



TOWARDS HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOLS



Regional Office for South-East Asia,
New Delhi

Health and Education

THE INSEPARABLE LINK



"The benefits of promoting the health of school children extend far beyond meeting their immediate needs for improving health for better learning. Tomorrow's communities are in the making today. Empowering school children with the knowledge and skills to promote their health and well-being, the health of their families and their communities, should be the primary concern of everybody. Promoting health through schools is a singular innovative approach to respond to the needs of school children, school personnel and communities."

Dr. Uton Muchtar Rafei
Regional Director

Education and health are two sides of the same coin. The critical synergistic relationship between education and health status is widely recognized. With a higher level of education, the chances for better jobs and access to facilities and services which promote health, are greatly increased. Research indicates that literate women tend to:

- marry later;
- exercise better control over their fertility;
- protect their own health and that of their children;
- adopt better breastfeeding practices and immunize their children.

Educated people are better able to respond to health needs of their families and contribute to the well-being of their

communities. But the foundations of such synergy are largely set at school.

Good health supports successful learning as much as successful learning supports health. Research again indicates that healthy children:

- have higher daily school attendance;
- learn better;
- take full advantage of every opportunity to learn and thus achieve higher academic excellence;
- tend to maximize social relationships and interactions at school and at home, thus improving their chances of balanced development.

Education increases children's opportunities to keep healthy. Acquisition of health-related knowledge, attitudes, skills and practices empower children to:

- pursue a healthy life, now and in the future;
- work as agents of change for the improved health for their families and communities.
- gain self-reliance, develop positive self-esteem and self-assertiveness which enable them to cope with the pressures of a socio-culturally diverse and highly competitive world;

Also :

- families benefit by the vast pool of health information and skills that the child brings home from school, which can be used to improve knowledge, practices and conditions at home;
- communities gain by acquiring increased awareness of health problems and their solutions through their involvement in school activities and community health projects.

Health Promoting Schools

THE CONCEPT

The concept of health promoting schools is about helping schools to build and use their entire organizational capacity to improve health among the pupils, staff, families and community members.

What is a health promoting school?

A health promoting school is described as a school constantly strengthening its capacity as a healthy setting for living, learning and working. It focuses on creating health and preventing important causes of death, disease and disability by helping school children, staff, family members and community members to:

- care for themselves;
- make decisions and have control over circumstances that affect their health;
- create conditions that are conducive to health.

Such a school aims to achieve healthy lifestyles for the whole school population by developing supportive environments conducive to the promotion of health. It offers opportunities



for and requires commitment to the provision of a safe and health-enhancing social, physical and psycho-social environment.

How can you know a health promoting school?

A health promoting school strives to:

- set clear goals and objectives for the promotion of health and safety for the whole school community;
- implement policies that enable all pupils to fulfil their physical, psycho-social and social potential, promote their self-esteem and acknowledge good effort and personal achievements;
- promote the health of school personnel, families and community members as well as students through developing a culture of social responsibility for health;

- foster health and learning through good staff-pupil and pupil-pupil relationships and establishment of good and healthy links between the school, the home and community;
- exploit available resources by maximizing on the services of health and education officials, teachers, students, parents, professional associations, the private sector and community leaders and groups in efforts to promote health;
- provide a health promoting environment for working and learning through its buildings, play areas, catering facilities, water and sanitation facilities;

- plan and implement a coherent school health education curriculum that actively engages school children through child-centred approaches;
- provide nutrition and food safety programmes, school health services, opportunities for physical education, recreation, counselling, social support and mental health promotion;
- equip school children with the knowledge and skills they need to make sound decisions about their personal health and to preserve and improve a safe and healthy school physical environment.

Guiding Principles for action

The vision of promoting health through schools is guided by the recommendations of the WHO Expert Committee on Comprehensive School Health Education and Promotion. These are:

- Investment in schooling must be improved and expanded.
- The full educational participation of girls must be expanded.
- Every school must provide a safe learning environment for students and a safe work place for staff.
- Every school must enable children and adolescents at all levels to learn critical health and life skills.
- Every school must more effectively serve as an entry point for health promotion and as a location for health intervention.
- Policies, legislation and guidelines must be developed to ensure the identification, allocation, mobilization and coordination



- of resources at the local, national and international levels to support school health.
- Teachers and school staff must be properly valued and provided with the necessary support to enable them to promote health.
- The community and the school must work together to support health and education.
- School health programmes must be well designed, monitored and evaluated to ensure their successful implementation and outcomes.
- International support must be further developed to enhance the ability of Member States, local communities and schools to promote health and education.

Strategies for Action

Promotion and development of health promoting schools involves four main strategies:

Advocacy

For the concept of health promoting schools to be a national priority, advocacy to create awareness among policy-makers, the general population, training and academic institutions, the community, parents, schools and students is critical.

Advocacy to achieve a common understanding of the concept, its strengths, strategies and priority action areas is required. Consensus on goals, strategies, plans of action and resources need to be built.

Partnerships and Alliances

The multiple factors which affect the health status of school children, as well as teachers and school personnel demand an intersectoral action. Building a sustainable partnership between the focal ministries of education and health and other sectors such as environment, urban and town planning, finance and economic planning, NGOs and the private sector should be a priority.

Alliances with professional bodies, unions, associations and private companies would not only provide the necessary platform for

advocacy but also help mobilize the necessary resources. For effective school health promotion, communities and schools should necessarily be partners in this endeavour.

Strengthening national and local capacity

Capacity building by necessity should be at all levels, from the national level to the schools in communities. The capacity and capability of health promotion advocates to promote health through schools, is an important requirement.

Health promoters need to be trained, among others, in research, documentation and dissemination of success stories.

Orientation of policy makers, training of teachers, community leaders and school leadership could ensure their active participation in needs assessment, programme planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Development of appropriate guidelines, manuals and tools are necessary to support capacity building.



Research, monitoring and evaluation

Effective and sensitive programmes are built on good baseline data.

Programmes should be designed to have a research and evaluation component that helps in constantly monitoring and fine-tuning the programme.

Appropriate methodologies, guidelines, protocols and tools for situation analysis and monitoring of planning and implementation processes as well as evaluation are crucial requirements. Evaluation and documentation of programmes should be used as tools to legitimize the cause of health promoting schools.

Steps to Health Promoting Schools

Build support for health promoting schools

Identify a group of people who are interested in health promotion, including the management of about 10-15 schools in communities in the same neighbourhood. This group could also include local, interested teachers, students, parents and community leaders.

Advocate the cause of health promoting schools by highlighting the rationale, the benefits and vision of the concept. Share ideas on what it does, how it works and who should be a part of it. Secure the agreement and commitment of management and community to develop health promoting schools.

Develop a school health team

Build a school health team made up of representatives of interested teachers,



parents, students, community members, and health workers.

Define the role of the team which should include providing leadership and guidance for the development and implementation of an action plan of health promoting schools.

Work with the team and school management to appoint a leader/coordinator for the day-to-day follow-up and liaison. The coordinator could be a teacher or volunteer from the community or a student.

Form a community advisory group

A group made up of leaders from the communities in which selected schools are situated including other sectors such as environment, public works as well as local industries, womens' groups, members from finance and health institutions, transport, NGOs, municipal or local government,

unions and professional associations should be formed. The advisory group could further advocate for health promoting schools, promote establishment of new health promoting schools, mobilize external resources and help address health and other problems that affect the health of school children, teachers and communities.

Carry out situation analysis

Find out the disease burden in the community, actions taken, existing health laws, regulations, policies and resources for health. Assess the current school efforts in school health as well as the disease burden, environmental and social factors which affect the health of school children.

The health knowledge of teachers and school children should be documented. The level of involvement of parents, community leaders, groups and NGOs in school health should also be documented. Possible resources for health promoting schools, both local and external should be identified.

Identify an entry point

Identify health promotion issues, which are the need of the majority of school children, staff, parents and community. This could be deworming of school children, providing mid-day meals, safe drinking water, building toilets, improving parent-teacher relationships, preventing tobacco and alcohol use, improving out-of-school learning situations, preventing accidents and violence reduction, etc.

Develop a Plan of Action

Develop clear aims for the promotion of health and safety for the whole school community.

Develop schools' policies and plans of action based on the identified issues with clearly defined roles for implementation by stakeholders. Set appropriate target dates for the implementation of each activity and indicators for monitoring and evaluation.

Develop mechanisms for resource mobilization such as school concerts, sale of school prepared products such as crafts, toiletries and mementos; sponsorship by individuals, companies, groups and parents' contributions.

Identify mechanisms for collaboration and institute reporting systems.

Implement, monitor and evaluate

Develop appropriate teaching/learning resource materials and carry out relevant training and orientation programmes.

Identify out-of-classroom learning situations, activities and projects, which could actively engage school children, parents, communities, other sectors and stakeholders together for action. Monitor progress through regular review meetings, share information with stakeholders. Evaluate after the end of target date, disseminate results as widely as possible, and replan.

Develop a local network

Advocate for networking among participating schools. Share information on the benefits of networking. Develop collectively the responsibilities and criteria for participation in the network as well as strategies for helping other schools become health promoting schools.

Health promoting schools should be seen as the beginning of healthy living, not only for school children but for the entire community. Investing in school health is a very sound investment with everlasting returns.

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