

Ten Commandments for Child Friendly School Initiative

In the plenary session of the PEDICON 2004, I was invited to elaborate on a new movement that started in Madhya Pradesh a few months earlier – “The Child Friendly School Initiative”. Children spend a significant portion of their time in schools and its environment definitely carries a bearing on their well-being. It behooves us to evaluate schools and see that they are healthy places to grow up in. We present 10 simple criteria, which schools should meet in order to promote positive health of children.

These criteria were decided after evaluating the results of a study conducted by us under the aegis of State Women’s Commission in schools of Madhya Pradesh. Of the 1509 schools in M.P. 504 (33.39%) were surveyed, of which 340 were urban and 164 were rural. This included government, private, trust managed and government aided schools. Primary, Middle, High and Higher Secondary schools were also given adequate representation. Some of the key data of the study are detailed in *Table 1*.

These results clearly indicate that not only the health of school children is being neglected their rights are also ignored. After much deliberation we decided that 10 points need to be emphasized to make school a friendly place for children. These are discussed below:

1. *No physical punishment:* The psychological and physical consequences of physical punishment are well known to pediatricians. The Juvenile Justice Act(1) was launched in 1986 to protect the rights of children. Child helplines are available in many metropolitan cities. It is the responsibility of the principal to strictly enforce that no physical punishment is given to children by teachers.
2. *No excess baggage:* There is enough literature to suggest that heavy school bags lead to backpain / scoliosis and kyphosis. It is recommended that bag should not weigh more than 10% of the child’s weight(2) and it should have at least 2 broad padded straps. Children should also be taught to bend at the knees with back straight while lifting the bag. Another option is to have duplicate set of books in the Home and School.
3. *Safe and proper transportation to school:* Children account for 10% of road traffic accidents. Measures to reduce accidents include coding of bus. Bus should have 30-50 seats with no extra passenger, 2 fire extinguishers, and a first-aid box. A trained driver and conductor should man the bus. Bus speed should not exceed 40 km/hour(3). Rickshaws should not carry more than 8 students / rickshaw.
4. *Hygienic drinking water:* Drinking water should be treated for fecal contamination and bacterial colony count. Water should be tested for chemical and biological contamination. There should be regular surveillance of drinking water purity. Periodic cleaning of reservoirs, disinfection, leak detection, sanitary survey, and bacteriological survey to further ensure drinking water standards are maintained. Chlorination or use of filters either double pot method or electrical/

TABLE I—Results of Survey in Schools of Madhya Pradesh.

	Government	Private	Trust managed	Government aided
Proper building	50%	70%	85%	60%
Proper playground	30%	60%	75%	30%
Area / student in classroom	4.4 sq.ft	8.064 sq.ft.	8.064 sq.ft.	0.7 sq.ft.
Adequate light and ventilation	40%	65%	75%	38%
Safe drinking water				
Filtration	5%	45%	75%	20%
Uncovered storage	30%	5%	5%	12%
Defined space for meals	26%	56%	80%	38%
Annual health checkup	50%	85%	45%	40%
Urinal / unit of student	70-100	50-75	50	60-90
Physical punishment	15%	5%	2%	7%
Average weight of bag	2.5-3.0 kg	2 kg	2.5-3.0 kg	2.5-3.0 kg
Availability of bus	6%	30%	45%	28%

electronic filters can be used for water purification and maintaining set standards for potable water(4).

5. *Clean kitchen or a place where children can bring and eat house food:* It has received support from the government in the form of mid-day meal programmes. It ensures the provision of balanced diet to school going children. It prevents spread of infection and unhygienic practices for food preparation. To achieve this no outside vendors should be allowed near school premises. There should be a separate eating / dining area in the schools. Nutritional and hygienic practices must be followed at all times. The idea of eating together ensures camaraderie and secularism amongst children(5).
6. *Minimum 4 games periods in one week:* It prevents children from becoming a book-worm and helps in personality development. With increasing interest towards TV and its antecedent problems of

obesity, *etc.* children are losing interest in play. This target is achieved by spread of awareness, provision of play field and a properly trained coach with sufficient time to play *i.e.*, games periods minimum 4 in one week(6).

7. *Properly ventilated and illuminated classrooms:* Well ventilated and illuminated class rooms prevent pollution, infection and eye strain and promote efficiency. Each class room should have sufficient doors and windows. There are guidelines for the school building, its location, site, area and structure. Class should accommodate atleast 40 students providing 10 sq ft/child. Rooms should be white washed from inside. There should be adequate sunlight and light should reach students desk from left side to illuminate reading surface(7).
8. *Periodic health checkup and health related lectures:* School health service is a basic requirement to safeguard the rights

of the child. It was started in 1909 and revised in 1961. Its main objectives are to promote positive health, prevent diseases, early diagnosis, treatment and followups. It aims to spread health awareness and health education, provision of healthful environment and emphasizes on the maintenance of health records for each student.

Health checkups should be held in school premises. Time spent on each student should be atleast 10 minutes and there should be provision of follow-up. Such health checkups should be held atleast once annually. Children should be screened for vision, hearing, scoliosis, hernia, *etc.* Regular growth monitoring, Hb for adolescent girls and vaccination should be checked(7).

9. *Facility for first aid in emergency:* Pupils can become sick / injured and may need atleast preliminary attention by the school teacher. Injuries can be from fall, motor vehicle accidents, near drowning, foreign body, poisoning, colic, *etc.* All concerned should have first aid knowledge and regular training of new recruits should be done. Better would be the provision of a paramedical trained person. All teachers and staff should be trained to know the ABC of resuscitation(8).

10. *Adequate number of toilets:* Such a provision preserves dignity and privacy. The absence of adequate no. of toilets leads to adverse effects on health and poor hygiene and also leads to pollution. To achieve this target there should be atleast one urinal per 60 students and one latrine for 100 students although ideal would be one latrine / 25 students. Toilets should have wash basins. There should be more toilets in girl's schools. Also, facility for

running water rather than stored water ensures cleanliness and hygiene(8).

These ten simple guidelines will go a long way in creating a healthy and supportive environment for optimum development of our children. Members of IAP all over the country need to inspire the school authorities and the parents to adopt these ten commandments in order to secure the health of their children(8).

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