

# Don't pity, empathize: Workshop urges kin of differently abled

Abha.Goradia@timesgroup.com

Madhu Kumre

**Nagpur:** Drawing a heart on her notepad, 11-year-old Vedashree Bobde wrote her aunt's name on it. "If someone tries to change a channel while my aunt is watching TV, even a repeat telecast of the same show, she gets angry, breaks the remote, and starts crying," said the tiny tot dressed up in a pink frock at the workshop for siblings and relatives of differently abled persons. The event was organized by Sweekar, an association of parents for mentally retarded, at Chitnavis Centre on Sunday.

The participants were divided into two groups — those below and above 18.

"What is disability? Is something wrong with your special sibling and how should you behave with them?" were some questions the kids in their early teens tackled, through interactive sessions with special educators and counsellors; Dr Swati Dharmadhikari, Abhijeet Raut and Ritesh Dive.

Talking about the focus on siblings instead of parents, Dr Ravindra Gokhale said, "Weakness of special children puts responsibility on the siblings and not only parents. They need to learn how they can better reciprocate in the family," said Dr Gokhale, president, Sweekar.

Urging those above 18 to create a self-help group on



Dr Swati Dharmadhikari conducting an interactive session for siblings of special children at Chitnavis Centre, Civil Lines, on Sunday

## TALK TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ Don't keep differently abled behind closed doors. Take them out to help with their socialization
- ▶ Share your problems. It will bring solutions
- ▶ Join a self-help group, make use of the rights given by the govt
- ▶ Assign them small tasks while cooking for food awareness
- ▶ Train them in personal hygiene and social etiquette
- ▶ A home, not hostel, is the best way to bring up special kids

WhatsApp, Abhijeet Raut said there are 22 schemes for special persons, and the family must take care of the rights of their kin. He gave the example of back-end workers at supermarkets, and said the government has identified 204 areas where the differently abled could be absorbed.

Child specialist Dr Jaya Shiwalkar urged parents to let special kids be independent, by assigning them chores and training them in personal hygiene. "We must educate them in matters of sexuality and socially appropriate

behaviour, to give them their independence and guide them into self-care," Shiwalkar added.

Empathy is not the same as sympathy, emphasized clinical psychologist Dr Swati Dharmadhikari. "Sympathy is giving money to a beggar, but empathy is to give him a fishing rod," she said, and urged participants to step in their kin's shoes to understand them. Dr Subhada Khirwadkar explained the theory of family stress and ways for better development of the differently abled.