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Seminar on Child First, Safety First organized by The The Bengal Chamber in association with Early Childhood association on 30th November 2017

Safety lesson from cop

JHINUK MAZUMDAR

Calcutta: Don't hide, report. This was the clear advice from a woman police officer to school heads and teachers at a workshop on how to protect children and ensure a safe environment for them.

Aparajita Rai, additional deputy commissioner, south division, Calcutta police, stressed that schools should come forward, report and probe in case of a complaint of molestation, abuse or harassment.

"You can approach the police for a discreet inquiry... but information must be given. Please don't hesitate to inform the police. It's an offence if you don't," Rai told representatives of over 25 preschools at a conference on Child First, Safety First organised by the Calcutta chapter of Early

Childhood Association at The Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry on Thursday. "The child need not be taken to the police station for investigation. A woman officer in plain clothes will visit the child and may take a counsellor along."

Schools have often been accused of not reporting incidents of crime so as to not to tarnish their reputation. But brushing such issues under the carpet breaks the trust of the child and lends immunity and unintentional protection

to the perpetrator.

A south Calcutta school was accused of trying to downplay allegations by Classes III students that a person had harassed them on the campus.

In another incident, a three-year-old girl was allegedly molested at a venue the school had taken the students to for rehearsals for a school programme. Parents had alleged delay in informing the police.

"If a parent has a complaint, do not side with the accused saying he is an old mem-

ber of the staff. He is a suspect and you should not vouch for him. The parent should be told that the school is conducting an inquiry," said Swati Popat Vats, president, Early Childhood Association.

Vats suggested that the accused be suspended till the probe is over. "Parents have to be heard and reassured rather than the school taking a defensive approach," said Suman Sood, director of Mon-grace Montessori House and territorial head of the Calcutta chapter of the association.

Psychologists feel not acting on a child's complaint or covering it up leads to trust deficit. "The child depends on the adult for protection. When an adult does not pay attention or does not take action, it is a blow to the trust mechanism," said Ruvena Sanyal.

WHAT SCHOOLS SHOULD DO

- Report complaints to police immediately, share information
- If possible, suspend accused till probe is over
- Reassure parents of action