

# SAAJHI SAMAJH

A Tech Mahindra Foundation Initiative



"Unlocking Minds: Key to the Locker Room"

WEBINAR: JUNE 3, 2020



**ENHANCING  
EMPLOYABILITY**



**SUPPORTING  
SCHOOL EDUCATION**



**PROMOTING  
INCLUSIVITY**

## ABOUT TECH MAHINDRA FOUNDATION

Tech Mahindra Foundation is the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) arm of Tech Mahindra Ltd. It was set up in 2007 as a Section 25 Company (now section 8, Companies Act, 2013), with the vision of Empowerment through Education.

### Our Focus Areas

#### EMPLOYABILITY

SMART (Skills for Market Training) is Tech Mahindra Foundation's flagship employability program, with 109 centres providing skill development in 11 cities. In addition, the Foundation runs seven Tech Mahindra SMART Academies: three SMART Academies for Healthcare, three SMART Academies for Digital Technologies and one SMART Academy for Logistics & Supply Chain Management as part of its employability program. Over the years, SMART has successfully trained young men and women, with a placement rate of over 75%. Its robust processes, stringent monitoring system and industry-led approach have created a model for scaling up skill development while maintaining high training standards.

#### EDUCATION

Tech Mahindra Foundation is committed to teacher empowerment, enriching in learning opportunities for children, effective school governance and enhancing parental involvement in school education. In the domain of education, Shikshaantar is the Foundation's training program for teachers. The Foundation runs three premier in-service teacher capacity building institutes called In-Service Teacher Education Institutes (ITEIs): two institutes in North Delhi Municipal Corporation and one institute in East Delhi Municipal Corporation. The Foundation partners with a large number of credible organisations in the field of education to bring about an overall development in the school.

#### DISABILITY

Disability is the third major area of intervention for Tech Mahindra Foundation. The Foundation works towards ensuring that Persons with Disabilities have the opportunity for a better future and dignified lives. It is achieved through two programs: ARISE+ (All Round Improvement in School Education for Children with Disabilities) and SMART+ (Skills for Market Training for Persons with Disabilities). The Foundation adopts an inclusive approach towards development and mandates that 10% of all its beneficiaries are Persons with Disabilities.

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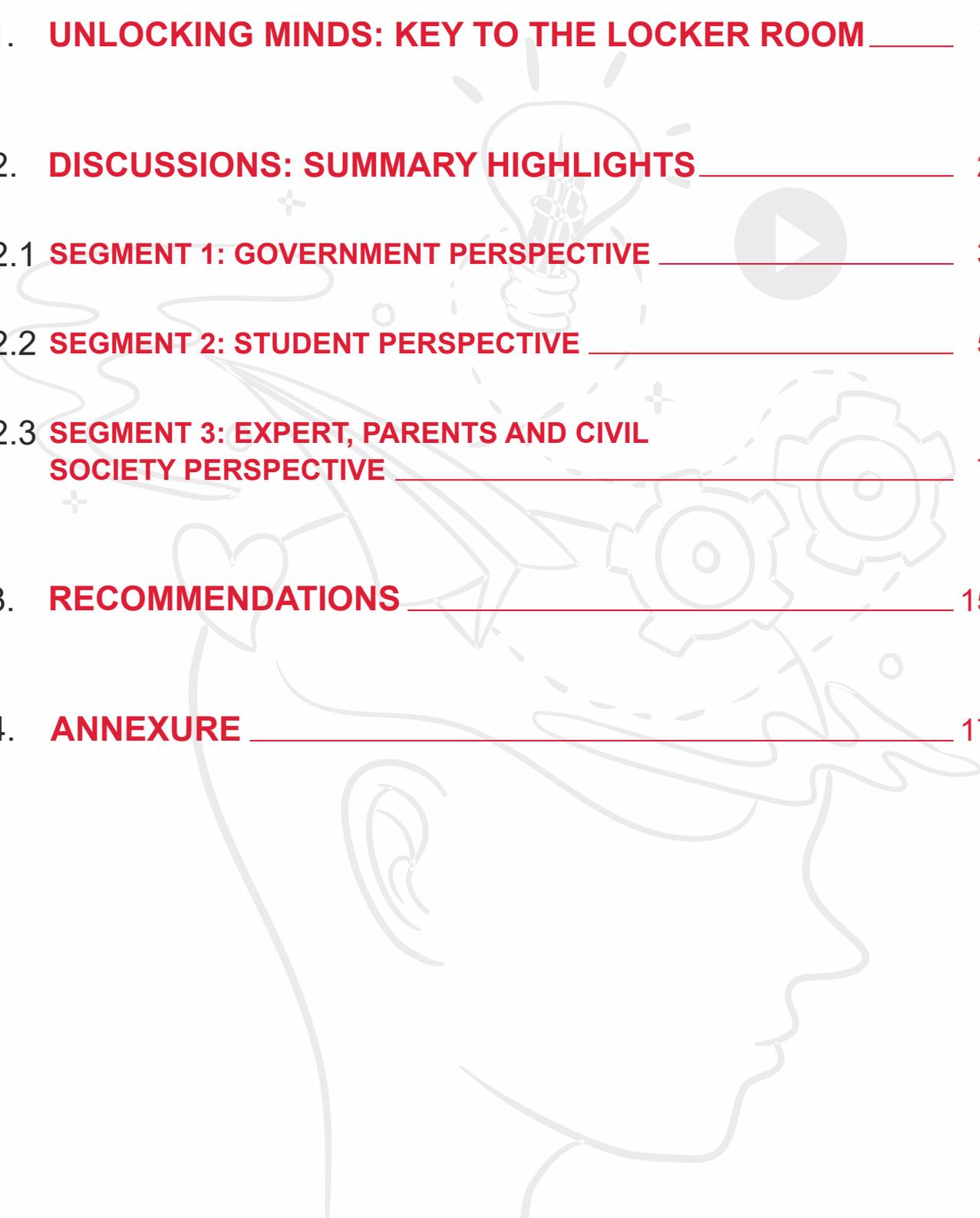
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# UNLOCKING MINDS: KEY TO THE LOCKER ROOM

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On 3 June 2020, Tech Mahindra Foundation organised a webinar as a part of the seminar series titled “Saajhi Samajh” (Shared Understanding). The central theme for this year’s **Saajhi Samajh** was “**Unlocking Minds: Key to the Locker Room**”, organised in the context of the controversial and shocking incident made infamous in the media as “Bois Locker Room”. The underlying issue behind this incident is the challenges faced by today’s youngsters in their transition from childhood to adulthood, and how equipped are we as a society to support them in this transition. Tech Mahindra Foundation, which works with the overarching vision of Empowerment through Education, felt this requires an open dialogue with all concerned stakeholders – educators, parents, adolescent students, government, civil society and academia. The dialogue aimed to understand the limitation of the current education system, the linkage between home and schools, the role of parenting, and the perception of adolescents, identify the gaps and disconnects among these, and then attempt to arrive at a roadmap for addressing this highly significant and sensitive topic.

## THIS CONVERSATION AIMED TO ANSWER THE FOLLOWING:

- How can teachers be better equipped to respond to the psychological and emotional needs of children and teenagers
- How to enrich and reinvent school curriculum - especially for the middle graders - to shift the focus towards socially sensitive issues including Gender Sensitivity, Societal Responsibility, Ethical Decision Making, Inclusivity among others
- How can social media and technology be best leveraged for engendering positivity in children
- Role of parenting and interface between school and home

## AGENDA

This event was a vibrant gathering of eminent personalities from Academia, Civil Society, Non- profit Organisations, Teacher and Student community who came together on an online platform (Zoom) on the afternoon of 3 June 2020. This discussion was divided into three different segments:

### SEGMENT 1 - GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction: Chetan Kapoor, COO of Tech Mahindra Foundation

Welcome address: Rakesh Soni, CEO of Tech Mahindra Foundation

Keynote address: Manish Sisodia, Deputy Chief Minister, Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi:

### SEGMENT 2 - STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

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Moderator - Ravi Gulati, co-founder of Manzil

Students: Akash Mishra, Abbas Ali, Shivani Jha, Anoushka Dhar, Aadya Nageswaran

### SEGMENT 3 - EXPERT AND PARENTS PERSPECTIVE

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Moderator: Chetan Kapoor

Panelists: Dr AL Sharada – Director, Population First; Tara Stafford Ocansey – Education specialist at Earth Institute, Columbia University in New York.; Sankalp Khanna – education consultant and co-author of the SEL curriculum 'Identities in Conflict'; Mukta Naik – Architect and Urban Planner by training and a Fellow at Centre for Policy Research; and Ravi Gulati, co-founder of Manzil.

## DISCUSSIONS: SUMMARY HIGHLIGHTS

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### WELCOME ADDRESS



#### **RAKESH SONI** **CEO** **TECH MAHINDRA FOUNDATION**

**Importance of multi-stakeholder partnership:** Corporates and government need to come together to maximise efforts, knowledge, insight and resources. This collaboration can effectively find ways to fill the gaps in the education system, and to counter the manifestation of regressive patriarchy and gender biases amongst adolescents.

**Value addition on behalf of Corporates:** Corporates can utilise their corporate social responsibility (CSR) to supplement and add value to the efforts of the government in building the education infrastructure and shaping curriculum and pedagogy.

Mr. Soni went on to give a brief description of Tech Mahindra Foundation's efforts in this direction through its Shikshaantar program, which aims at enhancing capacity of government school teachers. The Foundation conducts teacher training workshops for over 2500 teachers every year, mainly through its partnerships with the East Delhi and the North Delhi Municipal Corporations.

He then welcomed the Keynote Speaker, Mr. Manish Sisodia, Deputy Chief Minister Government of NCT Delhi to address the audience.

## SEGMENT 1: GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE



### Mr. Manish Sisodia

Deputy Chief Minister,  
Government of NCT Delhi

### KEYNOTE ADDRESS

**Role of parenting in guiding the adolescents through the stages:** Adolescent years reflect a constant change. This leads to a lot of curiosity – social, emotional and physical. Children often do not understand how to cope with these changes including physical changes. It becomes very important for adults and parents to walk them through these developments. This responsibility has to be taken by adults and parents with a lot of patience and a lot of understanding. Adults and parents need to understand children in their own terms and not impose their pre-conceived ideas and judgements on them. Adults should also be open to learning from them.

**Importance of changing the limited idea of success that parents impose on children and broaden to include value-based education:** For positive growth and development of adolescents, parents need to go beyond the narrow view of performance in academics and decent jobs. While parents have concerns over excessive TV viewing, obsession with gadgets, bad habits of drinking and smoking etc, social and parental understanding have to ensure that the child has holistic and positive growth and education.

**Avoid and stop negative feedback and inducement:** It is important to avoid giving negative inducement to children. Parent and adults often make the mistake of comparing their children with others. This does not allow children to develop their own individuality to become confident in their own talents and skillsets. Often such comparison is done by parents, teachers and society. This puts undue pressure on children.

**Role of schools is important in shaping minds and wellbeing:** Schools are also creating negative competition for children and not helping them to understand the bigger purpose of education. They only follow command and control methods of forcing the students to complete their syllabus without explaining why they are studying the subjects, what is the importance and how is this applicable in their lives. Due to undue unhealthy pressure and lack of understanding, studies have shown that 1 out of 4 children in India suffers from depression and many students commit suicide. These rates are increasing.

**Need to reform the education agenda:** It has become very important and necessary to change the education landscape of the country. While infrastructure and administrative changes need revamping, some other critical aspects of education must also change. There is need for new curriculum approaches to address the value deficit.

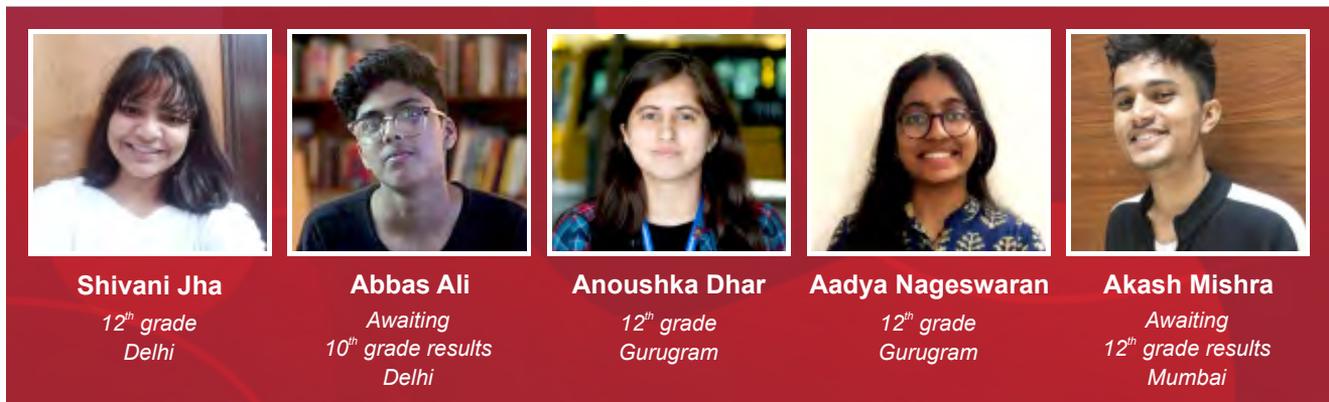
**Need innovative curriculum methods:** Delhi government has taken the initiative to innovate curriculum to address value deficit and mental health of children.

- **Happiness curriculum:** This has encouraged students to talk about their relationships with their surroundings/parents/society through different activities. It's been two years since the Happiness Curriculum was introduced. Schools have received a positive response regarding the developments of the Happiness Curriculum. Students have become more empathetic towards their parents and society and show more compassion and respect. This has particularly helped the girl child, who is a victim of gender discrimination at home where male siblings enjoy greater privileges. The Happiness Curriculum allows them to talk about their worries, calm their mind, understand the uncalled for gender discrimination, helps to clear their mind and free up their energy from unnecessary mental disturbance to divert attention to more productive avenues and studies.
- **Meditation**, in which focus is on mindfulness that creates safe space between students and teachers to talk about things apart from academic matter. This begins with the primary sections.
- **Entrepreneurship curriculum** has been introduced for senior students of 9 - 12<sup>th</sup> standards. The Entrepreneurship Curriculum was important to break the drudgery of our education systems, especially in government schools. Students are otherwise pushed towards limited professional options of doctors/lawyers, etc. Students do not have the freedom to make their own decisions. This entrepreneurship course motivates students to venture out according to their interests. These course modules on entrepreneurship are integrated with their regular curriculum. Students are extremely imaginative and vibrant with their ideas. The course allows them to explore and talk to understand where they are going. Handholding becomes important, but in an effective manner. Under this scheme, students are given Rs 1,000 each to come up with an idea of an enterprise. This has made students more creative. For example, one student wanted to set up a canteen in the school but that was against the policy as these schools get midday meal. But the student challenged this decision and offered the idea that if all students collectively pool in their respective money, then they can run a canteen.

**Need a creative and sensitive approach for guided growth:** Focus has to shift from onerous pressure of good marks and good grades and negative competition to honing of skills and what they are good at and their interests. This can be any vocation. Parents need to understand the reasons behind non-performance and engage with the children to understand their mindset and their interests. Parents, teachers and other adults in the community must have a dialogue with the adolescents for proper guided growth.



## SEGMENT 2: STUDENT PERSPECTIVE



A select panel of students has shared their individual experiences and insight into how they have dealt with situations in life, the reaction of adults, and their expectations. The openness, and maturity with which the students have expressed their most innate thoughts about the reactions and pragmatic solutions, has drawn a lot of attention and appreciation.

### ON CURIOSITY ABOUT THE OPPOSITE GENDER DURING ADOLESCENTS

**Innocent curiosity during the early years:** Around 5th or 6th grade it starts as innocent curiosity. Often teenagers and children do not know better as they are ignorant and misinformed. They may end up behaving in a manner which is not acceptable and is dangerous. Given the taboo in our society to talk about changing bodies, sexual developments, etc communication gap with parents and adults increases. Due to this misinformation children turn towards their peers who also do not have a good understanding of the difference between right and wrong and start indulging in distasteful comments regarding the opposite gender, and make dangerous jokes. This may even lead to sexual assaults. This further affects the community around them, especially the gender on whom such remarks are made. This often leads to mental health issues such as anxiety, depressive mood etc.

**On dangers of “boys will be boys” syndrome:** Adults who are expected to take care of the wellbeing and safety of children often do not provide the required support. They avoid having a dialogue with the children on these issues and continue to remain narrowly focussed on studies, concentration, syllabus etc. They ignore the tell-tale signs of boys picking up wrong notions that indicate wrong behaviour and a warped value system. They are dismissive of this as “boys will remain boys.” This suggests that such behaviour of boys is expected and should be ignored and not addressed. The responsibility to “deal with this” shifts to the girls who are the victims of such behaviour. They are also asked to channelise anger elsewhere and not by confronting the boys making such comments.

**On risks of creating “Gender boxes”:** Adolescents fall victim to pre-determined stereotypical gender roles that are already established in the society. These can be referred to as “gender boxes”, which once formed are very difficult to undo.

**Adults and teachers need to encourage open discussion:** There are positive examples of some teachers who help to build a transparent conversation. They make efforts to understand. An example was shared in which a Teach for India Fellow intervened when boys during a screening of a movie giggled and commented during intimate scenes. Teachers took out time to understand this reaction and from where it is stemming. They discussed sexuality, attraction, the do's and don'ts, the biology behind it and the reactions of human beings. But this is not the norm in our schools. Nor do parents intervene to explain at home when such intimate scenes play out. On the contrary, parents shut down the television and even label the kids as “bad kids” for watching such scenes.

**Students perspective of parents' role:** Parents often do not communicate with students, they do not explain why or where the students are going wrong. Most of the time they only try to discipline them. Often the way parents behave with each other influence the children and shape their perception of relationships and the dynamics between them and the opposite gender. Parents also have constraints. They feel uncomfortable to talk about such issues related to gender identity, sexuality etc. Parents think they cannot have a conversation with children as children do not have the mental capacity to understand such issues. If parents do not intervene and explain (sex, sexuality, sex education, consent, gender identity) – children will find other channels and sources to learn from and that may not be safe. Nobody checks how harmful or how authentic their information sources are. This leads to a lack of communication and misinformation. Children do not find spaces to talk as they are made to feel unsafe and inappropriate. This leads them to unsafe virtual spaces like the “boys' locker room.”



**Adults and teachers should introspect and fight their own unhealthy personal biases, flawed concepts and prejudices. This is a constant process of unlearning and re-learning.**



*- Abbas Ali*

**Parents should step in at the right time to explain things like compassion, respect, demeanour and behaviour with regards to others in the society:** Parents should also hold conversations with children about things like how to speak to the other gender and peers, the right and wrong, etc. At the same time, they should also imbibe these values and practice in their own lives too – the way they behave with their spouses, their family members and the society. Be the examples for their kids.

**On being Victim of sexual assault:** Adolescent girls fall victim to sexual assault from their family members or near and dear ones. But they do not find sympathetic understanding and counsel and protection from their parents. Often parents are dismissive about it and also do not believe in the allegations. This deeply demotivates and adversely affects mental wellbeing of the victims. They feel discouraged to speak up. They feel that their parents are not supportive. This deeply undermines the idea of safe space in homes.

**On the impact of social media and negative spaces of peer interactions:** While social media and the internet are powerful tools that can be used to get information, it is also harmful. Children have a misplaced understanding of what is “cool” and what isn't. Often the things that are deemed as “cool” include habits such as smoking and excessive drinking, and indulging in lewd conversations or talking inappropriately about the opposite gender. This also influences a lot of their peers to indulge in these activities. Social media amplifies this.

**What can parents do– student perspective:** Instead of resorting to forceful methods of taking away gadgets or social media connectivity from children, they need to guide them better, have a dialogue with them and have appropriate parental control during the nascent stages. Parents should instil values about interacting with others and they should remain involved with their child's personal life as a confidante, a friend, and not just a strict disciplinary. This has to begin at an early age. This is needed to regain trust and create safe spaces for the children. This will also keep the parents in the loop and reduce the dangers of their kids engaging in damaging and harmful activities. This has to start from an early age, and not suddenly when they grow up.

**What can teaching and education do – students perspective:** Teachers need to engage and encourage conversations around gender sensitivity and sexuality to address the toxic misinformation that is consuming the society and influencing the children. This has to begin from a very young age to create that space and comfort level between teachers and students. It is also very important to sensitise teachers. They may themselves be vulnerable to societal stereotypes, biases, and flawed concepts. The process of unlearning, and relearning is very important for all.

**Role of students in creating awareness:** Students can write, talk and communicate to build awareness at their level. Such talks are considered social taboo and swept under the rug. But children need to have open communication with other children to make them aware and to keep them informed. This will help to build the sense of right and wrong and the why's and how's.

The students' panel left a strong impression on the audience, with the mature and forthright views expressed by all the students. The moderator for this panel, Ravi Gulati, summed up the discussion by clearly stating that the responsibility for engendering a change in the situation squarely lay in the adults' stable, be it parents, teachers, or the society at large.

The stage was now set for the panel discussion comprising of the experts and adult stakeholders.

## SEGMENT 3: EXPERT, PARENTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVE



**Dr. AL Sharada**

Director, Population First

**Address the role of media and pop culture in influencing the adolescent:** An honest introspection of the society and the 'digital' world that the adolescents are growing up shows that one needs to understand the importance of the role that the media and pop culture play in festering misogynistic thoughts and often notions of gender violence. The education system has done very little in addressing these concerns. While efforts have been made to include courses on life skills in schools, the scope has however remained very limited.

**Need capacity building amongst adults and educators:** Capacity building amongst adults and educators is crucial. They have to be equipped with the required sensitivity and technique and be open to changes in their existing mindsets to hold open dialogue and discussions with the adolescents.

**Need alternative content for awareness generation and facilitating critical thinking amongst adolescents:** There is a difference between an adult's perception of social media and that of children. Society has not been able to leverage pop culture and digital media effectively to impart such sensitivity and knowledge to the youngsters. There is minimal alternative content on these issues out there to create awareness and to encourage critical thinking. Adults' have a shortcoming in realizing their mistakes of being apathetic towards children and lack of support extended to them.





## Ms. Tara Stafford Ocansey

Education Specialist, Earth Institute  
Columbia University

**Change the mindset of how the topics on gender identity, self, sexuality are perceived:** Topics on gender sensitivity, sexuality and curiosity that adolescents often feel as they transition toward adulthood should not be considered as 'sensitive' topics, but be treated as 'natural' topics of discussion that parents welcome and are proactive in addressing with their children.

**Address identity conflict among adolescents:** The identity conflict that the youth faces during the stage of adolescence which affects them psychologically, often make them prioritize their status as perceived by their peers. This leads to feelings of peer rejection and humiliation that is painful for the child to internalise. Along with these negative feelings, the child is also burdened with the responsibilities of academic excellence and finding a job. The child is also trying to make sense of personal relationships that they are developing with others at this stage, their curiosity of understanding sexuality and their growing sense of independence. As parents, one needs to be open to discussing these topics openly with children, which will likely involve ongoing reflection on the part of the parent to work through feelings of discomfort in discussing what may feel like difficult topics. This will help strengthen parents to be able to validate these various psychological developments in their kids.

**Need brave open dialogue with children:** It's universal for adolescents to be going through these psychological changes in their thought processes and curiosity levels. It is also universal for parents to find it uncomfortable and not know the best way to have that open dialogue with their kids. Parents also hesitate thinking that the kids are "too young" to be talking about this and understanding it. However, whether parents like it or not, children will be exposed to these factors; they will find other mediums of information. This emphasises the importance of creating brave spaces for open dialogue between educators/adults/and children. This has to start in the education space (in home and schools) and from an early stage. Educators and teachers have to reflect on their own biases and thoughts to be able to effectively talk to students.

It's also important to recognise that children are constantly being exposed to and are interacting with outside forces and it may not always be possible for the parents to understand how strongly these outside influences are impacting their kid. All of this mixed together puts a heavy burden on the child, often leading to low self-esteem, risky and aggressive behaviour like bullying or depression. The parent would find it very difficult to know this – unless they are willing to have that open space to have an honest conversation with their kids.

**Fostering young people's sense of purpose:** Programs aimed at promoting social-emotional skills and well-being among young people must tap into the developmental priorities for adolescents – of developing their identity, finding acceptance among their peers and finding where they can excel and achieve. Many programs targeted at promoting healthy behaviours in young people take an approach that emphasized the dangers and risks associated with various behaviours. Such approaches have been shown to have minimal impact, where programs that focus more on building self-confidence and engaging young people in meaningful activities like community service or youth advocacy can help build their sense of self-worth, their empathy, and give them a reason and motivation for making smart choices. For example, instead of teaching young girls what they need to do to avoid being sexually exploited by boys and placing the impetus on them, help them to know their power and build their confidence so that they wouldn't feel as susceptible to negative influences, and make sure boys also learn about consent and give them alternative models for what it means to "be a man" that involve respecting women and participating equally in household responsibilities.



## Mr. Sankalp Khanna

Education Consultant

**“Young minds are not deviant, they yearn for support which adults fail to provide”:** Adults and society condemn the thinking and action of young children by boxing them as “deviant thought process”. By doing so, the adults disable the concept of having safe spaces in which they may hold a reflective dialogue with the children. This leaves the children to their own thoughts and devices without the benefit of guidance and explanation to the questions they have. As a result, the child's thinking and feelings are not visible. Even approaching adults for any clarity is difficult for them. It feels like a dead end as the adults superimpose their judgemental moral code to perceive these thoughts and feelings. *“Calling children deviant is not only harmful to a child's learning and development, but it also fails to name the problem correctly and place responsibility where it belongs: on the adults”.*

Adults need healthy discussion with children to address their questions around sex, intimacy, bonding, gender identity, etc. Adults must not make children feel that these questions are “wrong” and alienate them. Adults may shove them away due to their discomfort, or embarrassment. However, this does not reduce the child's curiosity in any way. It remains and they do not know the reliable sources that they can turn towards to seek answers. This often draws them towards toxic ideologies.

In my writings I have argued that the role played by adults and parents should not be a static. They have to constantly upgrade their communication skills and build stamina to have difficult conversation. They need to increase their emotional bandwidth to be sensitive, accepting and to welcome questions during this transitional phase from childhood to adolescence. It is essential for them to call out normalised harmful behaviour. *“Adults should try and not condemn, but rather build reflective dialogue spaces and recognise that sexism and misogyny by young boys are learnt behaviours and can be unlearned.”*

**Children must be prevented from turning towards wrong sources of information:** Research shows that increasingly children are consuming pornography to understand the concept of sex. They confuse the violent depiction of sexual activities as intimacy. They are turning towards pop culture and using movie depictions of stereotypical male and female interactions and relations, and often end up with the belief that harassment is a romantic gesture. Children are digesting sexist lyrics from music videos. The “gender roles” are subconsciously reinstated within the children from everything that they see in the patriarchal layer that they live in (advertisements, to what they may see at home, etc). They grow up with misconstrued ideas of dominance/power/protection with love and intimacy. The content created in the form of entertainment, games and social media adds to this and propagates the idea that *“women are sexual objects and men as pursuers of sexual conquests”.*

**The “bois locker room” episode should be used as a wake-up call for the adults to realise how they are failing:** What happened in the “bois' locker room” episode is not something to be shocked about, because it is not something that has happened out of the blue. These conversations exist at multiple levels. The presence of social media only expose this grim reality. These conversations are neither rare nor deviant. This is the norm. The aftermath of the “bois' locker room” is an opportunity for the adults to realise that they are failing their children at home, in school and society. Adults know that these are topics of relevance but are not taking them head-on. They are modelling unhealthy masculinity, enforcing policing of harmful masculine norms on children to adhere. The responsibility is merely getting passed on between the family, school and society, with everyone silently hoping that one of them takes the responsibility. As I have often said, if anything needs to be classified as the problem, it is the absence of adult reflection around rape culture, and the absence of conscious dialogue spaces led by adults around topics of gender, identity, and violence.

**Educators should not take a top-down and hierarchical approach towards imparting social emotional learning (SEL) education to students:** Educators need to be aware and cautious about preaching values of mindfulness, positivity and peace, without integrating it in a theory of change that takes into account identity formation and the effect of contentious contexts and conflict. This sensitivity is important.

**Educational initiatives should challenge myths around gender identity and promote ideas of equity and feminism:** It becomes important to focus on educational initiatives that examines the effect of gender-based violence on the members of a society, how gender spectrum and myths are related to it, and how the literature is highlighting the importance of concepts of equity and the movement of feminism. This can help adolescents to introspect and recognise patterns of gender socialisation and how it shapes their aspirations and how they choose to act.

Adolescents need adults to model vulnerability and know there is a safe space in which healthy relationships can be built. There has to be an illustrative model of healthy manhood and identity and positive relationships. This can be shown by the adults whenever it is portrayed in the media or in their daily lives. This needs to also be re-enforced with praise and by pointing out what is good in them.

**Build and promote preventive strategies; and not band aid solutions:** Preventive strategies should focus on ending the cycle of gender violence, discouraging sharing and distribution of sexist content on social media in the form of memes and jokes, victim blaming, policing of women and encouraging the mentality that is 'boys will be boys'. We must not turn a blind eye towards what the adolescents are consuming.

Build safe spaces for children to address their questions and apprehensions about gender identity, their body and sexuality, instead of being dismissive about these topics. *"They need to be heard, valued and validated. It is important not to superimpose judgmental moral code on them and prevent alienation"*. There has to be an open communication between educators and their students.



## Ms. Neeru Lohiya

Mentor Teacher, Directorate of Education, GNCT

**Concern over assessment-driven academic structure:** When the focus is only on the marks obtained by the students, rather than focusing on the process of learning, it can create a problem. As long as a student is performing well academically, the parents and the teachers assume that everything is fine – they do not give equal importance to the child's mental health.

**The friction of ideals and point of views between students and teachers may result in a negative relationship:** Teachers do not hold an open discussion with the students, and students fear to share their questions and curiosity and thoughts with the teachers. They remain restrained out of fear of being rebuked or rejected. There is undue academic pressure on students and constant comparison they face with their family or peers or others in society. This festers insecurities.

**Preparedness of government schools:** Government schools are not fully equipped to deal with teenage stress but now the in-service teacher training is reaching out to them in all possible ways. Teachers are required to gain knowledge of the latest pedagogy suitable to the changing times. Further, there is a need to build capacity of teachers in a manner that they feel comfortable talking about these issues.





## Ms. Mukta Naik

Architect & Urban Planner  
Fellow at Centre for Policy Research

**Parents need to work with teachers:** Parents themselves look at schools with expectations that are limited to academic and curriculum performance. Their queries and how they evaluate schools also remain limited to that. Parents expect schools to have an oversight system for the process to check and identify what happens during the formative age of their children.

There has to be an interface that facilitates the process of parents not just talking to the school counsellor about the issues regarding identity formation, children's mental being, but also be able to talk to the children's teachers and mentors about the same. Teachers are in the frontline who observe and interact with children more closely and more often than the school counsellor (who does not deal with the particular child personally).

**Change approach:** Parents or teachers need not put themselves on a higher pedestal and pursue perfection which falls flat in times of connecting with their children. They also need to show greater concern and sensitivity to matters related to sex education imparted in schools.





## Mr. Ravi Gulati

Educator and Co-Founder of Manzil

**Connection and relationship between adults and adolescents has to improve:** Parents and adults need to stop practicing ageism, and give validation to other people's experiences, regardless of their age and break the boxes of gender biases. This is a lifelong learning that can happen from anyone – kids/youth/adults.

Honest open conversations happen when the relationship is based on love, trust and respect.

**Importance of giving thoughtful consideration and recognition to dissimilarities in similar experiences** - Importance for recognising that just because your experience was in a certain way at one point in your life, doesn't necessarily mean that someone else also has to have the same experiences or access to same situations as you did. Adults have to recognise the dissimilarities in the two time spaces between their experiences v/s a child's experience currently, at their age.

**Adults need to have a learner attitude** - The value of learning and unlearning has to be an integral and a continuous process. Life-long learning will help individuals to re think norms, beliefs, values that exist in the society due to historical and traditional conventions. With the new generations and their changing perceptions, adults have to acknowledge and give importance to the new perspectives. If they are raising questions it is necessary to understand why. Adults need to be willing and be open to receiving feedback. Learning happens both ways. It is not unidirectional from only adult to the child.

**School education has to go beyond curriculum learning** - As a society, we must focus on three important questions - What is learning? How learning happens? What's the role of a teacher? Education cannot remain synonymous with only curriculum learning. Education has to encompass all aspects of growth and curriculum, social and emotional learning with the child as the central focus. The system has to recognise the evolving relationships and bring changes in the teacher-children relationships to focus on creating safe and comfortable spaces for interactions.





**Mr. Chetan Kapoor (Moderator)**  
COO, Tech Mahindra Foundation

**'Adolescence' is a crucial developmental stage that needs special care:** Adolescence is the period of transition from childhood to adulthood. Children are more intrigued by adults and the opposite gender. This is the time when the relationship between the adolescent and their parents and teachers slowly weakens and stronger bonds with their peers take shape. They go through psychological changes but are often left to themselves to search answers.

**Unchecked psychological changes and unaddressed questions amongst adolescents lead to more harm:** This is the stage where societal influences increase as the adolescent has an impressionable mind. Their thoughts and psychological processes can be moulded based on the information they consume. They absorb gender biases, stereotypes, perverse attitudes towards sexuality, and misogynist tendencies. If left unaddressed, it may lead to consequences as what happened in the "Boys' Locker room" episode.

**Importance of child-centric learning:** Education has to serve the right purpose through the educational system to provide to the youth. Society has to address this conundrum better and the education system has to manage this transition responsibly. Teachers and educators will have to be well equipped to manage this.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

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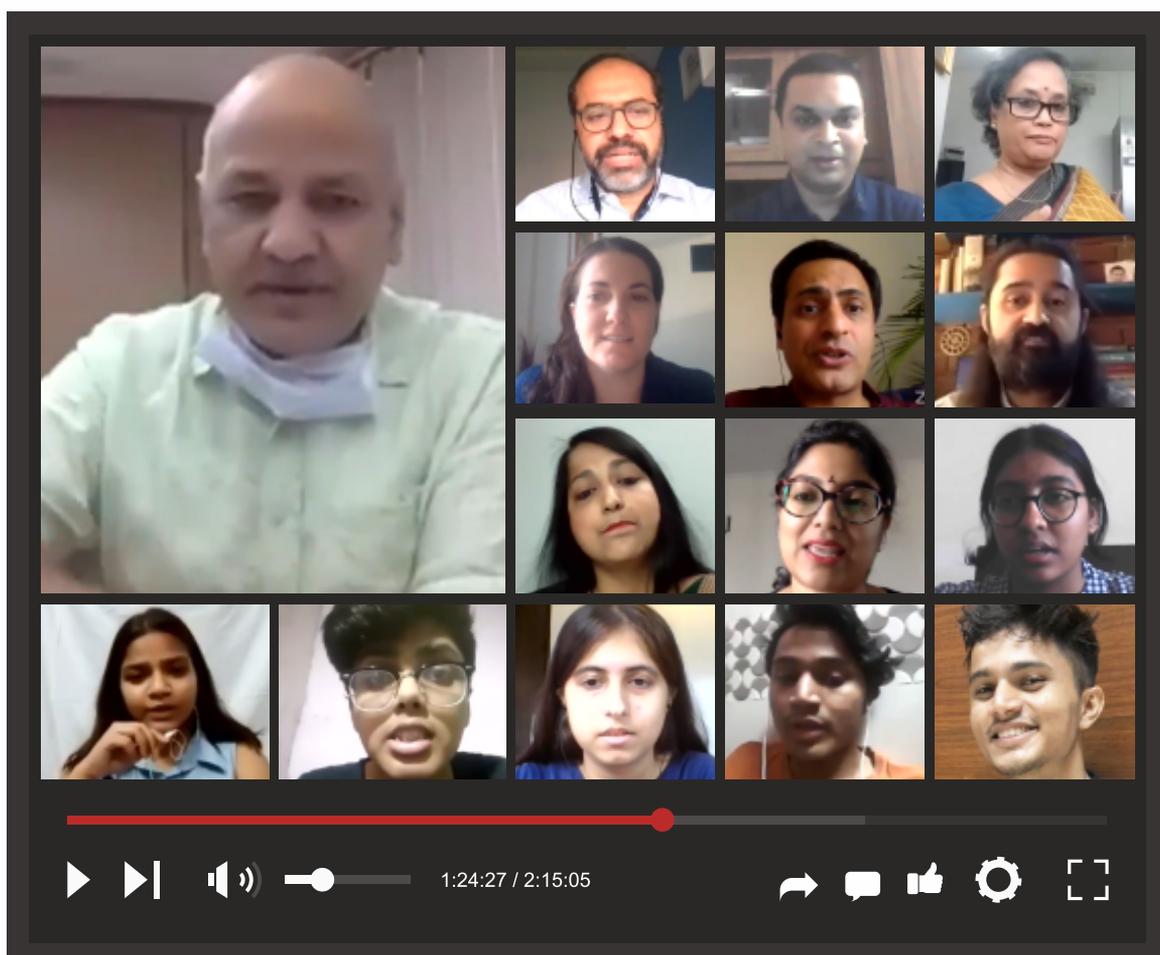
## How can we improve the education system?

Based on this insightful discussion and valuable suggestions from the panel of experts, specific recommendations are proposed to further reform the educational system and curriculum.<sup>1</sup>

- 1 Reform curriculum** to design courses that address the issue of sexuality, gender sensitivity, and inclusivity. Train teaching community to impart the course sensitively. School curriculum needs to be reviewed and revised to remove content that uses stereotypical and patriarchal visualisation of gender. Use gender neutral information.
- 2 Train teachers** who come in close contact with students to be able to track and recognise age-sensitive changes. They can help with emotional and psychological management of the child. This is needed in addition to the formal counselling services available in schools. Teachers need to include their observations in parent-teacher interactions and feedback. Also sensitise teachers against gender biases and misogyny that prevails in the larger society.
- 3 Adopt policy and create forums in educational institutes** to address gender based bullying and sexual harassment in schools and to address complaints for sensitive handling of such matters.
- 4 Build safe dialogue spaces within the educational institutes** to address questions and concerns of the adolescents about gender identity, their body, sexuality and relationships. This needs open communication between educators and students to ensure access to credible information. This interaction can prevent manifestation of stereotypes and harmful behaviour. The educators need to approach this conversation through a gender-neutral lens without being judgemental and without negative gender biases. It is important for the adults to share and 'consume' the material of the adolescents along with them. In this common space, share their interest in terms of music playlist, shows they are watching, and meaning of lyrics. Discuss together the world view projected through the shows, characters and lyrics and their implications.
- 5 Organise specially designed classes on use of social media** to sensitise children about the risks and safe use of social media. Similar sensitisation is needed for parents to equip them with ways to monitor permissive behaviour.
- 6 Introduce gender-neutral language in schools that challenges the boy/girl binary as** the basic learning approach to eradicate biases during the early years of schooling.
- 7 Raise awareness on gender stereotyping and bullying** including cyber bullying and violence against women. Extra-curricular activities may be organised in this regard to build awareness.

- 8 Need rehabilitation strategies for the victims vulnerable to harmful permissive behaviour.** Adolescents who are vulnerable to harmful behaviour and action need restorative strategies, re-education, healing, and also healing for those they have harmed. This must also include rehabilitation and support system for victims of gender violence. At a broader level this will require strengthening of justice system, policy change, and advocacy. and to build awareness.
- 9 Self-evaluation, continuous review of school policies is recommended** to ensure that there is timely response and effective implementation of gender mainstreaming.
- 10 Work in close association with parents to raise awareness about gender equality.** Parenting has to evolve constantly to address the challenges of gender inequality and to conduct difficult conversation around sexuality and related matters. They need to be watchful of harmful behaviour in children and ensure that such behaviour is not normalised. They also need to create dialogue spaces so that the process of unlearning of harmful behaviour around misogyny and sexism takes place in a conducive atmosphere.

<sup>1</sup>The recommendations 4, 8 and 10 have been enriched by additional written material shared by Sankalp Khanna, education consultant and co-author of the SEL curriculum 'Identities in Conflict'.



"Webinar - Unlocking Minds: Key to the Locker Room"

# ANNEXURE

## Additional resources for addressing topics on sex, body, and gender issues with children –

### Annotated Bibliography

Conversation on sex, body, and gender inequity is sensitive and uncomfortable. It is often difficult for adults to find the space to discuss these topics with children and adolescents. As a result, children do not get the requisite guidance or clarity on these issues during their transitional phase from childhood to adolescence. It is therefore important to create open channels and safe spaces for such discussion and to answer the questions from children. Without it, negative feelings will affect self-confidence of children, breed insecurity, and create negative body images. This may have serious consequences in terms of bullying, anxiety, depressive moods or even extreme action of self-harm.

To facilitate such conversation and to help the adults to feel comfortable about discussing these topics head-on, some guidance material and resources on the relevant topics are listed below. These resources with links have been shared by Tara Stafford Ocansey, education specialist from Earth Institute, Columbia University (<https://bit.ly/30CWSj5>).

1. Sex education - tips for parents. (2015). Better Health Channel. Retrieved from:

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/HealthyLiving/sex-education-tips-for-parents>

The article provides parents with tips and suggestions for better way of communicating honestly with the children about sex, prepares them about the possible reactions from children specially teenagers and ways to avoid conversation stoppers or awkward moments during the conversation. This can help parents plan such discussions better and create a safe environment for children to open to listening and sharing their doubts.

2. Kara, N. (2016, September 9). Books to help parents talk with children about sensitive topics. Retrieved from

<https://www.india.com/health/8-books-to-help-give-your-kids-the-talk-1447052/>

Books can be good conversation starters for kids to discuss difficult topics in a more interesting manner. The article suggests a list of books ranging from children, teens and a guide for parents as well. There are books covering topics like good touch, bad touch and teens going through physical and emotional changes.

3. Madhukalya, A. (2016, August 22). Resources to help parents talk about sex and body with children. HuffPost. Retrieved from [https://www.huffingtonpost.in/2016/08/19/these-books-and-films-can-help-you-talk-to-kids-about-sex-and-se\\_a\\_21454884/](https://www.huffingtonpost.in/2016/08/19/these-books-and-films-can-help-you-talk-to-kids-about-sex-and-se_a_21454884/)

This article contains links to interesting YouTube videos like a father discussing topics like periods, masturbation, pregnancy and other related topics with his young son, website about body issues, comics trip about menstruation. These resources help parents to get themselves aware of the knowledge and can help with the ideas to discuss it with their children.

4. Kapoor, S. (2018, June 27). Talking about Consent Culture. Retrieved from <https://fit.thequint.com/parenting/what-is-consent-culture>

The article covers a less discussed but an important topic of Consent, not only sex related but creating an overall consent culture around children from a very young age respecting their physical and emotional boundaries.

5. Satyamev Jayate Episode. (2014). When Masculinity Harms Men. India: YouTube. Retrieved from:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vuo4wbREE4U>

A talk show hosted by Amir Khan talking about the idea of masculinity and how differently both men and women perceive it. It covers stories and opinions of people from diverse backgrounds of rural areas, cities and Bollywood industries. How all of these ideas and notions are contributing to carry forwarding these old belief systems to the next generation.

6. Pappu & Papa Video Series. (n.d.). Yfilms. Retrieved from:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLRdplBrlnoZvUMh7vKT-N5hzdG-gwNR6G>

This series offers humorous examples of how to address sensitive topics with children.

7. Education for Sustainable Development. (n.d.). Resources for breaking down Gender Stereotypes. Retrieved from

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLRdplBrlnoZt-ji75lwovYxNlivwwYjA8>

This linked YouTube playlist from the Centre for Sustainable Development's Education for Sustainable Development initiative offers a few videos that discuss breaking down gender stereotypes.

8. Resources for Educators' Self-Reflection. (n.d.). Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Retrieved from:

<https://schoolguide.casel.org/focus-area-2/learn/reflecting-on-personal-sel-skills/>

### Additional Resource –

9. "Grey" – A short video created by a high school student from the Heritage Xperiential Learning School, Gurugram

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6kMj-G0PKA>

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