

Emotional wellbeing of children in Anganwadis

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As four-year-old Yasmeen gets ready to throw the ball into the basket, the anganwadi teacher claps her hands and calls Yasmeen's name repeatedly. All the children also clap their hands to encourage Yasmeen to throw the ball. The ball misses the basket and falls. The teacher continues to clap, picks up the ball and gives it to Yasmeen with a smile and asks her to throw it again. The encouragement continues. The ball misses the basket. The teacher once again picks up the ball with a smile and asks Yasmeen to try again. The teacher appreciates the child's effort every time, irrespective of whether the ball goes into the basket or not. By doing so, the teacher makes the children realise the importance of enjoying the process of trying and doing.

By appreciating the effort that the children put in rather than focusing on the outcome of the effort, the teacher builds resilience which encourages children to keep trying. Appreciation also reinforces good behaviour. A teacher can show appreciation in many ways, such as smiling, praising the effort by clapping or cheering, giving a pat on the back, shaking hands etc.

Anganwadis focus on the holistic development of children, which includes nutrition, good health, safety and opportunities for learning. In the first six years of life, parents and the anganwadi teacher are a major influence on children and must ensure nurturing of the children's physical and mental wellbeing. Children in anganwadis who are physically and mentally healthy tend to be happy and enjoy participating in activities which in turn motivates them to learn and develop faster than children who are not enrolled in anganwadis.

Venkatamma, an anganwadi teacher in a rural hamlet used to tap a stick on the ground three times to bring back the attention of her wards when they were distracted. She said that the 'fear of the stick' was the best way to discipline them, or they would not pay attention to classroom activities. As part of a workshop, the teachers were given a few techniques to grab children's attention, such as making them say ooi whenever the teacher says pillalu (children) or clapping three times when the teacher claps twice. Venkatamma implemented these in her centre and has stopped using the stick. She says that now the children are talking to her more and participating better.

Anganwadis, being the first contact with the world outside the home, play a major role in the social development of a child. In an anganwadi centre, the teacher facilitates appropriate social interactions among children, thereby creating opportunities for them to learn social skills of interacting with others, understanding others' feelings and expressing their own feelings.

The role of the anganwadi teacher in creating and sustaining a secure emotional environment for young children is of paramount importance. As emotional development is rapid among young children, they require more opportunities to observe and express their emotions. Emotional wellbeing means that the child is happy, feeling good and experiencing positive emotions like love, joy etc.

Emotional deprivation can have an adverse impact on a child's development in the long run. Emotions affect children's physical and psychological wellbeing. Children who are insecure or have conflict-ridden relationships with their caregivers can have problems building positive relationships with others. Children who are unable to regulate their frustrations and anger also have difficulty in making friends, attending to learning tasks, engaging teachers' positive attention and managing disappointments.

According to experts, children from economically-deprived families are more likely to manifest behavioural and emotional problems and as most of the children coming to anganwadis are from economically-disadvantaged families, it becomes even more critical for the teachers to focus on their emotional wellbeing and interventions in this aspect during the early years of a child's life may be most important in diminishing the harmful effects of poverty on children's behavioural and emotional development.

Identifying and naming an emotion is part of emotional development. The teacher needs to provide ample opportunities for children to identify emotions in daily life.

Conversation, stories and play activities help children to identify and name emotions.

Children model socially-appropriate behaviour based on the adults in their life. For instance, if adults shout at others when angry, then children too, learn to shout at others to show their anger. Parents and teachers need to create a secure emotional environment where children can express their emotions fearlessly.

A few things that the teachers can do to enhance emotional wellbeing in children are:

- Greet children when they meet them. This makes them feel acknowledged
- Spend quality time with children every day discussing their experiences
- Respond to the feelings and actions of children
- Appreciate children's efforts. Such encouragement builds happiness and self-esteem among children