

7 important points ECA wants the PM to focus on for Early Childhood Care and Education across India.

Over 40 percent of India's children in the 0-6 age group are deprived of any early childhood care despite the Constitution and Parliament having recognized the importance of ECCE. Article 45 of the Constitution directs that "the State shall Endeavour to provide ECCE for all children until they complete the age of six years". The plain truth is that after more than 65 years since independence early childhood care, development and education in this country is still neglected. It's time the country invested in taking care of its youngest citizens.

1. **Strong need for a separate ministry that focuses on early childhood care and education.** (Our country is battling with crimes against women and children. If we want our national human resource, our young children to grow up as strong, healthy, and competent youth then it is time to invest in early childhood. Because there is too much work to be done regarding laws, policies, frameworks, trainings, support systems, health, nutrition etc it's time to dedicate a separate ministry to early childhood development, care and education. The ministry can look after pregnancy, birth, mothering, parenting, child and mother health, child health and nutrition, care and education of young children. The ministry can look into child rights, child laws and thus strengthen the generations that will grow up and take this country to become a super power Examples around the world- Australia has ministry for families and children, Singapore, has the Early Childhood Development Agency which is an independent agency charged with overseeing child care and kindergarten education. In Scotland, governance is handled by the Ministry of Children and Young People. In Dubai you have MOSA, Ministry of Social Affairs...)
2. Please ensure minimum 12 hours of early childhood education free for all children between ages of 3 and 6 years.
3. The early childhood policy and curriculum framed by Women and Child Development Ministry at the center should be made non negotiable for all states to implement as the basic policy and curriculum, they can add points as per their state. This saves time in reinventing the wheel, as child development is not region, culture, or language specific. The language in which it is implemented can differ (example New Zealand has a policy and curriculum in English and Maori the local language)
4. Model early childhood development centers to replace present anganwadis to be set up in each state by the government. These centers must take care of parent education, pregnancy related health and nutrition, parent education classes, childcare, child nutrition and health and early childhood education.
5. Be it Anganawadis, Balwadis, or private preschools the common core guidelines for Quality, safety, and curriculum should be the same.
Example Head start program of USA. (Head Start was founded on the idea that every child -- no matter whom they are, what they look like, or where they grow up -- deserves the chance to reach their full potential. Since 1965, it has given meaning to the simple truth that in America, where you start should not determine how far you can go.)
6. Once early childhood centers mandatorily follow the curriculum guidelines in the national ECE policy then all educational boards to be advised by HRD ministry to sync their standard one curriculum to that of the ECE curriculum. Thus every child will begin with a strong foundation.
7. The age to begin nursery and the age to begin standard one should be

same across all states in India, presently it differs in many states. It should be 3 years by 30th September for nursery and 6 years by 30th September for standard one.

Young children are the other minority in our country, because they are presently just 20% of our population, have no voice, cannot vote so are being ignored when it comes to policy, laws, investments. But every business house, entertainment house, corporate company, uses young children for their benefit; crimes against young children are on the rise. Young children in our country are still battling with diseases, malnutrition, and lack of proper health facilities, childcare. Our country needs to set up child protective services to take care of them. We need to invest in our young children because they are going to grow up and become the youth of this country. It will be too late to take care of them then, because research has proven that the early years are when the foundation of all future growth is gained.