School counsellors set up e-help portal for kids

Kolkata: Eighteen counsellors from some of the city’s leading schools on Sunday evening launched free telephonic and online-based counselling services for students confined to their homes for the past three weeks. The psychological support group to help reduce panic attacks during the lockdown mainly include counsellors from La Martiniere for Girls, New Town School, Mahadevi Birla World Academy, DPS Ruby Park, Laxmipat Singhania, Calcutta Public School and other institutions. The free sessions, launched at 9pm, will be available from 9am to 11pm every day.

The service is focused on managing stress, anxiety and fear in the student community by providing “guidance for parents in handling difficult kids and gadget dependency of children during lockdown”. The psychological intervention is also open to adults.

“Some our patients suffer from chronic depression due to the barrage of bad news. In-person sessions are not possible, so free online counselling is being provided to them as well,” said clinical psychologist and school counsellor Gunjan Tiwari.

Ria Das, counsellor of New Town school, said, “The schools are not directly involved. We want to help as mental health professionals, in public interest.”

The counsellors have created a web portal, titled ‘Let’s win this battle’, that provides their phone numbers. “Each one of us is available at different hours of the day. One can connect through WhatsApp, video-conference, Skype or other online media,” said Das. The portal has a page for parents too. “We are pooling in external links on how they can deal with their kids’ hysteria,” she added.

There is special counselling offered through power point presentations for students of classes X and XII. Those due to appear for boards in 2021 are going through anxiety related to curtailed academics,” said Tiwari.

Paromita Sengupta (name changed) agreed, “My son needs help. In a state of stupor, he has cocooned himself with his cellphone and his routine has gone haywire since the lockdown. I can see he is missing his classmates, the games and all the things linked to physically going to school.”

Tiwari explained, “Not all adults understand their angst. Mothers and other adult members of the family may have gone through prolonged homework, for delivery or other medical issues, and know how to make use of the time. But the kids are clueless.”

Tips for Adults also available

**What** | Web portal, titled ‘Let’s win this battle’
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**Sessions** | 9am to 11pm every day
**Why** | To provide free online psychological help to school kids and guardians
**Features** | Portal for pep-talk, advice for parents, tips on how to keep kids engaged
**Communication** | Portal has contact numbers of counsellors and time of availability; Students, parents can send in queries, call or communicate via WhatsApp, video-calls or Skype