DEVELOPING A SAFE AND SECURE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN

IN SCHOOL AND IN SOCIETY

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Education plays a vital role in shaping an individual as well as the community at large. The essence of education therefore is to create individuals sound in health, and mind and a character based on age-old values of honesty, truth and compassion. In today's materialistic environment, a holistic form of education is of paramount importance. It aims to call forth from individuals an intrinsic reverence for life and learning. It empowers the three levels of existence of every individual, namely the physical, emotional and the spiritual.

The creation of safe schools must involve students, teachers, administrators, parents, law enforcement officers, mental health professionals, business and community leaders, and a wide array of youth-serving professionals in the community. The involvement of expertise and support from a variety of resources is essential, because schools have been organized for the purpose of learning rather than as institutions designed to control crime and violence. Teachers must be endowed with a deep sense of empathy, patience, understanding, and caring.

A school council should be formed with representatives from school staff, students, parents, and community representatives, This is responsible for providing advice and evaluating the state of school safety, and proposing revisions to the school discipline code and school safety plan as deemed necessary. School officials cannot assume their work is done after the community-school safety network has been established. Maintaining the vitality and effectiveness of the network requires continual attention.

The Council should provide parents (and teachers) with guidelines for talking with children about violence. Encourage parents to talk with their children and validate their feelings. They should be open to opportunities to talk when children are ready, honest about their own feelings related to violence, and emphasize the positive things that child/family/school can do to stay safe.

They should be aware of signs that their child might be in distress -- eg, changes in behaviour, anxiety, sleep problems, acting out, problems at school or with academic work. Limit television viewing -- developmentally inappropriate information can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children. Adults also need to be mindful of the content of conversations they have with each other in front of children, even teenagers, and limit their exposure to vengeful, hateful, and angry comments that might be misunderstood.

Holistic education teaches children not only to connect to their inner self but also to their surroundings and to their community. It creates a deep civic sense in children and thus helps establish a clean and vigilant society. It teaches children that we are essentially spiritual beings, no matter what religion, caste or creed we belong to. A reverence for all religions takes away the venom of religious intolerance. This brings about harmony and peace. Value-based education helps guide children in the right path.

To create a safe atmosphere in school and in the community, we need to create individuals, both physically and emotionally strong. To make children physically strong we need to involve them in physical activities. Group activities should also be encouraged. Activities such as sports, yoga, gardening and participating in civic activities create a sense of purpose and self-worth in children, along with comradeship, and help them keep away from idling their time in negative activities. This in turn ensures a safer environment. Another great way to educate children is to engage them in creative arts. This will not only give them a platform to express their talents but also create awareness of social ills through performing arts, dance, drama, skits etc.

To sum up, if we want to have a safe and clean atmosphere in our school and our society, we should empower ourselves and our children with the right tools so that we and our children can protect ourselves and others from the ill-effects of present day materialism, greed, jealousy, hatred, lust and intolerance. We as a society should be physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually strong!