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Help students feel safe in schools

June 23, 2020 @ 12:05am

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Teachers are now busy preparing for it and are implementing the Education and Health ministries' anti-Covid-19 guidelines and standard operating procedures (SOP). - NSTP/HALIMATON SAADIAH SULAIMAN

LETTER: In a few days, schools will reopen after a long break due to the Covid-19 pandemic. They are now busy preparing for it and are implementing the Education and Health ministries' anti-Covid-19 guidelines and standard operating procedures (SOP).

Although it appears that schools are ready for their reopening, are we psycho-emotionally prepared? When Covid-19 hit the country and the Movement Control Order (MCO) was implemented on March 18, almost everyone was in a state of disarray as they feared the disease and did not know whether they had enough food and other essentials at home to last during the MCO period.

Thus it is important for children to feel safe in schools. This is the main concern of parents.

With the help of the Education and Health ministries' anti-Covid-19 guidelines and standard operating procedures (SOP), schools are now preparing for the reopening.

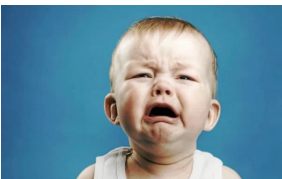
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Will the students follow the SOP, practise social distancing and keep themselves safe at all times? How will their social interactions be managed? Are all those returning to school free of the virus? They risk facing exposure to it as they will be surrounded by their friends whose movement history during the MCO is not known.

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It is important to explore the students' immediate needs in the first week of school. This can be done by preparing a platform for them to ask questions about the current situation. This psycho-educational module

should include Covid-19-related information, such as the disease, its effects on society and the importance of staying safe.

Issues arising from the session must be addressed carefully before a class can be conducted. A student needs assessment or a survey can be made in the first week of the reopening of school. During the session, however, teachers need to take note that they may be confronted with certain issues, such as tensions between students and their family members, which may have been triggered by the MCO.

This is more likely to happen to students who are victims of domestic abuse. The prolonged stress experienced during the MCO may lead them to have unhealthy coping responses, such as self-harm or suicidal thoughts.

Other family issues that might occur during the MCO are divorces and parental job losses. These will adversely affect their children. Students of such households will likely see the returning to school as a respite from such pressures.

These students must know that the school is providing them with psycho-emotional support. Teachers and counsellors must identify students who are reluctant to return to school and those with other issues which can interfere with the teaching and learning process.

Such students should undergo counselling sessions so that school counsellors can help them better cope with their issues and instil confidence and optimism.

Parents need to trust the schools to protect their children. Parents must remind their children about the importance of staying safe and maintaining social distance when meeting friends.

To the students, issues may have arisen during the MCO period. If anything bothers you, talk to your school counsellor.

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