

Dear Teachers,

You may have heard the famous saying of George Bernard Shaw - "To me the sole hope of human salvation lies in teaching." As a civilization, we in India have always placed teachers in the highest echelons, next to God. And why not?

A teacher plays a crucial role in the life of an individual. A good teacher occupies a very significant and pious place in the minds of young students. After parents, it is the teacher who influences a child most, and contributes to the shaping of his or her personality.

As you are well aware, children in every society face abuse, violence and exploitation. If you only look around you, you will see it. Little children engaged in labour and deprived of schooling – many of them bonded-parents beating their children, teachers beating children in the classroom or discriminating against them because of their caste or religion, girl children not being allowed to be born or killed soon after birth, or facing discrimination in the family and society because they are girls, early marriage, rape and incest...

Yes, this is the reality of many children's lives. Some of them may be in your class or your school.

As a teacher what will you do when you see a child being abused and exploited or hear about it?

Will you....

- *Blame it on destiny?*
- *Argue that all adults have gone through it as a child and so what's wrong with it?*
- *Argue that it is a custom, a practice and therefore nothing can be done about it?*
- *Blame it on poverty?*
- *Blame it on corruption?*
- *Blame the family and not do anything about it?*

- *Why bother if the child is not your student?*
- *Look for evidence to establish that the child really needs protection?*
- *Wait till you find evidence to act?*

Or will you.....

- *Ensure that the child is kept in a safe environment?*
- *Speak to the child?*
- *Talk to her/his family and tell them that every child has a right to safe childhood and that it is the primary responsibility of the parents to take care of their children?*
- *Help the child and the family, if required?*
- *Find out what is threatening the safety of the child?*
- *Act against those who are being cruel to the child or those from whom the child needs to be protected?*
- *Report the matter to the police/child line if there is need for legal protection and legal redressal?*

How you react will depend on how you see yourself. Do you see yourself simply as a teacher or as a leader, a torchbearer, a mentor and a guide? Because a leader, a torchbearer, a mentor or a guide must also take on the role of a caretaker, a protector and a social change agent.

You teachers are important because...

- You are part of a child's community and environment and therefore obligated to promote their rights and protect them.
- You are role models. You must set the norms.
- As teachers you are responsible for the growth, development, well-being and protection of your young students.
- You have been vested with authority and responsibility by your position.
- You can be more than a just a teacher who teaches the syllabus and achieves good results - you can be a social change agent.