate anti-bullying policy into the state education policy framework .
2. Establish a working group or standing committee to develop anti-bullying policy and monitor its implementation in the state through engaging relevant sectors outside the education system, including health, social work, women, children, police and suitable NGOs and prominent citizens.
3. An independent State Level monitoring agency and monitoring mechanisms in schools may be set up that ensures that each case of reported bullying is brought to a logical conclusion and the prescribed regulations are being followed. This Monitoring Agency may assist the Government Regulatory / School authorities, as a Secretariat, in terms management of complaints, and report on non-compliance, collection of information and data , provide regular and

periodic reports and work with existing legal institutions and assist concerned authorities to take action .

4. An Anti-Bullying Helpline, on parallels of Child Line– operated confidentially, independently and remotely to help students in distress and for reporting incidences of bullying and/or reprisals or suppression of reporting may be set up. It can be a common toll-free phone number, which can be operated regionally or centrally at the State level.
5. Develop and disseminate advocacy and information resource material to schools and to District bodies. There are various ways through which the community can be sensitized on this issue. Schools can conduct Anti-Bullying Campaigns and lay down a calendar of activities and events for different age groups - such as painting competitions for the younger students and essay writing/slogan writing for the elder ones. Inter-school competitions may be conducted and documentaries may be shown to spread awareness.. Life skills camps/leadership camps may be organized in schools to spread awareness and educate students on issue of bullying.

District level interventions

1. At the District level, a District team/ cell (which may be the Guidance and Counselling cell) may be set up which would ensure anti- bullying measures / mechanisms are set up in schools in their supervision and school development programme activities.
2. This team/ cell may monitor and review anti -bullying measures/ mechanisms at School level and also compile reports of incidences reported.
3. Develop and hold training programmes for teachers, parents and other stakeholders.

School level interventions

1. The message in all schools that “Bullying is strictly prohibited inside the school premises and no such act will go unnoticed or unpunished” may be clearly stated in the school prospectus and other guidelines circulated by the school.
2. Schools must create an amiable environment where learning can take place peacefully. They must build a trusting, respectful relationship among students, school administration and families. They should provide a confidential way for students to report about any incidence which is of concern to them. Structures and procedures must be established to provide accessible, confidential, secure and effective means of reporting incidents of bullying, for victims and for bystanders who are aware of it taking place and to identify and manage incidents of bullying, including appropriate counselling and sanctions /punishments on those engaged in bullying . For eg; an Anti- Bullying Committee may be constituted in school, comprising of Vice- Principal, a Senior teacher, School Doctor, Counsellor, PTA representative, School Management representative , Legal representative, etc whose roles and responsibilities would include (i) development and review of School Bullying Prevention Plan,(ii) development and implementing bullying prevention programmes,(iii) developing training programmes for staff, students, and parents, (i) creating awareness through various programmes(v) being vigilant and observing signs of bullying and

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responding quickly and sensitively(vi) names and contact numbers of members of the committee should be clearly displayed everywhere in the school premises , etc.

3. Arrangements for a Counsellor for Primary, and Middle, and for Secondary and Senior Secondary school may be made where possible, occurrence of acts of bullying and ragging has more probability in case of residential schools due to the amount of time spent together by students, making it essential that Counsellors and Wardens in boarding and residential schools need to be sensitized to the changing dynamics of student interaction. They should be empathetic and approachable so that students can confide in them. "Sentinels/ Monitors" may be appointed by the school management. These sentinels may be from the prefectorial /school council board of the schools or those who had been victims of bullying. Sentinels should be keen observers and thoroughly trained for 'risky situations'. They must report cases of bullying in a non- threatening/polite manner.
4. The right attitude is formed only at the formative period of schooling. Thus it is necessary that students are sensitized about human rights, democratic values, respect for diversity and equality, and respect for privacy and dignity of others. Schools must take initiative to conduct activities to educate and develop the understanding of students, staff and parents about the problem and effects of bullying. It is essential that schools take initiatives to provide Adolescence Education , Life Skills education, Values Education, Human Rights, Gender Sensitivity, Self-Esteem, Empathy, Interpersonal Communication, coping with stress and emotions, dealing with anger, and resisting peer pressure need to be conscientiously taken up in the activity periods. These can take the form of role plays, street- theatre (nukkad-natak), group-discussions, debates, special assemblies in schools, poster competitions, etc. Anti-bullying campaigns and training programmes may also be organized.
5. The family background and values play a very crucial role in emotional and psychological well-being of a child. The role of parents must be reinforced in Parent Teacher Meetings and representation in various other school Committees. There is a need for orientation and sensitization of the community and thus parents should also be oriented parents must be motivated to support the school in bullying-prevention efforts. They must be sensitized to report in confidence about any act of bullying which is brought to their notice by their child. Orientation programmes may be conducted for the school staff and teachers on regular basis.
6. Curriculum for Teacher training courses should mandatorily include topics on sensitization and prevention of bullying in schools.
7. The methods of intervention are as important as methods of prevention. It is recommended that there be a graded response system to address the cases of bullying and a clear cut process needs to be followed by schools as there might be cases which deserve utmost attention and stringent action. The responsibility and authority of school administration must be defined. The implications of neglect must also be clearly defined. School's decision, taken after following process of fair investigation, should not be ordinarily challengeable. Comprehensive guidelines may be developed for School Management which includes the various actions and penalties which may be taken by the School Management as per

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observation and understanding the gravity of the misconduct. Some of the recommended actions include:

- (i) Oral/written warning.
- (ii) Suspension from attending classes/school for a specified period.
- (iii) Withholding or cancelling the results.
- (iv) Imposition of fine upto a specified amount
- (v) Expulsion/rustication from school in rarest of rare cases.
- (vi) The option of transferring a student from one school to another school may also be looked into.

8. It is the responsibility of the school that the post-bullying atmosphere is calmed down. The school must be cautious that the victim/bully is not branded and he/she might be given opportunities for change.
9. It is very critical to promote an atmosphere of confidence and trust among every student and to provide a platform to students where they can raise their concerns. A confident reporting system may be established that allows students to report victimization. Schools may keep a complaint/ suggestion box and regularly monitor the feedback received. The necessary issues may be discussed and appropriately addressed. If there are any good suggestions received from the students, these should be announced in assemblies and be articulated in school functions. Strategies may be developed to reward students for positive behaviour. For younger children, age appropriate communication strategies should be developed and teachers should engage in dialogue with them to identify any problem. The role of class teacher, counsellor, school nurse/doctor may be enriched and children should be motivated and made aware with whom they can discuss such matters with confidentiality.
10. Engage all students, teaching and non-teaching staff and parents in the effort against bullying on a continual basis, as part of the moral and administrative fabric of the school.