

## NEWSLETTER FOR DECEMBER, 2014

Greetings, Dear Parents!!

In our last update, we spoke about aggression in school-going children, where we made a brief reference to the fact that very often, aggression and violence stems from child abuse.

Child abuse refers not only to situations of Domestic Violence, where the child is a witness to violent acts and words by parents and other family members. It refers to all forms of violence and / or aggression which a child witnesses or experiences, including aggression directed towards the child itself. This also extends to inappropriate acts of sexual contact which a child witnesses or experiences at the hands of family members or people known to the family.

This is an extremely sensitive topic in our society – and we often handle it by resorting to what we like to refer to as “The ostrich syndrome”. We would like to bury our heads in the sand and pretend that such things do not exist or that they do not occur in decent communities like ours. The tragic and frightening reality is that sexual harassment and violence against children are a glaring reality. Recent events in our own city and all over India have served to pull aside the curtains and reveal this sad and shocking truth. There have been cases of false accusations, and dissenters are quick to point out that this is proof that such things do not happen- actually, this only serves to compound the issue, because when a child is actually abused, believing this kind of fact prevents the child from speaking out and also prevents adults from believing the child.

The answer to this sensitive issue is a very simple one and it brings us to something which is part of the curriculum in many countries around the world and is also a standard recommended by The Council of Europe “One in Five Campaign” to end child sexual abuse. It is a safety training by parents or teachers, wherein a child is explained, in simple and non-sexual terms, how to take care of himself or herself. It involves open dialogue with children and alertness on the part of parents.

There are several websites which explain these things in greater detail, but we would like to give you a few suggestions as to what you can do as a parent to ensure the safety of your child:

1. Teach children that their bodies belong to them and they have the right to express any discomfort, distress or hurt whenever they may experience it.
2. Teach your child to respect his/her own body as well as the body of others- this would include talking about aggressive acts like slapping, hitting, punching, kicking, poking and other acts which can cause hurt or harm to the child.
3. Explain in very simple terms that there are 4 areas of the body where they cannot and must not be touched by anyone – Mouth, Chest, Area between the legs, and Buttocks. Please ensure that you use these words and do not use some other name for these areas. This avoids confusion when the child needs to communicate about any problems (even if it is only an infection) in these areas.
4. Explain that only certain TRUSTED individuals are allowed to touch them in these areas and that too, only in SPECIFIC SITUATIONS, as follows :

Mother/maid – while bathing or helping to change clothes(till he/she is able to do so on his/her own)

Father- same as above, in case of little boys

Doctor, nurse- during check ups and examination, usually in the presence of a parent

Lab Technician- for x-rays and blood tests, and that too, only in presence of a parent

5. Teach them the difference between Good Touch and Bad Touch, for which there is an excellent video available on the internet. It is a short movie created for children, in English and Hindi, named "KOMAL". Created by Childline, the video is an enlightening experience. It is advisable for that you should watch it first, and then decide whether you would be able to speak to your child accordingly or whether you would like to show it to your children and have a discussion with them about it afterwards. The other website which you might find interesting is that of the Child Psychiatry Institute in Pune, which has also created some useful material to help parents and teachers talk to children as part of this safety training.

The debates and controversies surrounding this issue will continue. There are theories that state that being over-protective of your child is unhealthy because you are preventing him / her from experiencing adequate social interactions and thereby hindering his all-round social development. Here, we will leave you with two thoughts to ponder-

1. Do you allow your child to touch a burning object or do you warn him to stay safe, even to the point of scolding him if he / she engages in unsafe behaviour ??

2. As a parent, you would like to always be around to protect your child but this is not possible, because then you stand the risk of becoming a "helicopter" parent, always hovering around the child, and it is this which actually hinders his social development

This safety training ensures that a child knows what kind of behaviour is safe and unsafe, and therefore, serves to act as a preventive measure, should the need arise, especially in situations where you might not be present.

As we gear up for a round of festive celebrations at the end of yet another eventful year, we take this opportunity to wish each and every one of you, dear parents and students, a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Safe New Year ahead.

With best wishes from,

The School Counsellors at La Martiniere, Kolkata

For appointments, interactions and discussions with the school counsellors, kindly contact the following numbers after January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015:

La Martiniere for Girls : 033 4040 6663

La Martiniere for Boys : 033 4040 6612 / 033 4040 6629