

## SIGNPOST

# Schools can make a difference

**Behavioural patterns can be developed in children through a suite of actions taken by educational institutions says Dr Sitara Vikram**

The three fundamentally important behavioural traits required to achieve success - delayed gratification, discipline and confidence - were discussed in the previous issue. These traits can be developed and learned but there is no magic bullet that can do this. A suite of consistent and coordinated actions taken by schools can only help this.

The first and most important thing is to start young. Habits and behaviour get ingrained over time. Positive behavioural patterns such as having a routine, regularity in school work, attendance need to be reinforced consistently.

For example, there is debate about children doing homework. Some schools and parents are against it in the lower classes. However, regular

homework - say 15 minutes every day, gets the child to understand the importance of discipline and taking responsibility to learn. Completing their "homework" at school is not the same - what you want the child to learn is, no matter what the surrounding environment

is, he/she needs to have the discipline to go sit with his / her books, even if there are exciting and distracting things happening around.

The second thing is a system of consistent boundaries and rules. Children need to know how far they can go and what they are allowed to do. When the rules are broken, there needs to be consequences - not in the old style "give the child a smack" option, but a gentle yet firm reprimand. Alternatively, when the child does well, a structured reward system that the child can understand is required. Very often, once the reward systems are in place, the mere withdrawal of the reward can be punishment enough. For example, a



system of star charts and badges can be introduced. Every time a child demonstrates good behaviour, he/she gets a star. Six stars get the child a green badge. Three consecutive green badges, gets a red badge and three red badges get a gold badge. The system has been found to be effective that now the mere withdrawal of a star is enough punishment to get the desired behaviour. Parents have started using the same system as a tool at home now too!

An approach that utilises the above system of rewards automatically builds confidence. When a child is praised for something she did, she feels confident. A child who knows she has not done well and receives praise will know that it is false. While the theory is simple, implementing the above successfully depends on the effort of the whole school team in partnership with parents. The suite of actions mentioned and the philosophy of building a "confident and competent" child rests with all the care givers (at home and at school).

When well-coordinated and consistently enforced, every child can achieve his or her potential in life.



**The philosophy of building a confident and competent child rests with all the care givers at home and at school. When well-coordinated and consistently enforced, every child can achieve his or her potential in life**

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