

### **Teachers of govt schools to double up as psychological counsellors**

NEWDELHI: To meet the paucity of trained school counsellors in the country, the Union health ministry is launching a programme to train more than 10 lakh school teachers to identify signs of stress, emotional issues, substance abuse and bullying among students.

Two teachers each in all government and government-aided schools will be trained to hold the special one-hour-long class once a week.

“It helps to have trained teachers in school as children wouldn’t visit a doctor unless they are sick, leading to many health conditions remaining undiagnosed for long. This way we will be able to pick up signs early and take preventive measures,” said a senior health ministry official, requesting anonymity. In case of symptoms of any serious conditions, the child will be referred to a specialist.

“We are in the process of finalising the curriculum that is going to be largely interactive. We have made a conscious effort to design age-appropriate content to hold the interest of children. By month end the curriculum will be finalised and after that training will begin.”

India has 26 crore (260 million) school-going children studying in around 11 lakh (1.1 million) schools. Activities are being drafted for children in three categories—classes 1 to 5 (primary), 6 to 8 (upper primary) and 9 to 12 (till senior secondary).

#### **HEALTH EXPERTS WELCOME THE MOVE**

“Given the shortage of psychologists and psychiatrists, which is 300% and 250% respectively, I am totally for screening and support at the basic level. Even two counsellors per school is not enough as some schools have 5,000-6,000 children, so the counsellor cannot devote enough time to each one,” says Dr Samir Parikh, director, department of mental health and behavioural sciences, Fortis Healthcare. The health ministry is taking up the project in partnership with human resource development ministry.