

WHITTILING A DREAM

A TRAINING MODULE TO CREATE AN INCLUSIVE
COMMUNITY FOR
AND PROACTIVE SCHOOL
THE PREVENTION OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE



Whittling a Dream:

Nirmal Initiative Teacher Training Module

Dedicated to Delta Meghwal

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FOREWORD

Most of us experience volatility of emotions on hearing or reading News reports on Child Sexual Abuse. We feel angry and anxious about the safety of our own children, and simultaneously an insatiable willingness to protect them. Often, we subscribe to the most common social response against Child Sexual Abuse, which is to inform the children that in case of inappropriate touch, shout, run, and tell a trusted adult. But may we pause and ask ourselves, what should a child tell us? Have we really been able to present ourselves as trusted adults? We, as a community including guardians, teachers, children face an absence of language which makes the situation grim in regard to the disclosure. Thus, the question arises what words shall a child use to talk about the breach of trust, about the violation of bodily integrity, about the manipulation of innocence and curiosity? And how should we the trusted adult respond to that? Do we have a mutually shared vocabulary to talk about sexual abuse, and about the feelings that result in the aftermath of abuse?

From our 4 years long engagement within the rural and semi-rural communities in Uttar Pradesh, we have learned that disclosure of abuse may result in child marriage and school dropout for a girl child. The complexity gets deeper as we acknowledge the prevalent caste-based discrimination and insensitivity towards children with disabilities, as Child Sexual Abuse prevails with many other types of violence. In order to address this complex and intersectional nature of sexual abuse, we must return to the foundation of human co-existence i.e. ‘effective communication’ and ‘belonging’. To begin with, we understand schools as an incredible site to do the foundational work.

Not only children spend a substantial amount of time in their respective schools, but teachers, the adults in the space of school hold great prospects of employing classroom as a safe space where empathetic and effective two-way communication flourish, the children are equipped with required skills and language to identify and disclose sexual abuse to trusted adults; the child can access emotional assistance and sustained care with the school community

Unfortunately, the significance of employing school to introduce primary prevention measures has not been duly acknowledged in the Indian context. NPE (1986), NCF (2005) have emphasized that schools should address the issues of sexuality and violence. In 2007, ARSH (2005), the only national-level sex-education program in India, was introduced across schools, but it was immediately reverted on the ground of being “too controversial”. Moreover, the module mainly addressed the biological aspects of growing up for adolescent students. Neither

did it cater to the needs of younger students, nor did it emphasize the right of bodily integrity and sexual safety. In addition to this, the major teacher education programs in India, DIET, B.Ed. B.El.ED. or M.Ed. also do not equip teachers with the required information, skills, and dispositions to address Child Sexual Abuse. Both, pre-service and in-service training programs lack the training of teachers concerning the sexual violence of children. Thus, teachers, and subsequently students have not been equipped with necessary understanding about sexual abuse.

This module aims to provide compassionate support to the teachers by letting them revisit their misconceptions about Child Sexual Abuse, equipping them with functional knowledge, skills, and confidence to ensure primary prevention of Child Sexual Abuse. We believe that well supported, responsible, confident, sensitive, and informed teachers can further equip their students with a sense of self-care, mutual respect, importance, and implications of a variety of touches, language for the disclosure, and so on.

A simplified yet rigorous engagement over the complex and intense issue of Child Sexual Abuse marks this training module. A specific focus has been given on incorporating Indian sensibilities and contextualizing the content to make it more engaging, relatable, and comprehensible for the prospective participants.

The periodic and continuous engagement, one of the key features of this module doesn't focus merely on imparting certain facts and information regarding Child Sexual Abuse, but it rather envisions a culture of acceptance, trust, supportive and sensitive conversation and belonging over a culture of stigma, shame, oblivion, silence, and of course further violence. Therefore, acknowledging the complexity of the issue of Child Sexual Abuse and the shortcomings of brief one-time interventions, this module has been designed for a year-long intermittent engagement with the teachers. With the completion of this module, a reconceptualization of the space of school as a safe space having small pockets of acceptance, safety, and trust for the students as well as children is envisioned. In a nutshell, this module intends to invoke and let linger on the question of, "Are we doing enough to protect our children?"

Shweta Goswami
Founder and Director, Nirmal Initiative Trust

INTRODUCTION

How often we look at our children with an eye of adoration. “Oh, our little naïve kids!” But ever wondered that our little kids are not as little that they do not understand why Papa would change TV channel every time an adult scene pops up, why women don’t change clothes in open, or for that matter, why a person would touch them inappropriately if and only if no one is around?

We, the adults think that children don’t understand, but sadly, they do. They understand it in the sense that the majority of them experience sexual abuse. And if nothing else, they do understand the *shhh*; the culture of silence around sexual violence in the space of the home, school, and in the larger society. This module is an attempt to challenge the *shhh* around child sexual abuse, and also to break it and replace it with a culture of sensitive informed communication.

The key focus of the module is to ensure primary prevention of Child Sexual Abuse through employing the space of school by equipping teachers; the adults in the space of school and subsequently young children with the functional knowledge, skills, language and most importantly the comfort and confidence to talk to young children about Child Sexual Abuse Prevention.

The module is divided into two segments. While the first section of the module addresses the conceptual understanding and attitudes of the teachers towards Child Sexual Abuse, the second section equips them with required pedagogical skills and tools to work in the direction of primary prevention of Child Sexual Abuse.

Beneficiaries

The module is primarily designed for the rural/semi-urban spaces keeping the South Asian sensibilities of gender and violence into account. While the school teachers (specifically primary level) are the primary beneficiaries of the module, students of the concerned teachers are expected to be the secondary beneficiaries of the module.

Approach and Theoretical Underpinnings

The concerned module deals with a socially rooted issue; strongly embedded and manifesting in the Indian society for quite a long period of time. Considering that Child Sexual Abuse is not a laboratory equation, but takes place in an intricate social matrix of gender, violence, body,

childhood, family, etc., it is understood that addressing this issue also requires a multi-level, rigorous, continuous engagement. The module takes due note of the larger patriarchal set-up which furnishes required conditions for the occurrence and maintenance of Child Sexual Abuse through the regulation and sexualization of body, culture of stigma and silence, child-rearing practices characterized by multiple caregivers families, no sense of questioning, etc. and thus, consequently inhibit disclosure (Geetha 2007; Das 1976; Dube 1988; Tuli 2012; Patel 2005; Sharma 2000; Meyer 2007; Korbin 2003). On this note, the module does not endorse a one-time intervention but is designed around four coherent significant themes that are to be engaged within the direction of ensuring primary prevention of Child Sexual Abuse over a period of time in a chronological manner.

The module primarily draws from the humanistic theory as it focusses on the affective domain of the child, focusses on the inner world of the individual. i.e. his/ her thoughts, feelings, emotions, and also advocates a teaching-learning environment that is characterized by a sense of warmth, genuineness, maturity, and concern for self and other fellow individuals (McNeil 1990). Through taking note of socio-psychological aspects of Child Sexual Abuse, ensuring the creation of a safe and sensitive environment for the disclosure and addressal of Child Sexual Abuse is what this module essentially aims for.

The practice of songbook and colour book is informed by the behaviouristic model of learning in the sense that the teaching-learning process is organized in a manner that ensures that students can master the transacted knowledge and skills and act as active, however, not sole participants in their own safety. The module employs the strategy of repetition, internalization, affirmation, and assertion for young learners to equip them with the preliminary language, knowledge, and confidence to identify and disclose any act of sexual violence to their trusted adults.

Further, the module categorically acknowledges the crucial role of language in the primary prevention of Child Sexual Abuse at different levels. Be it the lack of words guardians and children experience due to inherent shame stigma that follows Child Sexual Abuse, or a mere lack of commonly shared sensitive vocabulary to disclose and discuss the act of sexual violence; communication (verbal or non-verbal) plays quite a significant role in the case of Child Sexual Abuse. Researches have clearly revealed that schools particularly sexualize bodies, normalize gendered-based violence, employ strategies to discipline girls and boys; in short, legitimate 'appropriate' gendered behavior (Dunne et al 2006; Paechter 2006). Other than corporal punishment and physical violence, gender-based violence is also prevalent in schools

in terms of verbal abuse, groping, touching, forced love proposals, assault, and coercive sex (Leach 2003). All these gestures are characterized by violence, shame, and fear; key factors which certainly inhibit Child Sexual Abuse disclosure, if not necessarily promote Child Sexual Abuse. On this note, the module is also informed by the symbolic interactionist school of thought, as it asserts that education is not only possible through social interaction, but is rather determined by the same. What is being communicated, how it is communicated, and how it is being received and interpreted is an ongoing process in which the individual learns and shares social meanings with other people through social interaction (Ervin and MacLennan1994). Thus, through a periodic engagement with the participant teachers, the module is a preliminary, yet informed attempt to create a counter-culture to address sexual violence against children through banking upon the possibilities that human relationships and interactions hold.

Ethical Consideration

The module acknowledges that the participant teachers themselves can be subject to Child Sexual abuse, thus, while the transaction of the concerned module the teachers will be ensured right at the beginning, that if at any stage of their participation, they experience emotional disturbance, they can reach out the conducting authority, excuse themselves and in extreme cases revoke their participation as well. Required emotional assistance and support will be provided to the concerned as and when required from the team of Nirmal Initiative Counsellors. As far as the ethical consideration for children is concerned, the module has been designed in such a manner that it equips the teacher with required sensitivities that they can attend children and their sexual abuse disclosure in a compassionate, kind, and firm manner.