

Kids hit by autism need love and care

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A TAMIL poet said, "It is a privilege to be born a human being and more so without any disability."

And unfortunate are those who have some disorder and more so if the Government does not recognise it as disability. This is precisely the case with 17 lakh Indians who suffer from autism, a brain disorder that causes lifelong development disability, primarily affecting communication.

In India, deep-rooted negative attitude and the lack of awareness contributes in making the problem more grim. The fact is that there is no cure for autism: No medication, no injections, no pills that can overcome the disability, itself is discouraging. But a combination of good school and parent training can help an autistic person to make significant progress.

For this purpose 'Action for Autism', a city-based charitable organisation is holding annual training workshops for professionals and the parents of the autistic children in the Capital from October 5 to 11.

Merry Barua, Director of the organisation, says, "Since the disability is complex, most parents feel hopeless. In these kinds of workshops, we ensure that parents are fed with correct information as to how to deal with their children."

The workshops include various exercises as learning to accept the child, their behaviours, teaching methods, leisure and social skills, vocational and independence training etc."

Our aim is to demystify the belief of professional teaching. For majority of the time child is with his parents and because of the lack of generalisation of these children in different environment, it

is essential for the parents to know how to handle the child," says Barua.

Says Rajni Dutt, a teacher at the organisation's training centre, "Through these workshops parents and teachers share the techniques and problems in handling these children".

The training centre has enrolled various autistic persons in the age group 4 to 18. Sandra Dawson, therapist says, "These workshops are meant to empower the parents, to make them feel capable to handle their child."

However, she was critical of the Government's indifference and apathy. "The Government does not even recognise the disability, what to talk of aid."

"We face problems of funding and land. Moreover there is an acute shortage of trained professionals and doctors. For awareness also, a lot needs to be done," she added.

Though autism is not recognised as a disability, it has now been included in the National Trust Bill which now reads as the National Trust Bill for Mental Retardation and Autism. The Government is also considering amending the Persons with Disability (Equal opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act.

Says Lalee Patel, who is the mother of 9-year-old autistic boy, Vivek and was here for the second consecutive year for the workshop, "The workshops are helping me a lot. Vivek is learning to be independent and is emotionally much better."

Her husband however says there is severe lack of awareness in our country. Though the disorder is more common than the Down's syndrome, a lot of misinformation and confusion prevails, he says adding that the Government must intervene.