General Studies-1; Topic: role of family, society and educational institutions in inculcating values

Making Schools Safe for Children

1) Introduction
- Ever since the incident at Ryan International School, Gurgaon, where an eight-year-old boy was sexually abused, the issue of child safety in school has come to limelight.
- Children spend more time in school – making it extremely important for school authorities, teachers, and parents to ensure that every child is safe inside the school premises.

2) Present Status
- We lack a value system. Our education only provides skills to get a job.
- The refusal to make complaint about the misbehaviour of the school staff. The accused in the Ryan school case was suspended at another school without a police complaint.
- Not complaining emboldens serial sexual offenders & jeopardizes the lives of innocent children
- Parents do not want to get into the legal system and fear vindictive action from the school.
- The lack of reporting leaves children even more vulnerable to attacks.
- Guidelines for Prevention of Child Abuse have been largely ignored.
- There is no specific law passed by Parliament to deal with the crimes against children in schools.
- Deficient infrastructure, lack of toilets and inadequate safety measures are the reasons for children to feel unsafe. Toilets were identified as vulnerable areas for children.
- The Child Protection Policy ensures safety of children in schools. But, apart from Delhi, this has not been adopted by any other state.

3) Nature of Child abuse
- Children have been hurt and abused at school.
- Children are being abused by the caretaker and bus attendant.
- Abuse that our children face from classmates, teachers and even school heads.
- Many students have died or been injured due to poor infrastructure at the schools.
- A survey conducted by World Vision India revealed that one in every two children is a victim of sexual abuse.
- A UNICEF report said that majority of abuses of children was reported for the age group of 5 to 11 years.
- Children are unable to deal with the consequences of the humiliation meted out to them.

4) Solutions
- All the stakeholders including parents, teachers, students, school management, and the education department authorities must identify the lacunae and create a manual for school safety.
- These stakeholders must be given responsibility for implementing the guidelines.
- The list of criminals with past cases of wrongdoing against kids must be circulated in each & every school of our country
- Schools should deploy sufficient security guards from recognised security agency only
- Safety protocols must be put in place and police verification conducted for all employees
- As a parent, it is important that we teach our children to be assertive in order to protect themselves against incidents of bullying and emotional exploitation.

- At school, creating a safe learning environment, identifying pupils who are at risk of harm and then taking suitable action.
- Create a buddy system where children are paired up, or are in groups of three.
- Educate children and make them aware of their own rights over their bodies. Teach children about good touch and bad touch.
- Healthy and open conversations within schools can identify potential flash points and early action can be taken to save children from harm.
- Auditing the school infrastructure and amenities to create a better and safe learning environment.
- Make self defense classes mandatory for both boys and girls
- Child Abuse Prevention Committee should be appointed including staff and parents to tackle local issues.
- Child counsellor should be a full time employee in every school and she/he should talk to every child regularly
- We need to create quality human beings. We need to radically change the education system.

5) Conclusion

- The children are the biggest asset of the nation. They are the most vulnerable part of the society who needs to be protected.
- With care, with vigilance and with supervision the school can be made a safe space