

Building Inclusive Education Systems: Early Intervention and a Three-Tiered Support Framework for Diverse Learners

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Abstract: *Unique abilities and challenges, preferences and dreams reflect one's individuality. This individuality needs respect and an unconditional acceptance in the society, specifically in the education world. All stakeholders involved in the development of a child need to be involved right from the beginning with an understanding that each child has strengths which need to be celebrated and not problems to be solved. This paper is a small step towards creating welcoming communities, combating discriminatory attitudes, building inclusive society, and achieving education for all. The challenge is to create responsible universal citizens and influential individuals of the 21st century. This can be realized by laying a superior foundation through quality education embedded within the psychological well-being of all the learners. Every individual strives to receive a well-rounded educational programme irrespective of the diverse intellectual, social, emotional, and physical needs. Early intervention and prevention focus on a wide range of learners including able, gifted, talented, and special educational needs. Three-tiered intervention ensures maximum benefits for all learners to ensure a life with respect, dignity, care, and highest level of functioning. It involves understanding and addressing the mental health concerns and diverse levels of need among learners and families within the school community. This model aids in looking beyond the challenges through intervention at three levels primary, secondary, and tertiary. Implementing early intervention and prevention among the school community mitigates the development of behavioural, emotional, and academic problems and concerns of the learners.*

Keywords: Individuality, three-tiered model, psychological well-being

Celebrating Strengths



Three-tiered model of intervention involves understanding and addressing the mental health concerns and diverse levels of need among learners and families within the school community. This model aids in looking beyond the challenges through intervention at three levels primary, secondary and tertiary. Implementing early intervention and prevention among the school community mitigates the development of behavioural, emotional and academic problems and concerns of the learners. It also aims at reducing the risk of developing psychological disorders and disabilities and helps in restoring highest level of

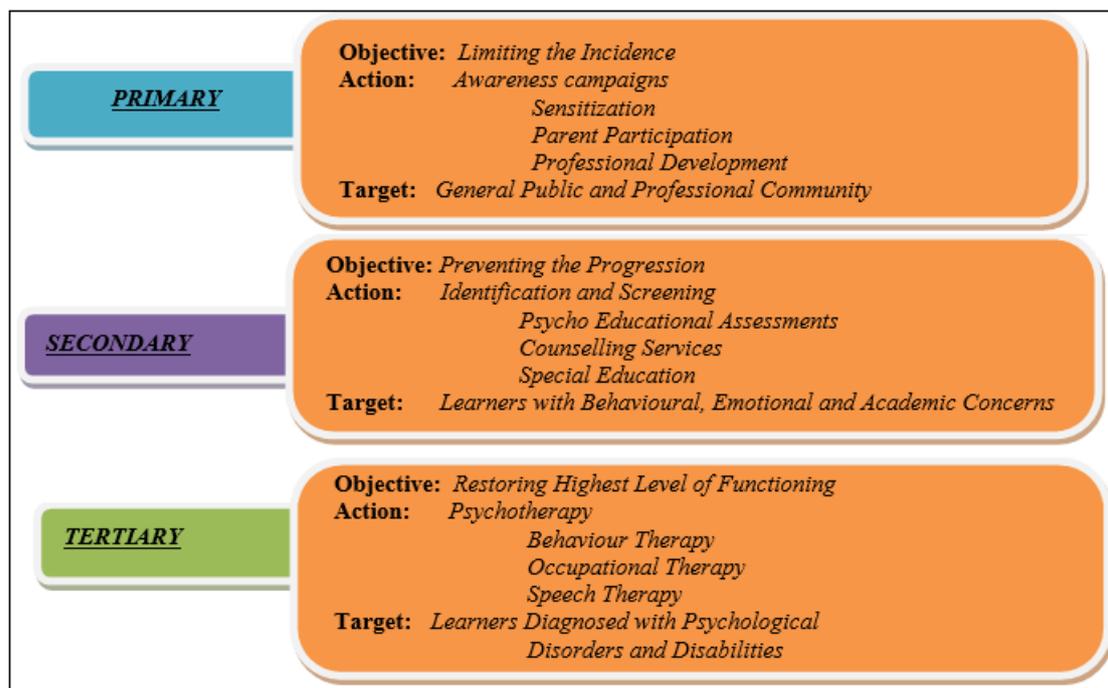
functioning among them. The school community is empowered through this model to exchange best practices in providing the learners with better opportunities for successful learning within the realm of sound mental health.

Various activities at the level of primary intervention protect each and every learner against psychosocial difficulties, and create learning environments to promote and sustain positive holistic development and functioning. The primary prevention strategies are implemented for the entire school community to develop the skills and assets that promote healthy behavioural, emotional and academic functioning of learners.

Secondary intervention is a means to intervene at the onset of psychosocial and school adjustment problems. Strategies at this level are targeted to the learners who possess specific individual and environmental risk factors for mental health and academic problems, and/or those students for whom universal prevention strategies have not worked and who are exhibiting initial signs of difficulties.

At the tertiary level of intervention learners receive a full continuum of mental health and academic services and supports by the various mental health and rehabilitation experts. This is an intensive intervention and is meant for the group of learners experiencing significant behavioural, emotional and/or academic problems.

Three-Tiered Model of Intervention



Primary Intervention

Primary intervention focuses on all the learners to promote holistic development. It is a universal and proactive approach to limit the incidence of various mental health concerns, psychological disorders and disabilities among the learners. The effective implementation of intervention at this level emphasizes creating awareness and sensitization among the general population and professional community directly involved in the teaching learning process.

Objective

Primary intervention aims at limiting the incidence of psychological disorders and disabilities through awareness campaigns, sensitization programmes, parent's participation and professional development programmes. The major goal of prevention at the primary level is to develop awareness and promote action, with the potential to influence society and leading towards its significant transformation.

Action

At the primary level the task of informing and educating the general population about behavioural, emotional and academic concerns of the learners is accomplished through various awareness and sensitization programmes. This is done with a vision to curb the existence of discriminatory attitude and develop communities which are welcoming for every one irrespective of the individual needs.

Various activities to limit the incidence include awareness campaigns, sensitization programmes, parental participation and professional development.

Awareness Campaigns

Awareness campaigns focus not only on widening the awareness on a particular issue but also include education, explanation and engagement at a community level. Various workshops, seminars, talk shows etc. are conducted to create awareness among the general population about the inclusive practices, various mental health issues, psychological disorders and disabilities. The awareness campaigns

highlight important concerns and ensure community participation and acceptance of each and every learner. The objective here is to motivate people in bringing out the needed societal change and creating positive shifts in the educational system.

Sensitization

Sensitization programmes promote participation, encourage accountability and create a space to explore perceptions and attitudes around various mental health concerns. These programs educate the people directly involved with learners like the facilitators, peer groups and other school administrative staff. These programmes target on various disabilities, skill development, adaptive and assistive devices, therapeutic and support services, assessment, and educational implications. These programmes positively influence and impact the attitudes and behaviour of the community members about the inclusive practices. These sessions provide a platform to reflect upon the experiences shared, and the positive aspects of inclusion.

Parent Participation

Parent participation programs aim at promoting a social and educational atmosphere where parents feel welcomed, respected, trusted, heard and needed. Various expert talks, advocacy seminars and various counselling sessions create awareness of various aspects of inclusion practices among the parent community. These sessions ensure active involvement of parents and create a platform of mutual support and a sense of empowerment. Parents increase interaction with their children, become more responsive and sensitive to their needs and more confident in their parenting skills. The first hand experience and view of the parents regarding their child are valued for the contribution it makes to their child's education. Parents are seen as partners in the education process.

Professional Development

Professional development programmes focus on active involvement of staff and administration to have an effective

impact on the learning outcomes. These programmes provide opportunities for effective and positive engagements among the professionals on various inclusive practices and mental health concerns. Specific professional development and training programs are conducted to promote an inclusive culture within the school system and to create a cadre of competent facilitators who can develop alternate and creative ways of teaching. This enables and equips the facilitators to better comprehend and deal with the diverse needs of the learners. Effective collaboration among professionals may yield positive changes in the deep structure, changes in teacher attitudes, as well as improvements in the academic and social progress for all the learners.

Target

The whole population is the possible target of primary prevention. This is done at a macro level by involving general public and professional community to ensure active participation and involvement in the holistic development of the learners despite the diversity.

Primary prevention operates on a community basis to improve the social environment and promote the social, emotional and physical well being of the learners.

Secondary Intervention

Secondary intervention seeks to lower the rate of established behavioural, emotional and academic problems among the learners by early detection and diagnostic assessment. The focus is on lessening the impact of various mental health concerns, psychological disorders and disabilities on the learners. The effective implementation of intervention at this level is done by identifying, screening and diagnosing the concerns and difficulties of the learners and providing effective counselling and special education services as and when required.

Objective

Secondary intervention aims at preventing the progression of learners towards psychological disorders and disabilities. It involves the processes of identification and screening, psycho educational assessments, counselling services and special education services. At this level intervention is undertaken to prevent or reduce the progression of identified issues and concerns related to mental health of the learners.

Action

At the secondary level the task of identifying, screening and diagnosing the behavioural, emotional and academic concerns of the learners is accomplished followed by effective planning and implementation of interventional services. This is done with a vision to empower learners their parents, and the facilitators directly involved with the learners, to apply best practices and opportunities for successful learning. The specific group of learners who are identified and diagnosed with behavioural, emotional and/or academic problems are facilitated to achieve their potential in all the areas of development by raising their level of progress, irrespective of their abilities.

Various activities to prevent the progression include identification, screening, psycho - educational assessment, counselling and special education services.

Identification and Screening

The fundamental step in secondary intervention is to identify the needs and the level of understanding of the learners. A facilitator plays a key role here by identifying the students at risk for behavioural, emotional and academic concerns. The facilitators are equipped with effective resources and trainings to identify learners who might need special attention. They make their observations and anecdotal notes to identify learners who might face difficulties in academics or behaviour.

After the identification, the facilitator approaches the school counsellor or the special educator for a formal screening to get a better understanding of the learner's needs and concerns. Formal screening tools are used to determine the learner's academic potential and intellectual capacity. Screening is a relatively brief process to identify learners who are at an increased risk for having psychological disorders or disabilities and deserve immediate attention, intervention, comprehensive assessment and diagnosis. Keeping in mind the curriculum and assessment requirements, special arrangements are then provided to the learners to restore their highest level of functioning.

Psycho Educational Assessment

The Psycho educational assessments are a more comprehensive and individualized examination of the behavioural, emotional and academic difficulties of the learners identified during the initial screening. A team of qualified professionals including clinical psychologists, counsellors, special educators provide comprehensive and detailed psycho - diagnostic reports of the strengths and limitations of a particular learner to help them come to term with the learning and behavioural difficulties. These assessments define the nature of the problem, determine a diagnosis, and develop specific recommendations for addressing the interventional goals. Multiple avenues are used to obtain the necessary clinical information, including self - assessment instruments, clinical records, structured clinical interviews, assessment measures, and collateral information. This provides a broad perspective of the learner's psychosocial history, level of functioning and impairment, as well as degree of distress. Psycho - educational assessments include observation, identification, diagnosis and management of the learner's developmental issues, special needs and mental health concerns.

A child's cognitive and academic strengths and weaknesses are thoroughly assessed by means of various psycho - diagnostic tools including rating scales, behavioural samples, direct observations, collateral information from family members and other organizations and retrospective data including previous evaluations and assessments. The recommendations based on these assessments are made to assist the learners and their families as well as the school community to do the best they can. The assessments provide a clear picture of the causes and the effects of the learning and behavioural difficulties and broadens the view and increased understanding affecting the learner positively.

Counselling Services

Counsellors play a significant role in providing mental health services to all the learners at primary, secondary as well as at tertiary level of intervention by rendering personalized and general counselling. At the secondary level the counsellors provide an in depth analysis and subsequent intervention to the learners, facilitators, parents and other concerned administrative authorities as and when required. Counsellors help the learners in developing their capacities as thinkers and making them aware of their capacities as thinkers, who are capable of developing skills, tools, attitudes to become increasingly independent as learners.

Counselling services support learners to develop appropriate skills and attitudes, to resolve behavioural, emotional and academic problems and achieve a balanced quality of life. Counselling services are provided to the whole school community individually as well as collectively in small cohesive groups. Counsellors maintain absolute confidentiality of all the learners according to the code of counselling ethics. Occasionally the essential information is shared with the head of the school or other authorities or the family members when it is deemed necessary (such as in case of self harm or harming others) and is in best interest of the learners.

Individual counselling sessions are taken up with the learners who are referred by the facilitators identified for behavioural, emotional and/or academic problems. Counsellors develop confidential relationships with students to help them resolve or cope with their psychological and developmental concerns. Counsellors work with individual learners, facilitators, families in the areas of academic achievement, career development, and social/emotional development ensuring that learners become productive, well - adjusted and successful in all their endeavours.

Group counselling sessions are also taken up to establish academic and personal goals and to resolve interpersonal problems among the learners. These sessions are carried out to improve the learners' self esteem, time management, organizational and various other life skills. General and specific personality workshops are also taken up with learners of all age groups pertaining to their developmental stage to promote holistic wellbeing. Counsellors also provide leadership and advocacy to promote equity and access to opportunities for rigorous educational experiences for all learners.

Counsellors consult, collaborate and coordinate with facilitators, families, staff, and the community time to time to create an optimal learning environment for all learners. Counsellors connect with the facilitators and parents to develop strategies for assisting a learner with academic difficulties and/or mental health issues. Counsellors also work in close collaboration with the special educators to assess learners' skills to determine their needs and to develop individualised education plans. Counseling services also involve life skills education based peer educator trainings for the learners.

Special Education

Special education ensures that learners with disabilities are provided with an environment that allows them to be educated effectively. The special educators' main focus is not on the learners' disability rather on their abilities.

Special education can include a range of support services, depending on the special needs of the learners. RPWD Act 2016 has listed 21 disabilities that qualify for special education. Special educators work in close collaboration with the classroom facilitators and school counsellor to analyze the issues that can be dealt with inside the classroom with modest assistance provided. They help in developing skills, concepts and behaviours related directly to the disability or challenges of learners with additional requisites that should take place inside the school. After a careful psycho diagnostic evaluation various modifications are provided to the learners to supplement the classroom learning.

- 1) Modification and adaptation of the curriculum as per the learner's requirement.
- 2) Modulation of the instructions given in the classroom
- 3) Changes in the seating plan
- 4) Extra individual time to understand the new concepts
- 5) Help in adapting the learning skills
- 6) Review concern areas
- 7) Utilize informal methods to document
- 8) Recommend specific in - class accommodations (differentiation)
- 9) Monitor students' progress and effectiveness of interventions
- 10) Involve parents as participants
- 11) Provide parents with clear information and feedback. Parents consent is very important.
- 12) Provide feedback to administrators regarding school resources and needs

Special educators initiate individual educational planning for learners with additional requisites and ensure its implementation. Individualized assessment by the special educators is followed by the formulation and implementation of the Individualized Education Plan (the IEPs). The IEPs are mapped with the learning outcomes. The key idea is to reinforce multisensory methodology. IEPs are based on the approved curriculum with cross disciplinary skills and appropriate strategies, resources and demonstration of learning. IEPs are upgraded based on the analyses of student's performance. This is done in order to redirect, focus and deepen understanding in the learners.

Special educators also ensure the involvement of parents of learners with additional requisites in the educational processes. The special educator collaborates closely with teachers, other professionals and administrators to foster the teaching and learning of learners with additional requisites. The special educator participates in the process of fostering the inclusive school development by fostering collaboration among the learners with special needs and their peers in various spheres of education including the scholastic and co scholastic domains.

Target

The learners who are at risk for any mental health concerns are the possible target of secondary prevention. At the level of secondary intervention counsellors and special educators work closely with the concerned learner, the facilitator and the immediate family. The aim here is to develop strategies for assisting a learner with academic difficulties and/or mental health issues to achieve their maximum potential. Secondary prevention mostly operates on an individual basis to develop appropriate skills and attitudes, to resolve behavioural, emotional and academic problems and achieve a balanced quality of life.

Tertiary Intervention

Tertiary intervention comes in place to restore highest level of functioning among the learners by involving various therapies depending on the diagnosed disorders and disabilities. At this level of intervention focus is on providing therapy, rehabilitation, and management of the psychological disorders and disabilities to the learners and reaching their maximum potential.

The effective implementation of intervention at this level is done by providing a full continuum of mental health and academic services and supports by the various mental health and rehabilitation experts.

Objective

Tertiary intervention aims at restoring the highest level of functioning in the learners diagnosed with psychological disorders and disabilities. It involves the processes of providing therapies and rehabilitation by the mental health and rehabilitation experts like psychologists, child development specialists, speech therapists, occupational therapists etc. This is an intensive intervention and is meant for the group of learners experiencing significant behavioural, emotional and/or academic disorders and disabilities.

Action

Intervention at the tertiary level is provided to the learners to manage and cope with severe psychological disorders and disabilities. The school collaborates with various professionals from outside like psychiatrist, psychologists, paediatricians, occupational therapists, speech therapists etc. to cater to the special needs of the learners. The learners are provided with all the support and assistance by these experts to achieve their potential in all the areas of development. The therapies include psychotherapy, behaviour therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy. The aim of these therapies is to reduce symptoms which can be disabling. Therapies guide the learners to limit complications and empower them to manage their own symptoms.

Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy involves therapeutic conversations and interactions between the therapists and the client (here, the learner) to help with a broad variety of mental disorders and emotional difficulties. It can help learners and their families understand and resolve problems, modify behaviour, and make positive changes in their lives. Psychotherapy can be supportive, re-educative, or psychoanalytic in its form.

Behaviour Therapy

Behaviour therapy seeks to identify and help change potentially self-destructive or unhealthy behaviours in individuals. It functions on the idea that all behaviours can be learned, unlearned and relearned. The focus of therapy is often on immediate concerns and how to modify them by encouraging learners and their families to seek new behaviours, to reward desired behaviours, and to allow unwanted behaviours to extinguish.

Occupational Therapy

Occupational therapy works on the basic elements of health and development which are love, nutrition, exercise, sensory integration and the self confidence. Occupational therapists employ knowledge, skills and professional judgement to determine what to address during the evaluation, intervention and outcome processes. Occupational therapy plays a large role in supporting learners and the facilitators in providing ways to adapt each learner's environment and to optimize the abilities to their maximum potential.

Speech Therapy

Speech therapy is the assessment and treatment of communication problems and speech disorders which is performed by speech-language pathologists also known as speech therapists. Speech therapy techniques are used to improve speech, communication and abilities to understand and express language, including nonverbal language. These techniques focus on treating speech disorders or speech impairments as well which develop in childhood.

All these therapies provided by the professional experts function as a multi-disciplinary team with an objective of providing comprehensive services to help the learners come to term with their behavioural, emotional and academic problems.

Target

Tertiary prevention targets the learners who are diagnosed with significant psychological disorders and disabilities. Various therapeutic interventions focus on improving functioning, minimizing the impact, and preventing or delaying further complications for learners with disorders and disabilities. Tertiary prevention is most comprehensive and individualized in its approach in restoring highest level of functioning and reaching the maximum potential in the learners.

Conclusion

All intervention programmes irrespective of the level should be carefully monitored to assess and record the impact on learners' progression and participation in learning and in academic life. These programmes are most effective and lead to better outcomes when they are implemented as intended and when implementation is intensive and includes frequent opportunities for learners to practise skills. Intervention at each level facilitates the learning experiences of the learners and their progress becomes evident through increased level of performance and positive self image. Three tiered intervention ensures maximum benefits for all learners so as to ensure a life with respect, dignity, care and highest level of functioning. The challenge to create

responsible universal citizens and influential individuals of the 21st century can be realized by effective implementation of intervention at three levels aiming at limiting the incidence, preventing the progression and restoring highest level of functioning among all the learners.

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