Building A Better Future

Stories of Change

Why am I different?

If I get married, will I get the chance to study?

My Health is in my Hands

Your father was right. With the help of our daughter, our crops have doubled this year!

CHETNA
For Women Young people Children
Acknowledgements

Our special thanks to all the adolescents who generously shared their life stories; dreams, aspirations and challenges during the workshop organised from 28 to 30 December 2015 in Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

We are thankful to Ms Niharika and Ms Eram Eqbal from World Comics, New Delhi, for their technical inputs and support provided in the facilitation of the workshop.

Our special thanks to Government officials Dr Manish Fancy, Chief District Health Officer, Sabarkantha and Dr Mugad, Taluka Health Officer, Talod for encouraging the adolescents in their active participation.

We also thank Ms Jyoti Jumani, Ms Shivani Pandya and Dr Shailee Patel for extending support in writing and editing the case stories.

We are thankful to the CHETNA team especially to Ms Shraddha Betai, Ms Hetvi Shah, Ms Antara Trivedi, Dr Trupti Maitrik, Ms Angina Patel, Mr Raju Param, Mr Milan Patel, and Ms Hemali Chotani for extending support during the workshop. Our special thanks to Mr Anil Gajjar, Mr Gaurang Shah, Ms Khusbhoo Saiyed and Ms Mansi Shah for designing the document.

This workshop would not have been possible without CHETNA field team: Mr Rajesh Solanki, Mr Balvant, Mr Mukesh Patel, Mr Dashrath Singh and Mr Digvijay who, in the face of all the social norms, motivated the adolescents and their parents for their participation in the workshop.

This workshop would not have been possible without financial support from MacAurthur Foundation.

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Introduction

Today, every fifth person in India is an adolescent (10-19 years of age) and every third is a young person (10-24 years of age). Around 181 million young people (72%) reside in rural areas. Available data indicates that early marriage, early pregnancy, incomplete and/or lack of education, sexual abuse and violence, morbidity related to risky behaviour among young people are some challenges that need to be addressed urgently. In addition since these issues are entangled with multiple socio-economic factors they become more complex and need a multi-sectoral approach.

CHETNA undertook a three-year intervention to demonstrate a comprehensive adolescent health and empowerment programme funded by MacAurthur Foundation in a effort to converge services of different schemes and programmes of government, related to adolescent’s health and nutrition at the village level. The project covered three major components Nutrition, Sexual and Reproductive Health and substance misuse of Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKS) which was launched by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. The strategies recommended for RKS were used to reach out to the school going and non school going adolescents, both boys and girls. The project was implemented in 73 villages of Talod block of Sabarkatha district in the north-east of Gujarat state. The district comprises 7 talukas and 711 villages. Talod block has a total population of 1.4 lakh.

Every quarter, in each village adolescent health day was organized, which created a platform to make the health and nutrition services and information more accessible to adolescents, both girls and boys. The project reached out to 17,000 adolescents, school going as well as non-school going. The project process provided them opportunity to reflect, and to question the status quo. It was a process of empowerment. Some of the young people could bring change in their lives, some failed but have not yet lost hope, and some are still struggling to bring about change in their life.

At the end of the intervention, 49 adolescents came together and shared their challenges and stories of change.

CHETNA, with support from World Comics introduced the “comic strip” as the tool to document the experiences of adolescent in their own words. During a three day workshop these young people shared their life stories; dreams, aspirations and challenges. Together they learned how to depict and write their own story. They shared their emotions: what makes them angry and what makes them happy, when do they feel restricted, and when they feel free. The last day of the workshop was an amalgam of many emotions, and a lot of happiness as they could translate their life stories through illustrative comic strips.

The workshop resulted in 49 stories which are presented here. The stories revolve around health, nutrition and social issues e.g. gender discrimination, early marriage, nutritional anaemia, substance misuse, menstrual health and hygiene, pubertal changes, and Reproductive Tract Infections (RTIs).

Apart from this, the CHETNA team also visited and talked to adolescent girls and boys; we have collected and documented these stories which are narrated here.
Nutritional Anaemia

The high prevalence of nutritional anaemia among adolescents in India is of grave concern. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS 3) as many as 56% of girls and 30% of boys in the 15-19 age group are anaemic. Anaemia affects physical growth, cognitive development, performance in school and at work, and reproduction. Evidence indicates that preventive supplementation, coupled with nutrition education, is an effective strategy for combating iron deficiency among adolescents.

The data from the Adolescent Health Days organized in the intervention area of the Sangam project shows that nearly 80% of the adolescent girls and boys are anaemic. Education sessions on nutritional anaemia, with special focus on consumption of Iron Folic Acid tablets and iron-rich food helped to increase the consumption of these tablets.
I have been selected to play in a kho-kho match in my school but I do not feel well. I feel weak, pale, and dizzy. I’ll talk my friend Sejal what she thinks.

Sejal, I have not been feeling well since last 3 months. You know, I have been selected in the kho-kho match for our annual school sports day. I don’t know what to do.

Let’s go and meet CHETNA’s Field team member Kamlaben.

Madam, my friend has become weak, pale and feeling dizzy.

Surabhi... you should start drinking milk and eating green leafy vegetables and pulses. Also, do not forget to take iron tablets every day!

After 3 months.

I followed Kamlaben’s advice. See me now! I am healthy! I will win this kho-kho match and become the champion!
Why is this happening only to me??

I have no idea why I feel so tired nowadays! I can’t ride my bicycle nor can I study well... I am not able to remember things.

He shared his problem with CHETNA field supervisor at the end of the health education session in the school.

Oh, Vishal! Feeling weak, dizzy, and pale are the symptoms of anaemia! Eat plenty of green leafy vegetables, pulses and drink milk and also take iron tablets from school.

After three months

Now that I have been eating nutritious food and taking the iron tablets, I am healthy!
“Change is for sure” The Story of Meena Zala

Stepping into Meena's home, in Kabodra, I cannot help but admire how beautiful this pucca home is. I even hesitate to step inside for the floor has been moulded, by hand, with intricately designed half-circles, creating a wonderful texture. Ultimately, we choose to sit outside of her home, in the shade.

Meena is shy and reticent with me. However, her interactions with her friends who are also here with us show her bubbly and talkative side. “I'm seventeen,” Meena informs me. “I have four siblings. I am the second-eldest. My mother stays at home. My father does farm work. We have five bighas of land. I work on the farm on holidays.”

“What do you like to do when you're not at school or working on the farm,” I inquire.

“I like hanging out with my friends and watching TV. My favourite TV shows are Saalam e Ishq and Meri Aashiqui Tumse Hi.

**Meena used to be anaemic.**

“When I was in ninth standard, I experienced feeling weak. I got chakkar (feelings of fainting) and always felt exhausted. I also used to get irritated. When I would play with my friends, I would get tired and would not be able to complete the game.” Meena adds that she could not concentrate on studies. “In my tenth standard exams, I only scored a 50%. I felt that something was wrong so I went and talked to my parents.”

“What did your parents say?,” I ask. “We went to a doctor. It was around Diwali in 2013. The doctor told me to take tablets. He gave me information about nutritious food. A few months later, in January 2014, I also went to see Bhanuben (the Anganwadi Worker). She also told me the same thing that the doctor did.”

Meena informed me, “It did not work because I did not take those tablets regularly.”

“In January 2015, I met Mukeshbhai [CHETNA field worker],” Meena begins to discuss her interactions with Mukeshbhai. “He held health sessions at my school on nutrition. He discussed symptoms of anaemia, which I was experiencing. I told him about feeling exhausted. He got my haemoglobin level checked. It was eight grams percentage! He told me that it is very low. He advised me to take iron tablets and eat leafy vegetables, legumes, pulses and lemon. Earlier, I did not eat green leafy vegetables because my mother did not cook it.”

Mukeshbhai regularly used to meet me and ask me whether I was taking iron tablets regularly or not. He used to inquire whether green leafy vegetables and pulses are cooked at home or not, and more important he used to ask my mother whether she fed me those foods.” Her mother interjects, “I used to cook it! You just never ate it.” Everyone smiled.

“Mukeshbhai introduced me to Nurseben at the sub-centre for any support required in his absence.” Due to Mukeshbhai's intervention, Meena finally began complying with the recommendations. “After two months I felt a change! In February 2016, Meena got her Hb tested once again. She was at a healthy eleven grams percentage. “I did not feel tired or exhausted and those chakkars were gone. I felt normal again!”

“What’s next,” I ask her, “what do you want to do after you finish twelfth standard?”

“I want to pursue a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.). “Do you have any advice for others who have anaemia?” I ask. “Just follow the advice given. Change is for sure,” Meena says, smilingly.
I FEEL BETTER

Krishna is studying in the 9th standard. She loves going to school.

Sita, whenever I am reading, I am not able to concentrate on studies. I am tired after doing some work.

Come...let’s go and talk to our class teacher. She will help you.

Krishna and Sita talk to their class teacher.

Teacher, Krishna is unable to concentrate on her studies. She cannot remember her lessons and gets tired after working.

We will talk to CHETNA field supervisor who comes regularly to our school.

Teacher introduces Krishna to CHETNA field supervisor

Krishna, you look pale. Even your Adolescent Health Day (AHD) Card shows your Hb levels are low. You should take iron tablets along with sour food and also eat green leafy vegetables.

Okay sir, I will do as you said.

After three months

Sita... I am feeling better. I can even concentrate on my studies.
One year earlier

I feel tired while playing and doing work, even if it's only for a short amount of time. I can't even remember what I am studying sometimes.

Why does this happen only to me? Everyone is making fun of me...

Sir! I feel tired and cannot remember anything while studying...what is the reason for this?

Amar, you are suffering from anaemia. You must test your blood. Eat more leafy green vegetables, drink milk, and take iron tablets.

After 6 months

I am healthy after following your advice. I got my blood tested. In the first report, my Hb levels were 7.5 gm but now my Hb has increased to 11 gm. Thank you, sir!

It is my responsibility.
A FRIEND's SUPPORT

One year earlier

Alka, see...he is looking very thin.

Everyone is teasing me! If I had a body like them, I would not be teased like this.

Jayesh, everyone is making fun of me by looking at my body. I am very much disturbed. Why is this happening?

Look, Chintan, do not worry. It is because of pubertal changes during adolescence. You are suffering from anaemia. Keep eating green leafy vegetables and pulses and drink milk...then see how healthy you are and feel afterwards.

After 6 months

Arey wah! Chintan, you are looking very healthy!

Thank you very much, my friend. Because of your advice, I am fit and healthy.
I am feeling tired and dizzy and I don’t feel like working.

Why am I feeling so tired? What should I do now?

Sir...I am feeling so tired? What can I do?

I have been following your advice and I am healthy now! Thank you so much.

These are the symptoms of anaemia. Eat pulses and green vegetables. Drink milk and take iron tablets daily.

It is my duty.
Pubertal Changes

During the puberty period adolescents go through series of physical, mental and emotional changes. This is a period of biological, cognitive and social transition, which is of such magnitude and rapidity that it is difficult for them to cope up; many times they get into habits and behaviours leading to problems related to eating disorders, accidents, substance abuse and depression etc. They also get involved in risky sexual behaviour and anti-social activities. Some of these behaviours may continue over a lifetime.

Adolescents greatly lack correct information related to the physiological, psychological and sexual changes that their bodies undergo. The Indian social environment does not provide adolescents with structured opportunities to learn about the same.

During CHETNA's Sangam project both girls and boys went through structured educational classes to learn about their body and bodily processes, including reproductive organs and their functioning.

Information dissemination on reproduction was not a smooth process. There was resistance from the parents and teachers, which was expected. Regular discussions with parents and teachers, and persistence, helped to make this happen effectively.
Look at this fellow! His face has so many pimples!

Why do I have so many pimples on my face? Why not others? I need to talk to my school teacher...maybe he can guide me?

After few days, he discussed his problem with his sir.

Sir, due to pimples on my face, I cannot concentrate on my studies and my friends are teasing me.

During the adolescent phase, skin becomes oily and pimples appear on face. Do not worry about it! It happens to everybody. Wash your face frequently with water, eat green leafy vegetables and pulses, and drink milk. There is no need for any medicines.

After one year

Sir, I followed your advice and now I am free from pimples! Thank you for that!

It is my duty.
Take this porn video. Watch it whenever you are free.

Yes, okay. It’s too good.

I have not been able to concentrate on my studies. It is due to my bad habits.... I need to take someone’s help.

Sir, I have started masturbation quite frequently. I am always anxious.

Oh! What happened to you? Why do you look so worried? Your class teacher was telling me you are not as attentive in school nowadays.

Now you are aware that masturbation is not a disease. Reading good books has changed your thinking. Now you can also share this information with your friends.

Yes. I am happy now.
I have been masturbating every day. I feel like I am losing weight and becoming weak.

Yes, even I feel so. I have heard that one drop of semen loss is like 100 drops of blood loss from our body.

I am really worried about my health.

Okay, let’s go and find out the right information.

Sir, can you give me the correct information?

Masturbating does not result in weight loss or weakness. It’s a wrong belief. Getting excited is very normal.

Now I have the correct information, I will share it with my friends.
Come, Priya. Let's go and play!

No, you go. I don't want to play.

See, Riya, I have so many pimples on my face. I look so ugly. I don't feel like playing with others. Everyone is beautiful. I am not.

Priya went to meet ASHAben at the village Anganwadi

Priya, don't worry. This is normal adolescent phase change. Start eating leafy green vegetables and wash your face regularly with water. Also, eat iron tablets. You will feel better.

Okay, thanks. I will do so.

After three months

Tindi, Minki, and Chinki - let's go and play! With the help of the ASHAben, I do not have a pimple problem anymore. Now I look beautiful!

Oh, yes! You are looking really beautiful! Let's play!
“Bodily changes are normal” The Story of Parul Soni

Parul crushed a castor seed in her hands, showing me the oil that comes out of it. We are at her family’s small but lush plot of land adjacent to her home in Umed ni Mavadi. Parul speaks rapidly and succinctly as we walk back towards her home.

Parul is sixteen years old, and studies at C.D. Patel High School. Her mother is a homemaker. Parul has three siblings – two older and one younger. She started her story by saying that she did not like her appearance. “My friends wanted me to join them for our daily get together but I would refuse as I looked dark, and had pimples and white spots all over my face. I did not like my appearance. I use to feel depressed. I had irregular menstruation with heavy bleeding. I use to remain tense about soiling my cloths due to heavy bleeding.”

Parul continued, “I used to feel tired. I would sit with my books in my hand but I could not study.”

CHETNA’s field worker Sureshbhai met Parul during the field visit and learnt about her frustrations. He encouraged Parul to attend CHETNA’s Health Education sessions. Parul attended the classes regularly.

“I regularly attended the classes. I learnt about nutrition, pubertal changes, menstrual cycles and menstrual hygiene, addiction etc. The very important message that I received is that bodily changes are normal. We should be aware about this and need to know how to face it. Sureshbhai had also told me to meet Sumitraben, our Nurseben. She advised me to wash my face well two to three times a day to prevent pimples. She also estimated my Haemoglobin level.”

“Did they tell you how much your haemoglobin level was?” I ask Parul.

She replied, “Seven grams percentage. After learning about the importance of nutrition from Hemantbhai and Sumitraben, I started eating different foods and regularly consumed Iron Folic Acid tablets. Earlier I would not eat vegetables. I started seeing a positive difference in myself and realising that it was helping me, I began to like it.”

Parul’s haemoglobin levels increased to twelve grams percentage over the course of eleven months. She adds, “My skin has improved and my pimples are gone, I do not have feelings of fainting when I walk. My periods are regular.”

As I leave Umed ni Mavadi, I pass by C.D. Patel High School. Outside its gates are many students waiting to enter the school. I see Parul, amongst a group of girls – her friends. She is smiling and laughing, engrossed in their conversation. She looks happy.
“Know our body” The Story of Jigar Raval

Jigar is a 19-year-old boy who lives in Kaborda village in Gujarat. His family consists of his father, a rickshaw driver; his mother, a farm labourer, and one elder brother Anil, who is studying for L.L.B. after completing his B.Com.

Jigar has completed his schooling from M.M. Patel High School and is planning to pursue a degree related to Information Technology. He supports his family in the farming work.

“When I was in 10th standard, my friend showed me a pornographic video on the mobile phone. I saw this for the first time. I did not have a mobile phone. I used to borrow the phone from my friend and watch such videos every night. I used to enjoy this. While watching I used to feel different in my body. I started masturbating. I used to enjoy it. I started sleeping late. After sometime I needed to masturbate more than two times a day. I needed to find private place to masturbate. I could not resist this. I started feeling tense and guilty because of what I was doing. I did not know what to do.”

“I came in contact with Maheshbhai, (CHETNA field worker). He advised me to attend the Health Education classes being organized in our village. I started going to the classes. After few classes I talked to Maheshbhai about my feelings. The first thing he told me is that there is nothing wrong in masturbation. That was a great relief. I told him that the frequency of masturbation had increased and I needed to know what to do to reduce it.”

Maheshbhai counseled me and asked me to my divert attention to sports. I followed his advice. I continuously remained in touch with him, which helped me a lot. I have been able to reduce the frequency of masturbation. Today I can talk to you about my experience with confidence, without feeling guilty.”
17-year old boy

At night, I find traces of white fluid along with my urine? Is that a disease?

What should I do? I don’t understand what is happening.

Friend, are you getting your clothes wet in the night time? Is that a disease?

No, it’s not a disease. It is common in adolescence. Do not worry.

Friend, thank you very much for your kind explanation.

Hey, brother! Friends are always there for each other.
I masturbated daily for six months.

I cannot concentrate in my studies. My percentages are going down. What can I do?

Ajit! We should gather information on how to stop masturbating so much!

Let's go to meet CHETNA's field supervisor who is working on SANGAM programme.

Because I masturbate, I cannot concentrate in my studies. What should I do?

After six months, I passed with 70% marks.

You should play games, read books and newspapers...you should divert your mind from masturbation.

I got the right information from the SANGAM programme and now I can concentrate on my studies. I will share this information with my friends!
I have pimples on my face. I don’t like to go out.

I shared my problem with the Anganwadi Worker.

Eat green leafy vegetables and pulses and consume iron tablets. Also wash your face two to three times a day.

I am very thankful to her.

This is my responsibility

After a few months

As I am free from the problem, I can go out...
Yesterday night, while I was sleeping, I felt that my clothes got wet.

Oh! What type of disease am I suffering from? I cannot understand.

I don’t like doing anything. I don’t feel like going to school.

My friend told me to go and meet CHETNA’s field supervisor.

Friend, do not worry! We will go and meet CHETNA’s field supervisor. He will guide you.

Thanks, I will definitely meet him.

It is a common condition during adolescent phase. Some boys have nightfall; some do not. There is nothing to worry about.

Thank you for the information. I am happy now that my fear has gone.
Adolescents and Menstruation

Access to scientific information about menstruation is a concern for rural adolescent girls. The first menstruation is often horrifying and traumatic for an adolescent girl because it usually occurs without her knowing about it. Menstrual blood is considered as impure due to which perception girls are considered untouchable and impure during menstruation. This creates a sense of shame among adolescent girls, and also affects their self esteem. Usually the concerns related to menstruation are not discussed.

Having no knowledge about menstruation and its link with fertility puts adolescent girls at risk of teenage pregnancy. Cases have been noted of girls getting impregnated by their brother/cousin brother through casual sexual activity.

There is a great need to equip adolescent girls with adequate information on menstruation. During the Sangam project, scientific information about menstruation and menstrual hygiene was imparted. This provided the adolescent girls an opportunity to share their experiences and issues related to menstruation.
I am going to the farm with my father.

No you are not going today.

Why? I go every day...why not today?

Your mother believes that you are in menstruation today...if you touch the crops in the farm, they will all get spoilt!

But that is not true...come with me to the farm.

After six months

Your father was right. With the help of our daughter, our crops have doubled this year!
Riya, I am not getting my periods regularly. What should I do? I am very worried about this.

Don't worry... We will go to meet the ASHAben.

ASHAben, she is not getting her monthly periods. She is going through too many difficulties and is not saying anything. Will you please help her?

Do not worry if you are not getting your periods regularly. Start to eat healthy foods and take iron tablets.

After 6 months

Aha! I've been getting my periods regularly for two months now.

Let's go and speak with the ASHAben.

ASHAben, I have followed the advice you have given. I am fine now!

Great! You should also give this information to your friends.
Papa, I have stomach ache.

If you have stomach ache, tell your mother! Why are you telling me?

Ma, I have pain in my stomach. I told papa but he told me to inform you.

Yes, you have now grown up. Your menses have started.

Ma, can I tell this to papa?

Oh! You cannot share this with papa or your brother!

Is it wrong to talk about my menstruation with my brother and father?
“Solutions are within reach” The Story of Ketki Patel

Ketki is a 16-year-old young, bubbly, enthusiastic girl, living in Gambhirpura, a village in Talod block. She lives with her grandparents, mother, and 3 siblings. Her father passed away when she was 13 years old. Ketki wanted to become a teacher. Due to the sudden death of her father, her life changed. Ketki, being the eldest child, had to look after all household work. Her day starts early and ends late.

Unlike other girls, at the age of thirteen, Ketki was not menstruating. This created tension for her. Rajubhai (Rajesh Solanki, a CHETNA field worker, addressed as Rajubhai in Gambhirpura) had come to Ketki’s village to facilitate educational sessions for adolescent girls. Ketki started attending the classes. Initially she felt shy to disclose her concerns related to menstruation. By the third session she gained the confidence to share her concerns, with the hope that her worries may be resolved. Rajubhai asked her to go to the Youth Friendly Health Centre located in the Community Health Centre - (CHC) Talod. Ketki took her Dadi (grandmother) with her. The staff nurse examined her and referred her to a gynecologist in the Civil Hospital, Talod. The doctor prescribed her a course of tablets, which she started taking from the next day. She got her periods after 5 days instead of eight, as assured by the doctor.

Her menstruation is still not regular but her worries have ended. She is keen to marry someone who is good natured and caring. She does not want to marry someone who drinks, and beats his wife.
I am now 16 but am not getting my periods regularly. Why is this happening?

Mummy, I am not getting my periods regularly. I am worried about this. Why is this happening?

Let’s go to the Anganwadi on Mamta Taruni Diwas. We will ask the nurse about it.

Amisha and her mother met Nurse in the Anganwadi. Her mother discussed with her about Amisha’s period problem.

Amisha, do not worry about the irregularity of your monthly periods during adolescence. Just eat green vegetables and eat food regularly. Take iron tablets and rest properly.

I will listen to your advice. I am glad that this is not a disease.

After 3 months

I am happy for getting periods regularly. Thank you Nurseen!!!
We are having schemes for the purchase of food from PDS so why not the same for monthly period pads?

You are right! We should meet with the ASHA Been.

Kala, we do not have that kind of plan.

Mummy! Pads aren’t available so what should we do?

Use clean cotton cloths during your monthly periods.

Okay, this is good advice. I will follow this.
TRUE OR FALSE?

Mummy, I am back from school. Let me help you cook!

You can't enter into the kitchen!

Every day I help you cook. Why not today?

I told you once that when a girl is menstruating, she cannot enter the kitchen.

Anganwadi worker comes to Nirali’s home

Oh, Nirali’s mother! These all are superstitions! Let her work in the kitchen!

Okay.

Nirali beta, we are very thankful to the Anganwadiben because she gave me the right information at the right time.

Yes, mother, I am very happy that you understand now!
Reproductive Tract Infections (RTIs) and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

It is a reality that adolescents are getting into sexual activities and thereby are exposed to sexual and reproductive health-related risks, including HIV. But these young people lack the autonomy to take decisions on important sexual and reproductive health related matters.

Region-specific, small studies indicate that sexual activities among adolescents within and outside marriage usually begin as early as 12-13 years of age. This age is higher among boys than girls. Girls experience forced sex, which is usually initiated by family members, neighbours, school teachers and others acquainted with the young people. Girls are also coerced into having sex by an adolescent boyfriend who wants to prove his masculinity. Sometimes due to poor economic conditions, parents also force their young daughters into sexual activities.

Unprotected sexual activities lead to unwanted pregnancy, illegal and unsafe abortions leading to morbidity, mortality and sexual and reproductive tract infections including HIV/AIDS. Reproductive Tract Infections (RTI), which are preventable and treatable, are responsible for leading to serious consequences including infertility, ectopic pregnancy, pregnancy wastage, low birth weight, etc.

During the Sangam project the team faced resistance from teachers in some schools while imparting information on RTI and STDs. Our experience suggests that equipping girls with information on RTI, along with life skills related to communication and negotiation, can be the most empowering experience for them.
Suresh is having burning pain while passing urine.

I have taken so many home remedies but I still don’t feel well.

He even took medicine from the medical shops but nothing changed.

What should I do now?

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I am distracted due to my urine pain.

Don’t worry Suresh, you can be cured from this problem. Take proper medicines from the doctor and also keep your genital parts clean and wear clean clothes.

Now I am free from my problem! I am thankful to CHETNA field supervisor.

Oh, it’s my duty!
What is happening to me? I have boils in my genital area...with whom should I talk to about this?

Dharti’s mother was working in the field.

Mummy, I have boils in my genital area. I am afraid.

Oh! Let’s go to the sub-centre.

Dharti went to the sub-centre and met the Nurseben there.

Dharti, you should maintain hygiene during menstruation and use clean cloths which you should dry in the sunlight. You should also take medicine.

Okay, I will maintain hygiene so that my boils are cured.

With the help of the Nurseben, my problem has been solved! I keep my genital parts clean. I am happy. I will also tell my friends about maintaining hygiene.
Addiction to Tobacco, Alcohol and Mobile Phones

Use of tobacco, alcohol, and other substances is a worldwide concern. The use of these is rapidly increasing among children and adolescents. The NFHS 3 shows that 11% of boys and 1% of girls in the age group of 15-19 years had consumed alcohol. Almost 3% of 15-19 year-old adolescent boys, who drink alcohol, consume it daily, whereas another 18% consume it almost once a week. Almost 29% of the boys and 4% of the girls (15-19 years) use some kind of tobacco. The use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs among youth is associated with physical violence, risky sexual activity, depression and suicide, as well as irregular school or work attendance, and other negative outcomes. Substance misuse is also known as a risk factor for Non Communicable Diseases such as cardiovascular diseases and stroke in adult life.

During one-to-one interactions with the adolescents during the Sangam project period several cases were noted among the boys with regard to substance abuse, peer pressure, and family disturbances The CHETNA team made efforts to provide the adolescents with the correct information on consequences and health effects of substance abuse, especially of tobacco.

During our Sangam project intervention period, many of the adolescents were familiar with the use of mobile phones. Also, a large number of the non-school going boys had access to mobile phones. Among those who did not have personal phones, they used to access their parents' phone for either messaging, Google surfing or playing games. Mobile phones are turning into a sort of addiction for adolescents, which affects their overall thinking and creative skills, as well as school performance.
I have dental caries and I am unable to open my mouth. I want to stop chewing tobacco. I saw a poster of the SANGAM programme. One day, I will meet CHETNA’s field supervisor.

I am not able to open my mouth. I have toothaches. What should I do now?

First, stop chewing tobacco. It has many bad health implications. You are also spending a lot of money on it. Don’t continue this.

I have decided I am not going to chew tobacco now that I have the right information.
Jayesh studied until eighth standard

Do not waste your time for me! I do not love you.

What are you talking about? What will I do without you?

After separation, Jayesh got addicted to smoking and alcohol.

When a person is alone and nobody supports, the only option is alcohol.

Jayesh met his friend and CHETNA’s field supervisor.

Look at yourself. What have you done? Let’s go to the rehabilitation centre.

After counselling at the centre, Jayesh stopped drinking

If you had not corrected me at the right time, I would have destroyed myself!

That’s called true friendship.
When I was in the tenth standard, I was very good in studies. I scored 70% marks in the exam and would have chosen science stream to become a doctor.

I wished to pursue my studies in science but my dad said "No." He was busy consuming alcohol with his friend.

Now we are going to enjoy!

Ha. Ha. Ha...

I went to Anganwadi and met Anganwadi worker.

Alcohol consumption can lead to diseases like cancer.

My father is consuming too much alcohol. Every day quarrels arise in our home.

AWW counseled my father so that my father stopped drinking alcohol.

Now my mother, father and I live peacefully in our house.
“Addiction is not an answer to forget unhappiness” The Story of Sagar Darbar

“I don’t know how it happened,” Sagar says. He is talking about the girl he loves, or loved; it is not clear if his feelings for her have changed. Though, in some capacity, he does still care for her; he refuses to name her at all. Sagar is eighteen years old and is reeling from his experience with love; the experience that spiralled him towards consumption of tobacco, cigarettes and alcohol.

Sagar speaks very softly, as if he would rather not be heard. He tells me that this entire family including his mother, father and brother work on the farm. They all live in Umed ni Mavadi. His brother studies in the seventh standard. “I only studied till 8th standard,” Sagar says, “I had to leave school to earn money for my family. I was thirteen or fourteen years old.” Initially, Sagar only did khetikam (farming). Now, he also does a factory job alongside farming.

“We do not own our land.” Sagar’s family only gets one-sixth of the profit earned by farming. The rest goes to the land owner.

“I would see Savita around and began liking her. She did not go to the same school as me. It was not until I left school that I told her I liked her. Thankfully, she also liked me and we started seeing each other!”

They would meet once or twice a week – usually in the fields – but talked on the phone daily. Their relationship was entirely secretive; their parents were not aware of it. Sagar was very serious about their relationship.

“I asked her to marry me but she would not agree,” Sagar confides. Their relationship lasted a year. “Savita called me and told that her parents had found her a groom and that she had agreed. It was the very first guy her parents showed her!”

“I burned all our letters and tore up all the gifts she gave me,” says Sagar about what happened after the break up. He used to cry a lot, but would do it in the fields so no one at home would know. “I began drinking alcohol, chewing masala (tobacco). I never used to do any of
these. But it seemed like it would make me forget about what had happened. “Tension dhur thai thodu.” (ease the tension a bit).

Curious, I asked Sagar how often he would partake in these activities. He replies, “In the beginning, I only chewed tobacco once or twice a day. I would only drink alcohol once a month. But as I kept doing it, I kept doing more frequently. I would chew seven to eight sachets of tobaccos and started smoking too. I used my earnings in these activities.”

Luckily for Sagar, his friend Digvijay became concerned with his behaviour and wanted to help him. Digvijay is a CHETNA field worker. He encouraged Sagar to attend his educational sessions that were held in the Anganwadi.

“I went to one of the programmes. They informed me that I was at high risk of getting mouth cancer, and then opening my mouth would be very difficult.” Sagar attended around 13 of the sessions that Digvijay held. “We are very good friends so he kept counselling me on why I should stop smoking and how it would hurt my body. He told me I should find some way to replace the addiction.” So I began eating variyali (fennel seeds) or mukhwas (mouth freshener) every time I wanted to smoke or drink or chew.”

“Digvijay also gave me the information about Yuva Maitri Kendra in Talod but I did not go,” Sagar adds.

I asked Sagar how long he was addicted to tobacco. “I think a year... a year and a half. It took me six months to quit. I have not looked back since.” Sagar has not smoked, has not chewed tobacco, has not drunk since he quit. “No one should partake in these bad activities,” Sagar adds, “it is not good for you. It is not healthy.” He is thankful for Digvijay. “What’s next,” I ask, “what do you want to do in the future?” A few moments later, he said, “videsh javani iccha chhe.” (I want to travel abroad.)
Hiten’s family was very happy

Mummy, can I go out for playing?
Yes, you can go.

I have finished my alcohol. Get me another bottle.

Mummy! I need money to pay for my fees.
From where should I bring the money? Because of alcohol, I have no money left.

I will never consume alcohol and will inform others to quit drinking alcohol as well.
A 17 year old boy with his friends

Hemant, let's have some tobacco!

Yes, friend... let's go!

Friend, now I am addicted to tobacco. I cannot live without it. I am also suffering from headaches and cannot concentrate on my studies.

Let's go to Aarogyasatra

At Anganwadi

Tobacco leads to injurious diseases like cancer so slowly break your habit of consuming tobacco. Only then you will stay healthy.

I will try surely...

After 1 month

Going to Anganwadi Kendra helped me to get rid of my tobacco addiction. I am healthy now.

It was my responsibility to take you. Now go and educate your friends to quit tobacco as well.
Jinesh was studying in the tenth standard.

You should eat Gutka (tobacco) - it's fun!

Bhuma! I want to quit chewing gutka. Will you help me learn how I should quit.

Hey, you should meet our village CHETNA's field supervisor.

After 1 month

Sir, I want to stop chewing gutka but I am not able to quit.

You should stop chewing because you will suffer from life-threatening diseases like cancer and TB.

Today, I am no longer addicted to gutka. I am thankful to CHETNA's field supervisor. Today, I am living a healthy life.
School Dropout

The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) shows that 13 out of every 100 Indians between 5-29 years did not attend school, or dropped out because they did not consider education “necessary.” This proportion is significantly higher for school-going children between 10-14 years.

There are various socio-cultural and economic reasons responsible for school dropout, such as poverty; distance of school from home; poor transport facilities; unsafe environment for girls; poor quality of teachers; income generating responsibility of boys, early marriage of girls, etc.

During our Sangam project many stories emerged related to school dropouts which were the result of gender discrimination.
Komal dropped out of school when she was in the eighth standard.

Okay, bye! We will meet at school again.

At Komal’s house.

Komal, you will not be going to school from tomorrow. As all three of you sisters are getting married, you need to help me in the household work.

Why?

All my sisters will get married and go to their in-laws house but I will not be able to go to school.

See...my brother is going to school and I have to work. I will have to do the same for the rest of my life.
We passed our exam with good results! Now we will go on to eleventh standard.

Yes... We are happy.

Papa, I want to continue my studies.

There is no need to study more.

You have two younger brothers... they will continue their schooling. You will help your mother here, at home.

As I am a girl, I cannot study.

Rohan is going to school. I am working on a farm. Why? Why?
Harshad passed 10th standard and wanted to take science stream and become an engineer.

You have passed tenth standard? What do you want to do next?

I will take the science stream. I wish to become an engineer.

Father, I want to take science stream and become an engineer.

We do not have any money. You will have to do farming and study here in the village only.

I have to work day and night in the fields.

If my father had money, I would not be working in the fields. I would be taking science classes and would have become an engineer but today, I have to study Arts.
Jagdish appeared for 10th std exam. After the result announcement, he met his sir in school.

Your tenth standard results have been declared and you have failed. Your parents will scold and beat you.

I am not going home. My parents will scold and beat me.

Friends giving him a lesson

Go home! Your father will not do anything to you!

Result after 1 year

You have let me down. You cannot do anything well.

It is not like that, father. Understand him. He will work hard and pass the exam again.

I am happy that because of my sister, I scored good percentage in the tenth standard.
I like to study. I scored good marks in tenth standard but my father could not afford the school expenses, so I could not continue my education.

Why me? Why not my brother? Why the partiality?

I cannot afford the costs of both you and your brother’s school expenses, so you do not need to study any more.

I wish I could have studied further as well like my brother.

I feel that if I got the chance to educate myself, I would study a lot.
I want to study further.

No! There is no school in our village for 8th standard. You would have to go to another village. You do not need to study further.

Mummy! I want to go to the neighbouring village to study.

No, girls are not allowed to study in other villages. They have to do work at home.

There are no schools and transportation facilities in my village. This is why I cannot study more.

After a few years

Now we have a school in our village and transport facilities too. I wish it had been like this during my time.
Wah Ramila! You secured first position in your examination again! I think that your family will fulfill your dream of being a peer educator.

Thank you, teacher.

Papa! I have again topped my examinations! My teacher says that I am very intelligent and that one day, I will become a peer educator.

Yes, good! We'll see...

Beta, we are having lots of work in the field so from now on, you will not go to school. You will help with field work instead.

But papa...I want to become a peer educator.

How my life has changed....what has happened to me? I have stopped studying.
On the day of results

Wah, wah...68%. I am enjoying my studies.

Papa is suffering from a fever. With whom should I share this moment of joy?

Mummy, look! I got a good percentage!

Very good...but unfortunately, I do not have money to support your further studies.

Mummy does not have any money to help me study further.....who will help me?
I failed my tenth exams. What should I do?

Don't give up! Try again next time.

Mitali! What was your exam result?

I failed...

Oh my god...

Mummy papa, I will reappear for examinations and will pass this time.

No, this is not needed.

Not necessary. You will not reappear in exam or study further. You will work at home.

Now all I do is housework. I wish I could go to school; I was so happy in the school.
Early Marriage

It is estimated that 47% of girls in India are married before their 18th birthday. The rates of early marriage vary between the States and are as high as 69% and 65% in Bihar and Rajasthan respectively. In Gujarat, 18.7% girls married before 18 years of age and 34.5% boys married below 21 years of age.

During the Sangam project we came across some cases of early marriage. This is a complex social problem, and not easy to solve. The Story of Bhaumik's Sisters reflects this complexity. During the workshop several adolescent girls and boys did share their life story related to early marriage.
Reena was only 14 years old when she got married along with her elder sister.

I want to study. I love going to school. Why do I have to get married at such a young age?

After one month, her in-laws asked Reena to come from her parents home, due to her husband’s job.

We are going out for some work. You cannot go out. We will lock you in at home.

I wish I had said no to getting married.

After six months, her parents came to meet her at her in-laws house.

I am always being locked in at home. I cannot meet anyone. I am not happy. I will not live here anymore.

Oh dear...do not worry. Let’s go home and we will find a way out.

After two months.

I am very happy after getting a divorce. I will start my new life with my parents’ support.

Court
“Who is to blame?” The Story of Bhaumik's Sisters

Bhaumik is sixteen years old, the youngest in his family, and studying in 10th standard. His mother works in an Anganwadi. His father is an auto-rickshaw driver. He has three elder siblings, two sisters and one brother.

Bhaumik is friendly but shy and silent. “It was a Saturday,” Bhaumik begins, “My sister went outside and did not come back for a long time. Mummy sent me to look for her. I thought maybe she went to a friend’s house. Our next door neighbour said that they had seen her leave with a bag. Someone else said they saw her get into a car – a Bolero.”

Bhaumik's sister had run away with Ramesh, a boy she had fallen in love with.

What happened was this: Bhaumik's family had been looking for a prospective groom for his sister. Due to interference of their extended family members, somehow that process was not coming to a successful conclusion. Meanwhile his sister became friendly with Ramesh, the son of one of her father's colleagues. Both the families were not happy about this new relationship. They tried to stop it. The young couple eloped.

This incident affected the lives of other family members also. Bhaumik's other sister Purnima was 17 years old, and was studying in Randheja. The parents, fearing that she may also elope, brought her back home, and married her off. Bhaumik shares, “I was disturbed. I could not focus on studying. I would walk around aimlessly. I got poor marks in my first exam of 9th standard. My friends took me to Rajubhai [CHETNA field worker] who comes to the school every 10 or 15 days.

Bhaumik and Rajubhai have been in contact for around 18 months; Rajubhai has been continuously motivating him to study. I asked Bhaumik how he is feeling now. He replied, “I am feeling sad for my sisters. I do not know what happened to my sister who eloped. And my sister Purnima could not finish her studies. I want to pursue a diploma in Information Technology. I hope I will be able to fulfil my dream.”
One day I met a girl with whom I got engaged. That day I was very happy.

I want you to break off our engagement or else I will commit suicide.

Why?

I want to marry someone else.

Okay, I will discuss at home. But you should not talk about suicide.

After reaching home and discussing with parents.

I don't want to be engaged anymore. I want to further continue my studies.

As you wish...

After few days

I am happy with your decision. You are saving lives of three people.

Yes! I am also happy because now I will complete further studies.
I was very happy when I was studying in the seventh standard.

Now I am going to eighth standard.

Good, Manisha! But you will not study any further.

You are getting married. Your sister is also getting married. Our financial condition is not very good.

If I get married, will I get the chance to study?

Now what I should do? Should I talk about this to my in-laws?

Manisha, we will allow you to study as much as you want but only after getting married.
Anupam's elder sister had a love marriage. This created a tense situation in his home. Our daughter has brought dishonor upon the family. How will I be able to concentrate in this kind of situation?

Fearing that their community will shun them, Anupam's parents got his younger sister married before she was 18 years old. My parents are making a mistake....how can they marry my sister off before she is of the legal age?

Anupam talked to his friend about his family problem. His friend advised him to consult the CHETNA field supervisor. These are common problems in many families. You should just concentrate on your studies. There are many social problems at my home...I am not able to study. My mind is distracted and disturbed.

CHETNA's field supervisor met with Anupam's parents and Anupam. Your family problems are disturbing Anupam. He cannot study. Please help him to focus and avoid these discussions in his presence. Yes...our family problems are affecting Anupam. Now we will be careful and support him in his studies.
Bhavik is interested in studying

I was very intelligent in tenth standard. Everyone from my class knew me as a good student.

Bhavik, you are very intelligent in studies therefore you will score good marks in our final examination.

When the tenth standard examination arrived, I suffered from typhoid. I was not able to study for my exams. When the results came, I failed three subjects.

After some time of leaving studies, I met CHETNA’s field supervisor

Bhavik, do not take tension. If you fail, work hard again but do not give up on your studies! You will clear the exam.

After five months

The 10th standard class results have been declared! I passed with 70%. After completing 11th and 12th, I will become a police officer.
Papa, I stood third in my class.

See, Ankit! You were using your mobile so much therefore you stood 3rd in the exam.

No papa, you are wrong. I collected educational information from my mobile. That is why I stood third.

How is this possible?

I entered www.google.com here in my mobile and got the information that I wanted and so I passed with good marks.

Now if you want any information or news, you should get it from the mobile.

I did not know the mobile could be so useful.

Yes, now I will also use the mobile.
Aunty, see! I bought a new mobile.

You are only 17 years old...why should you have a mobile now? Give me the mobile.

Wah! Today I bought a new mobile...I am very happy! I will enjoy this!

Is it really true that I will only use my mobile to talk to boys? Nothing else?

What is the connection between my age and having a mobile?

Your age is such that you can become spoilt...you can get into contact with boys and have friendships with them. Therefore, give me the mobile.
Today, when I reach home I will ask my mother to allow me to take part in a horse riding race.

Mummy, I want to take part in a horse riding race but Dadi (grandmother) says it will harm my private parts.

No, my daughter, you will participate in it. Nothing will happen.

Well, mummy has given me permission to participate in the race!

Mummy! I got second place in the horse riding race!

Sabaash beta! (Congratulations, my child!)
There is no food in our home. Why are you not earning any money, Gaurav?

Mother, do not worry. I am looking out for a job.

Rakesh, I told my mom that I am looking out for a job but I can’t find any work.

You should go to the Sarpanch. There, you will definitely earn work for 100 days.

Sarpanchji, is there any work I can do?

Okay, from tomorrow you will come for work.

Second day

This is your day’s salary.

Today I will present this money to my mother. She will be so happy!
Today, I will buy English books and will start learning the language.

This crazy guy is going to learn English.

How long will I have to study English all by myself? No one speaks English in my school.

Sir, I like to speak in English but no one else knows English.

Don’t worry. You can speak in English to me.

Good morning, sir! I have done my homework. Will you please check it?

After a week

Good job!
Rajesh and Meena - two friends sat together to study.

Rajesh, learn fast...you have to complete the chapters. Meena...why are you not sitting with a girl to learn something?

Rajesh is my childhood friend. I feel good studying with him.

But you and Rajesh have grown up now. Now that you're older, a girl and a boy can never be friends.

There is no relation between friends and age.

Neighbour comes and talk to Meena's mother Shanti

Shanti, you must keep your daughter away from boys. She is grown up now.

What is wrong with this generation? I will inform your mother.

You are correct, Mam. They are no longer kids.
Why is she still studying? After marriage, she will have to go to her in-laws house.

With a little education she has started arguing with me.

My luck depends on my strength and efforts.

She is not arguing with you. She is expressing the facts.

Yes, yes! What is the use of her study, she will get married and go away. Let’s see what will she become after study.