

Child Friendly School Initiative Program (CFSI) under IAP Action Plan – 2011

It is my pleasure and privilege to interact with you all through this page. In the next few issues, I will be discussing IAP Action Plan for the year 2011. Our children have lot of problems at school which needs remediation. So we are planning to implement Child Friendly School Initiative to improve their health.

Our children are spending most of their time, for a period of more than 10-12 years in schools. Hence we should provide good physical, mental and social environment for our children. Most of the parents have the false belief (or they have no time to think about it!) that the school environment of their children are optimal. Are the schools as child friendly as we consider, and how do we make them more cordial?

Our children are forced to carry heavy backpacks daily to school. Excess of homework and examination leaves no free time for them even at their home. Many students are getting punished directly or indirectly for academic matters. Another worrying matter is the over crowded school vehicles. The number of school latrines and toilets are either inadequate or unhygienic. Majority of the children, especially girls have never used them in their school life. Everybody admits that there are some problems: but where do we start from and how do we solve them?

Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) of IAP was a grand success in making our hospital environment baby friendly. Similarly we all look forward for a child friendly school environment. With these in mind, IAP is planning to implement the Child Friendly School Initiative (CFSI) Program under the IAP President's Action Plan, countrywide.

CFSI PROGRAM: A 5 POINT ACTION PLAN

1. *No physical punishment in school:* The physical

punishment may do more harm than benefit. However in unavoidable situations, the child may be punished by other non-physical methods.

2. *Avoid excess baggage:* Excess weight of the school bag may lead to backache, neck pain, school phobia, etc ("The school bag syndrome"). The ideal weight of school bags should be less than 10% of the child's body weight. Bag weight can be reduced by different methods: (a) The age of admission for KG class should be 4 years and the first standard at 6 years, (b) in lower primary classes bag weight can be reduced by having a provision for keeping books in the school, (c) for different terms we can have separate term textbooks, (d) a file system is an effective method in higher classes.
3. *Provision for adequate number of toilets:* There should be one urinal for 60 students and one latrine for 100 students, with provision for daily cleaning.
4. There should be *provision for safe travel* to and from the school. Travel in two or three-wheelers should be discouraged and overcrowding to be avoided.
5. *Well equipped class rooms and adequate play grounds:* The number of students in a classroom should be limited to 40. The class room should have enough space (10 sq. feet/student or 400 sq.feet/classroom) and there should be appropriate furniture and proper ventilation. The school should have an adequate playground and a minimum of 4 hours per week to be allotted for sports and cultural activities.

As a pediatrician, each and every one of us has the responsibility of making our school environment healthy and friendly. Parents, teachers and the school

management can contribute a lot in this aspect. It is heartening to see that there are some movements from many corners of the country. The Education, Health and Human resources ministry should take action to implement necessary steps to make our schools child friendly. We can say that the school is a child friendly one, if the child says “I would like to go to school on weekends.”

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