

Parent experiences of the Independent Living Course

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(a mother of a child at Asha Kiran School)

The aim of the Independent Living Course, is to help us set long term goals for our children based on their strengths and abilities, so that they can be as independent as possible in their lives. It also helps us in taking baby steps in our preparation and planning to ultimately achieve our goals in a way that is not too stressful to either the child or parent.

The course is basically a brainstorming session where a group of us parents meet and try to find solutions to a specific problem by sharing ideas, analyzing how these ideas would best suit our child and then implementing them to see how it best works out. We meet every alternate Friday and at the start of every session we share our feedback on the previous weeks experience and also how we have implemented our plans and if there is any progress (however small) we have observed.

Our group consisting of six parents met for the first time on the 26th of July 2018. After we made our introductions we shared our experience on how we felt when we were first told that our child is differently abled. It was a very emotional session and all of us shed a few tears while recalling the past and explaining our child's specific difficulty to the rest of the group. The session was very cathartic and in a way created a bond among us. We realized that although we were different (in terms of each child having different difficulties and needs) yet we were the same (in terms of the challenges we face, emotions we go through and the reaction that our kids receive when taken out).

Over the next sessions we were more at ease with each other. During our second session we discussed how we can make our child more independent at home. We freely expressed our challenges, gave each other suggestions and ideas. Some of the suggestions were very practical and I have personally tried implementing some of them.

Our third session was based on the challenges faced by us parents when we take our children out for social gatherings. This was an issue all of us were grappling with and there were many suggestions made which personally I have tried to implement (accepting the child as he is, not being embarrassed when people look curiously at him and to be able to remain unperturbed externally). With persistence, I am sure we will be able to see a change for the better.

Our fourth session was on sending our special child out to join the work force. This was one area I thought that was out of bounds for our kids, but I was pleasantly surprised to find out that opportunities were actually available and a number of children have been successfully placed in jobs. This knowledge made me feel hopeful and more positive about their future.

Our group plans to meet at one of our houses or at a picnic spot once every three or four months so that we initiate a small social circle for our children and for them to be more at ease when taken to other social events.

All in all this program has helped us look at our challenges and face them in a very systematic and scientific manner. Planning, is the key to help our little ones face the world more independently.

I would like to thank Dr. Rita James and Chandra madam for initiating and conducting this workshop and for always being there to support and help us.