UNIT 14  ROLE, FUNCTION AND RESPONSIBILITY OF TEACHER

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14.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous units you have studied about the strategies and measures that are being adopted to prevent the further spread of Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome Disease (AIDS) and providing care to those afflicted with the disease. In this unit we shall discuss the important role that the teachers can play in addressing these twin concerns. It is well known that only education can help in overcoming the crisis generated by the spread of AIDS. Teachers, who have a social obligation and are hailed, as the agents of social change are, therefore, the ones who can save societies from the impending disaster. Today, AIDS is not only wrecking individual lives but has reached such epidemic proportions that it has started extracting a heavy toll from entire societies. Since this disease is more prevalent among those who constitute the work force or are preparing to join it, hence it can devastate the society by ravaging the economy. Therefore, teachers have to play an important role in ensuring that the future citizens can protect themselves from this disease so that the society is free from this scourge. At the same time it is necessary to foster humane attitude towards those afflicted with it and in this respect too the teachers have a role to play. Teachers, therefore, have to shoulder a new responsibility and perform certain well-defined roles about which, we shall discuss in this unit.

14.2 OBJECTIVES

Following a study of this unit, you should be able to:

- understand the responsibilities of teachers in preventing the spread of AIDS and in caring for those infected with it;
- internalize various roles to be performed by teachers in schools while imparting education on AIDS; and
• comprehend the necessity to shape the attitude of the students in a positive way towards those infected with the AIDS virus.

14.3 RESPONSIBILITIES OF TEACHER

We know that incidences of AIDS, from being isolated cases few decades back, have assumed epidemic proportions in several nations. It is affecting millions and every year the number of incidents of infection with this disease is on the rise at an alarming rate. In India too one cannot remain complacent that only 1% of the population is suffering from AIDS because as per a report on the global status of the AIDS epidemic, by the United Nations, by the end of 2005, India had surpassed South Africa as the country with the highest number of HIV cases and highest number of deaths from AIDS. As we know there is still no cure for this disease and hence, the solution to this problem lies in its prevention, which requires education and educating students because they are the future citizens. Therefore, safeguarding their health and well-being amounts to safeguarding the future of the country (YUVA, Handbook for teachers, 2005). One positive aspect about this disease is that it is preventable, provided certain precautions are taken. Education imparted by teachers can help in taking these precautions as schools in comparison to other social agencies, wield greater influence on young minds (Thomas, 2006). Hence, the teacher has to perform certain specific functions in this regard.

Caring for children bearing the burden of this disease is a new responsibility of teachers. Today, there is a steady increase in the number of households having AIDS patients and their resources are strained severely as they struggle to cope up with the demands of the disease. The poor are especially affected. In many cases, AIDS shatters the family as children are orphaned or left to the care of a single parent, who may also be suffering from the disease. AIDS unlike other diseases not only kills people and depletes their financial resources but also robs them off their social status. Therefore, inhuman attitude towards them adds to their misery and further impedes social development. AIDS has a cruel impact on children as trauma and hardship of the children affected by HIV and AIDS is not only because they get orphaned but also because they lose their childhood and carefree days as they start shouldering the responsibilities of an adult like procuring food, earning money, caring for the sick, and thereby leaving school.

Teachers need to understand the misery of such children and try to solve the behavioural problems exhibited by them. Reports in the media about the inhuman treatment meted out to people infected with the disease are frequent. Children of such people are denied admission to schools. Even educated people do not want to send their children to schools that admit children who are HIV positive. Families are made social outcasts and denied employment. To overcome this problem, teachers have to adopt a twin approach.

Treating sero positive (infected with AIDS virus) people with dignity: The teachers themselves should be aware of the modes of transmission of the disease and understand that the company of such people is not harmful. It is also to be understood that there could be many years before these people get full blown AIDS and these years could be spent productively. The tendency to brand them as immoral should also be done away with as AIDS can be transmitted by other means besides the sexual route and moreover, it is inhuman to harbour such perceptions. Teachers may also have to counsel such children and their parents and build hope and confidence in them and convince them that with certain precautionary measures and healthy lifestyle they can lead quality life with dignity for several years.
Shaping the attitude of the youth: On visiting the website. http://www.avert.org/aidsimpact.html you would find that it has been rightly pointed out that it is important to recognize teachers as key partners in the care of orphans and vulnerable children. This is mainly because a teacher’s attitude wields great influence on children and the youth and even the community and hence, they can determine acceptance or rejection and stigmatization, of those infected or belong to such families.

A teacher is responsible for changing the attitude of the learners and making them caring and humane towards those infected with the HIV virus. Teachers can influence the learners that caring for any one who is unwell is a human quality and patients of AIDS are no exceptions and they too deserve equal care and respect. Also they need to be convinced that studying and playing together or befriending those infected, will not harm them in any way. The knowledge that infection is although mainly through sex with infected persons, there are other modes of transmission too will help in this direction. Hence, while morality is to be stressed for future healthy family life and for becoming a responsible citizen but on the flip side sero positive people are not to be judged as immoral. Children can be made the messengers for the society through campaigns organized by the school. The teachers can thus, fulfill their social obligation of providing care for those infected.

This is important not only for humanitarian reasons but also because unless the attitude towards those infected is changed, people who are infected would not open up due to the stigma attached to this disease and the fear of being ostracized by the society. Such reluctance to share information would not only harm them but also harm the society. Rise of such secretive behaviour is harmful for the society as the problem would not be recognized and dealt with in its full magnitude.

14.4 INSTRUCTIONAL ROLES

India has the highest number of HIV positive people today and so far there is no way of reversing this growth. Therefore, educating the youth is the only way to prevent a pandemic. But as a teacher, you may be wondering what exactly is to be done? You may also feel that children of upper primary level and secondary schools are too young to be imparted with such education. However, increasing number of adolescents are today experimenting with undesirable things and hence, education cannot be delayed.

For imparting education that aims to prevent the further spread of this disease we need to provide certain learning experiences. Again integrating them with other disciplines and thus adopting a holistic approach has been vouched to be more effective by the NCERT than dealing with it as an isolated affair. Hence, it has to be integrated with other areas like economics, sociology, sex education, which again has to be taught in the perspective of human physiology with topics like reproduction, conception, pregnancy, health, hygiene, etc. The teacher has to frame certain well-defined objectives for providing AIDS education. The selection of the method and media of teaching are also important because of the special nature of the content.

Framing Objectives: First let us discuss the objectives that a teacher would formulate while imparting instructions in this area. The objectives have to be framed in such a way that the learners are not only well informed about the relevant issues but also internalize them so that it results in shaping certain attitudes, which in turn can lead to total personality development of the learners.
The learner should have the right type of knowledge about the (human body and health) life-styles. The misconceptions and myths also need to be cleared. The learners need to be well informed about the modes of transmission of the disease, its impact on the individual, community and nation, signs and symptoms of the disease, steps to prevent it, its treatment and such other issues. The learners should also be enabled to develop self-esteem and dignity and have ethical, social and spiritual values, which would guide them throughout the life in personal and social relationships. The learners also need to know about the importance of the health and general well-being of the entire family, responsible sexual behavior before and after marriage (Thomas, 2006). There should also be objectives to develop a positive and caring attitude towards those suffering from this disease and their family. While these are some of the objectives around which instructional strategies could be built up, there could be many more as per the demands of the situation.

Selection of learning experiences: The learning experiences could be provided through not only specially designed content but also through a number of other curricula and co-curricular activities. From the objectives we can infer that the content cannot be restricted to certain topics from the life science syllabus but the learning experiences have to be from a wide range of areas like biology, sociology, morality and ethics, etc. Hence, knowledge regarding human physiology like reproductive systems, puberty, pregnancy, right time for conception, transmission and prevention of diseases, categories of people who are vulnerable to Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), and especially to AIDS like drug abusers, children of affected mothers, thalassemics, health workers, sex workers, etc. What constitutes high risk behavior is essential but not enough to shape attitudes. Life skills also have to be developed to develop moral values so as to internalize the content. Hence, learning experiences should not be wholly bookish.

The teacher also has to realize that media, fall out of globalization like influence of different cultures, modern trends that are more permissive about the free mingling of the youth of opposite sexes, etc., have produced a generation with a different set of values and ideas. The learners have to develop a personality that can imbibe the positive aspects of these trends and remain steadfast about moral and ethical aspects. Therefore, a fixed and rigid curriculum that imparts only knowledge, would not be of much help as education in this direction cannot be restricted merely to the teaching of certain topics. Life skills hence, are considered to be important today and co-curricular activities, therefore, should also find an important place for providing appropriate and wholesome learning experiences that safeguard the health of future citizens and also make them caring towards those afflicted.

Method of teaching: The teaching method would also vary and include manifold activities like lectures, assignments, projects, field visits, counselling, informing honestly about facts related to sex, sexuality and their related aspects, organizing co-curricular activities, etc. The teacher also has to be careful about the selection and integration of media as its strong impact can help in developing attitudes.

Shedding Inhibitions: On visiting the website http://www.financialexpress.com/latest_full_story.php?content_id=128334 you will find that according to a recent study many teachers, are uncomfortable while imparting sex education may be difficult for the teachers in the beginning to discuss with adolescents matters relating to sex and sexuality. But adopting a mechanical approach and using a medical jargon may not be helpful. First, teachers would need to shed their inhibitions and discuss freely these issues but at the same time be cautious about the choice of content and vocabulary. They would have to be especially sensitive while dealing with these issues and also take care not to create panic among the learners. A serious and professional approach would help in discussing in a matter of fact way.
As we have already discussed a holistic approach needs to be adopted for imparting education on AIDS. Apart from teaching, the teacher is expected to play a significant role as a counsellor, where more than teaching, listening to the learners and paying attention to their doubts, queries, problems and dilemmas that require proper advise and guidance would be important. While teaching is usually meant for a group, counselling may be for an individual learner or a group. Teachers may find counselling more difficult than teaching as the latter cannot be successful without building rapport with the counselee and for this there is the need to empathize with and understand the problems of the counselee. While there are many learners who require counselling to safe guard them from this disease and build a positive attitude towards those suffering from it, there could be some who are themselves suffering from it or belong to families with AIDS patients. Let us now discuss some of the expectations from a teacher who also happens to be a counsellor.

**Counselling regarding general problems of adolescents:** Adolescents have unique problems regarding their changing physical aspects, emotional problems, peer pressure, growing expectations of parents, school and society. Factors like hormonal changes, influence of media, peer pressure, beginning of a search for identity, curiosity on issues related to sex coupled with lack of proper information may make them experiment with drugs, alcohol, sex, etc. As a teacher, you would have to counsel them about the dangerous fall out of such irresponsible behaviours.

**Counselling to dispel myths and misconceptions:** There are still many who harbour misconceptions and myths about STDs and AIDS. The misconceptions could be regarding mode of transmission and even cure. Similarly misconceptions are there regarding sexual matters like ways of warding off unwanted pregnancies. These misconceptions are dangerous and it is necessary to prepare the learners to get rid of them and accept the right information on these issues.

**Counselling those infected with HIV:** The incidents of social discrimination against those infected and their family members are common. The learners therefore, need to be counselled about the modes of transmission of the disease and not consider friendship with HIV positive people as a health hazard. As already discussed, the teacher may also have to counsel those infected with the virus and lead them to further sources of information, centers offering testing and treatment, and refrain from being judgmental on them. Counselling children and their families can significantly improve their quality of life, reduce suffering and assist in managing the disease. Moral and educational support and care that could include counselling on various issues ranging from health related affairs, shelter, finance, etc., and mobilizing material aid, educational support, etc., are also to be done (http://www.avert.org/children.html). Above all, they need to be convinced that they could have many more years of quality life that should not be wasted in misery and hopelessness.

Today with a growing population of those infected with the disease, teachers can expect more and more learners who are infected with it. That children affected by HIV/AIDS are continually facing discrimination and exploitation, has been reported by a Human Rights Watch report (http://www.indiatogether.org/2004/jul/chil-aidschild.htm.) It is therefore necessary to counsel learners to make them humane towards such people. The teacher is expected to highlight and reiterate that anyone can get AIDS, irrespective of his/ her socio-economic background but only through certain specific modes. The learners should also know that insects or casual contacts with those infected or sharing towels, utensils, stationeries, etc. do not lead to the disease.
Desirable traits of a counsellor As a counselor, the teacher is expected to be a good listener, patient, non-judgmental, sensitive, sympathetic and sincere about his/her opinions and feelings. Building rapport is necessary so that the counselees can relax and feel comfortable. While collecting information through gentle probing, checking out on the information elicited is necessary, care should be taken that the session does not degenerate into one with interrogation or attempts of extracting confessions as this could discourage the learners from seeking help. Above all, the teacher has to respect the confidentiality of the information provided and honour the need for privacy (Guidelines School AIDS Education Programme). The teacher should seek the cooperation of parents and experts when the situation demands it. Through counselling teachers can build confidence, develop self-image, assertiveness, remove anxieties and guilt and thus, help in developing personality of the learners. The counselee should be encouraged to come up with solutions for their problems on their own. It is also important to follow up as counselling is not a one-time affair but a continuous process and may involve a long time with several sessions.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Use the space provided for your answers.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of this unit.

1. With illustrations explain any two desirable traits required for counselling a HIV positive learner.

2. What activities do you consider to be necessary before and after the use of electronic media for disseminating information on AIDS?

3. What could be the impact of being judgmental on HIV positive people?

TEACHER AS THE SOURCE OF INFORMATION

In India discussing sexual matters openly is still a taboo. Parents and elders often find it embarrassing to discuss it with children. In the absence of healthy discussions, children grow up with certain misconceptions and half-baked information they
gather on their own. They often resort to their peers for information, which could be misleading. A teacher is, therefore, the one to whom the learners can turn to for the right type of information. Even on his/ her own the teacher has to ensure that the learners are equipped with the right kind of information so that they can protect themselves and at the same time not consider being friends with HIV positive people as indulging in high risk behaviour.

In this respect you may ask what sort of information is to be provided to the learners?

There could be many kinds of information that could be needed by the learners. Information on different aspects such as what exactly AIDS stands for, how it is caused, the nature and major types of the virus, the difference between HIV positive status and full blown case of AIDS, the symptoms of the disease and when to go for diagnostic tests, testing centers, treatment, precautions to be taken to avoid getting infected, etc., need to be provided. It is the duty of the teacher to inform the students about people who are sero positive i.e., infected with the virus but not suffering from AIDS and hence appear healthy but can be potent source of infection. However, the intervening period following infection and development of AIDS can be devoted to work, education and community life. Sharing needles, razors and the like and having unprotected sex with such persons or their being sperm or blood donors could be dangerous but otherwise there is no reason for ostracizing them.

14.7 DEVELOPMENT OF LIFE SKILLS

AIDS is basically a life style disease that can be prevented. While being informed is important but internalizing the information and developing certain skills that help in shaping the personality is even more important. Even if a person refrains from having multiple sexual partners, but is unable to say no to drugs, s/he could fall prey to the disease by becoming a drug addict who could one day be using intravenous drugs. Therefore, today we emphasize the necessity of life skills that help us in leading a dignified and quality life and a teacher today is supposed to help the learners in developing these skills. As rightly pointed out by Thomas (2006), life skill education for this disease must follow a strategy that will promote a culture of life rather than of death.

What constitutes life skill education? According to UNICEF the term Life skills refers to a large group of psycho-social and interpersonal skills which can help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop coping and self-management skills that help them in leading a healthy and productive life. Life Skills as defined by

Wikipedia, are the skills necessary for successful living and relate to six main areas: self, Family, job, community, leisure, and spirituality (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life Skills). Thus, life skills are a group of abilities that help us to make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others, and manage lives in a healthy and productive manner. They thereby help us to adapt to meet the new challenges in life (http://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index.html).

All over the world women are at the receiving end and are more vulnerable to AIDS as they lack information to prevent it and are also devoid of the power to keep them safe (http://www.liebeilonline.com/doi/pdl710.1089/apc.2Q05.19.xiii?cookieSet 1). Thus, we see that many of us are not in a position to take decisions due to a variety of reasons. UNICEF is promoting life skill education so that as
mentioned earlier we can take informed decision, communicate it and shape our own future instead of flowing with the tide.

The teacher has to organize academic and co curricular activities like debates, discussions, encourage learners to solve problems, nurture creative thinking, and above all make them feel empowered to shape the course of their own life. Developing attributes such as gender sensitization, craving for a happy family life, practical living skills such as managing money, preparing budget, solving problems by setting realistic goals, remaining persistent, making decisions, resolving conflicts, coping with failures, adjusting to change, seeking cooperation, making life style choices, learning to say no, remaining free of addictions and remaining celibate till marriage, being faithful to one’s partner, etc., are also needed to enable learners to lead quality life and at the same time have empathy for those suffering from HIV/ AIDS (http://www.josseybass.com/A/VileyCDAAA/ileyTitle/productCd-0787966207.html).

We shall not discuss this any further as you will read about this in details in the first and second units of Block 2 in Course 2.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Use the space provided for your answers.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of this unit.

4. Explain two major aspects about which the teachers themselves should be well informed for HIV/ AIDS education?

5. How will you nurture decision-making skill in learners? Explain with illustration.

14.8 LET US SUM UP

Education on HIV/AIDS is the only way to cope up with the challenge posed by this disease. It is the responsibility of the teacher to prevent the further spread of the disease by educating the future citizens and at the same time develop in people positive attitude towards those affected by it. To fulfill these responsibilities a teacher has to perform several roles. S/he has to first of all understand that teaching certain topics as isolated topics to impart knowledge about HIV/ AIDS is not enough as the learners have to internalize the information and for this an integrated approach with emphasis on knowledge, skill and attitude development is important. As per NCERT, information on AIDS hence, has to be given in a context and with skills
that enable learners to construct knowledge in a holistic manner with a wider perspective.

The teacher also has to be a counsellor for helping learners in overcoming their confusions, dilemmas, doubts, etc., on various issues and also counsel children affected by this disease directly or indirectly. Besides, a teacher has to be a source of accurate information about things like the disease itself, its cause and mode of transmission, youth friendly support services, etc. Finally teachers have to develop life skills in learners so that they can take right decisions and abide by them and thus, lead a life of dignity. As 7 mentioned by Thomas (2000) rightly, an appropriate educational programme for HIV/AIDS is essentially value based with regard for the dignity of individuals.

14.9 UNIT-END EXERCISES

1. i) Find out how many people are infected with AIDS in your state and the growth decline in the figures during the last five years.

ii) Along with your students collect information about the awareness regarding AIDS in your community.

iii) Find out about the counselling centers and testing centers for AIDS in your locality.

14.10 SUGGESTED READINGS


Introduction to Family Life Education, Block 1, Course-BSWE 004, IGNOU (Self Learning Material), 2005.


HIV and AIDS Prevention and Care


14.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Patience, non judgmental
2. Discussions, quizzes, etc.
3. Could become secretive
4. Modes of transmission; symptoms
5. Debates, discussions, etc.