

# Exploring Work Strategies of the Committees for the Care of the Next Generation in Primary and Secondary Schools from the Perspective of Students' Mental Health Growth

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**Keywords:** Committees for the Care of the Next Generation (CCNG) in Primary and Secondary Schools; School-Family-Community Collaboration; Primary and Secondary School Students; Mental Health Growth

**Abstract:** The Committees for the Care of the Next Generation (CCNG) in primary and secondary schools are important forces in the comprehensive development promotion system for the mental health growth of children and adolescents. Focusing on the mental health growth of adolescent students, this paper, based on an in-depth investigation of the work implementation of CCNG in primary and secondary schools and the status quo of students' mental health growth, explores suitable work strategies for them to give full play to their own role and effectiveness with high quality. The adoption by CCNG in primary and secondary schools of a school-family-community collaboration strategy focusing on the core of students' mental health growth, an influence strategy aiming at students' lifelong happiness, and an empowerment strategy to promote students' self-independent healthy growth is conducive to facilitating the mental health growth of children and adolescents and improving the quality of education.

## 1. Introduction

General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized that children and adolescents are the future of the motherland and the hope of the Chinese nation. For primary and secondary school students, who are in their childhood and adolescence, whether they can grow up healthily and buckle the first button of life well is not only related to their own future happiness and well-being, but also to the future and destiny of the country and the nation. Educating and guiding primary and secondary school students to cultivate patriotism, diligence and progress, and achieve all-round physical and mental health development is a great systematic project that the whole society cares about and undertakes its mission.

### 1.1. The School CCNG Is an Important Force in Education

The Committees for the Care of the Next Generation (CCNG) in primary and secondary schools are an indispensable and important force in the systematic project of education in primary and secondary schools. When the Party Central Committee approved the establishment of the China CCNG, it clearly stated that the China CCNG is a mass work organization dedicated to caring for, educating and fostering the healthy growth of young people, and serves as a bridge and bond connecting the Party and the government with young people. The CCNG in the education system is an important part of the China CCNG system, and the CCNG in primary and secondary schools is the grassroots organization responsible for caring for the next generation under local education CCNGs. The purpose of the CCNG is to care for, educate and foster the healthy growth of the next generation. Primary and secondary schools themselves are the main institutions and forces that provide education for children and adolescents to promote their healthy development, and their original mission and functions are highly consistent with the goals and focus of the CCNG.

Undoubtedly, as an important part of the CCNG system rooted in primary and secondary education, the CCNG in primary and secondary schools targets education and talent cultivation and shoulders its responsibility as a key force in the education project.

## **1.2. Students' Mental Health Growth Is the Goal of Education**

Education is a cause that benefits the present generation and future generations. The questions of *what kind of people to cultivate* and *how to cultivate them* concern the ideological soul and value orientation of builders and successors of socialism, as well as the future and destiny of the country<sup>[1]</sup>. Therefore, steering the direction of education and improving its quality are crucial to fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education. To grasp this key point, we must first focus on the core and soul of human beings—the inner world of students. In other words, educating the mind precedes educating people, and nurturing the mind is central to education. By cultivating the mind, we help students develop positive psychological qualities such as aspiration for progress, self-esteem, self-confidence, rationality, calmness and sound personality, and continuously promote their mental health growth in the complex environment of the new era featuring both opportunities and challenges. To fulfill its educational mission and act as a bridge in the new era, the CCNG in primary and secondary schools must focus on the goal of students' mental health growth in its practical work.

## **2. Work Strategies of the School CCNG to Promote Students' Mental Health Growth**

Currently, in light of the actual growth of primary and secondary students and in accordance with the requirements of higher-level education CCNGs, the CCNG in primary and secondary schools has carried out extensive work and achieved remarkable results in helping students grow and succeed. However, on the whole, its work still falls short of the requirements of the times and the needs of students' growth to varying degrees. Facing new situations in student development, the CCNG in primary and secondary schools must transform its working mindset and adopt the following strategies to enhance the quality of education, promote students' mental health growth, clarify its priorities and improve effectiveness.

### **2.1. Collaborative Strategy Focusing on Students' Mental Health Growth**

Investigations show that primary and secondary students are generally positive, confident and motivated, but they also suffer from problems to varying degrees, such as weak willpower and susceptibility to external interference, poor adaptability to changing environments, mental fragility and tendency to take extreme measures in the face of difficulties and setbacks, and excessive self-centeredness with insufficient collective and overall awareness. Their mental health needs to be further improved. Amid intensifying competition, rapid development of information technology and clashing diverse values, the CCNG in primary and secondary schools must mobilize and gather multiple educational forces including families, schools and communities to generate resonance effects through a school-family-community collaborative strategy, so as to focus on the key goal of students' mental health growth and upgrade the overall quality of school education<sup>[2]</sup>.

**Family Educational Force.** The family is the first school for the mental health growth of primary and secondary students, and parents are their first teachers in mental health development. Nevertheless, families and parents have not yet fully fulfilled their educational responsibilities and functions for students' mental health growth, with problems of inaction or misconduct that seriously hinder students' healthy development and the effective implementation of school mental health education. How to effectively guide parents to exert their positive influence on their children's mental health growth is not only a research topic for the CCNG in primary and secondary schools but also an opportunity to advance its work.

**School Educational Force.** Mental health education is a basic project in primary and secondary education, critical to the effective implementation of the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education. The *Guidelines for Mental Health Education in Primary and Secondary Schools* (Jiao Ji [2012] No.15) stipulates that mental health education in primary and secondary schools

must adhere to basic principles including integrating scientificity and effectiveness, integrating development, prevention and crisis intervention, and combining teachers' leading role with students' subjectivity. However, while strengthening mental health education to promote students' mental health growth, most primary and secondary schools still face problems such as scattered mental health education forces, unclear focus, and insufficient standardization and effectiveness, and have not yet fully followed the basic principles required by the Guidelines. As a bridge and bond connecting the school's Party organization and administration with students, the CCNG in primary and secondary schools enjoys unique advantages in activating school mental health education by actively participating in the psychological education project, offering suggestions and providing guidance.

**Social Educational Force.** The rapid development of information technology has brought unprecedented changes and impacts to the learning and lifestyles of primary and secondary students, as well as unprecedented challenges and tests to their growth. To help students withstand these challenges, stay on the right track and achieve all-round mental health development, the CCNG in primary and secondary schools must not only coordinate the educational forces of families and schools but also extend its vision to communities and society, examine the realistic situation of students' mental health growth from a systematic ecological perspective, analyze various social influences on students' mental health, and then leverage social educational forces to create a positive and sound social ecosystem for students' healthy growth.

The CCNGs of Simianshan School, Shuangfu No.2 Primary School and other primary and secondary schools in Jiangjin District, Chongqing have actively explored the school-family-community collaborative strategy to coordinate and gather joint educational forces for students' mental health growth. They have made constructive attempts in participating in collaborative education to eliminate social interference, prevent crisis incidents, build a favorable ecosystem for students' mental health growth, and align efforts around students' mental health development, achieving preliminary results.

## **2.2. Influencing Strategy Oriented Toward Students' Lifelong Happiness**

The collaborative strategy helps the CCNG in primary and secondary schools coordinate and integrate family, school and social forces in students' growth ecosystem, eliminate negative factors affecting mental health, and promote concerted efforts for better mental health development. While generating new impetus for students' mental health growth through the collaborative strategy, the CCNG must also adopt a long-term perspective, focus on students' entire lives, and implement an influencing strategy to enhance the effectiveness of caring for the next generation in terms of the height and warmth of students' happy life, so that students can truly gain a sense of gain and happiness.

**Adopting the influencing strategy embodies student-centeredness.** In caring for the growth and success of the next generation, the CCNG in primary and secondary schools must always think from students' perspective, address their urgent needs, plan work on their behalf, and let them feel the warmth from families, schools and society through concrete actions. Therefore, in promoting students' mental health growth, it is necessary to balance knowledge teaching with joyful learning and happy life, as well as students' future happiness and present well-being. Knowledge is a tool, not equivalent to power, let alone the goal of education; it is only a "resource" and condition for personal growth. Knowledgeable people are not necessarily mentally healthy or happy. Development is for people, and education cultivates people. In participating in school-family-community collaborative education and promoting students' mental health growth, the top priority of the CCNG is to enable students to acquire knowledge and develop abilities in joyful learning and happy life, so that they truly experience all-round development in morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics and labor as a pleasant journey rather than an external imposition or bondage. Meanwhile, it should coordinate family, school and social forces to resolve the contradiction between pursuing future happiness and sacrificing present happiness.

Currently, among parents, teachers and social values, there is a prevalent view that students

should endure hardship and devote all their energy to study today for a happy and successful life tomorrow. While necessary hardships in growth are normal, overloading students with study at the cost of their happy childhood will backfire. It not only fails to secure their future happiness but also deprives them of joyful learning and life, and may even trigger psychological problems, mental disorders or vicious incidents. Therefore, in applying the influencing strategy to collaborative education, the CCNG in primary and secondary schools should give play to its advantages to inspire more parents, teachers and social forces to transform their psychological education concepts, balance the relationship between students' lifelong happiness and present joyful life, and better support students' mental health growth.

**Adopting the influencing strategy is a need to return to the true nature of education.**

Promoting the mental health growth of primary and secondary students must follow the laws of mental health education and return to its authentic path<sup>[3]</sup>. At present, the construction of a Healthy China, school mental health education and social psychological services have become national development strategies. The Party and the state attach great care to children and adolescents and close attention to their mental health. Schools at all levels, including primary and secondary schools, have attached great importance to students' mental health and carried out extensive work in crisis prevention and intervention, psychological counseling, psychological activities and mental health courses, achieving unprecedented results. To participate in collaborative education and help students achieve mental health and fulfilling happiness, the CCNG in primary and secondary schools must respect the inherent laws of students' mental health growth and enable them to enjoy the joy of learning and happiness of life through practical experience and internalized perception. Professor Peng Kaiping's research shows that students' mental health growth requires a three-tier protection mechanism: proximal defense focusing on emotional regulation, middle defense centered on resilience training, and distal defense based on cultural care. These three levels form a complete psychological protection system from the inside out and from short term to long term<sup>[4]</sup>. This indicates that promoting students' mental health growth must focus on their emotions and follow a proper process. The emotions of primary and secondary students are in a process of development, stabilization and maturation, so they need guidance to continuously improve their emotional regulation ability and emotional quality. Therefore, by coordinating family, school and social forces, the CCNG in primary and secondary schools should take students' emotional regulation as a key focus, enabling them to perceive their deep psychological needs in emotional changes, control their emotions through reasonable satisfaction of needs, feel inner fulfillment in learning and growth, and thus love learning and enjoy life.

At present, both school and family education tend to ignore students' psychological feelings and impose unilateral wishes and demands on them, influenced by traditional ideas such as "a good education leads to official career". For instance, students are forced to do excessive exercises or attend training courses at all costs for future "success" and "wealth". Objectively, such outdated cultural values have become a shackle to students' mental health growth. Examined through Professor Peng's three-tier protection mechanism, these negative values are inconsistent or even contradictory to the advanced and healthy culture required for distal defense. Moreover, emphasizing only academic performance regardless of students' psychological development stages and emotional feelings essentially violates or reverses...

### **2.3. Empowerment Strategy for Promoting Students' Independent Healthy Growth**

From the perspective of systems theory, as a special living individual, a student's mental health growth is a self-organizing process in which their psychological state transforms from "disorder" to "order" and their mental energy dynamically rises from a lower to a higher level. It is not imposed by external instructions, but a process in which students, as the subjects of growth, spontaneously select, integrate and construct internally under the stimulation of external environments and educational forces. Under open and non-equilibrium conditions, they conduct self-examination and self-reflection on growth, and continuously establish new internal order. On this basis, when the CCNG in primary and secondary schools participates in school-family-community collaborative

education, coordinates and integrates relevant educational forces to promote students' mental health growth, it should adopt not only collaborative and influencing strategies but also an empowerment strategy. The implementation and effectiveness of the empowerment strategy lie in properly handling three major relationships.

**Relationship between Leadership and Subjectivity.** Compared with students themselves, all educational forces are external factors for their mental health growth, acting as external leaders that can only play a guiding role. Students themselves are the subjects of their own all-round mental health development, undertaking the subjective role and function of self-growth.

In coordinating family, school and social forces, the CCNG in primary and secondary schools should guide all parties to take a proper leading role, use appropriate methods and educational wisdom to stimulate students' subjective initiative, and awaken their awareness and potential transformation within a limited scope, achieving the effect of "one tree shaking another" and "one cloud moving another", rather than overstepping their duties and "replacing" students in growth. Lessons from tragedies caused by psychological problems and crises due to "replacing" students' growth in real educational scenarios must be heeded. To avoid recurrence of such tragedies, it is essential to correctly balance the leadership of external educational forces and the subjectivity of students' own growth, so as to effectively empower their mental health growth.

**Relationship between Action and Inaction.** To empower students' mental health growth, the CCNG in primary and secondary schools must also handle the relationship between what to do and what not to do. "Action" means that, as an external force for students' growth, the CCNG should earnestly fulfill its duties within its scope, helping students remove practical obstacles and prevent potential risks on the path of mental health growth. For example, children in early school age have immature self-awareness and limited ability to resist external safety risks. It is necessary to coordinate family, school and social forces to reach a consensus, strengthen safety education and protection for such students, and guide all parties to take active actions in these fields.

The CCNG of Simianshan School in Jiangjin District has set a good example by fully tapping into local higher education resources, introducing educational forces from institutions such as Chongqing Vocational and Technical College of Engineering, and inviting senior experts in geology and mental health education to provide safety education on geological disaster prevention and psychological crisis intervention, reflecting the sense of responsibility of grassroots education CCNGs in doing what they ought to do. Meanwhile, the CCNG should also practice "inaction" by leaving appropriate space for students' free development. It should allow students to gradually grow stronger and spiritually richer through self-exploration and self-expression, so as to properly balance action and inaction.

**Relationship between Critical Periods and Non-Critical Periods.** When collaborating with various educational forces to empower students' mental health growth, the CCNG in primary and secondary schools must seize critical periods and correctly handle the relationship between critical and non-critical periods.

Human learning and growth are lifelong processes. Compared with adulthood, school years, especially childhood and adolescence, are critical periods in one's life. Student development is a unity of continuity and stages, and the stages can be regarded as critical periods. Missing such periods may prevent certain potentials from fully developing and affect future life. Nevertheless, development does not stop in other periods; it merely proceeds at a slower pace or with different characteristics, which can be regarded as non-critical periods.

According to Erikson's psychosocial development theory, infancy is the starting point of life, and psychological nurturing during this period lays the foundation for healthy lifelong growth<sup>[5]</sup>. It is undoubtedly a critical period that requires parents' personal care to help resolve developmental crises such as trust vs. mistrust and autonomy vs. shame and doubt, so as to foster a sense of security, hope and willpower.

By respecting the laws of psychological development and seizing critical periods, the CCNG in primary and secondary schools gains a solid foundation to better empower students' mental health growth and boost their initiative for self-development. Although senior high school students are in a

stage of establishing stable self-identity, which is crucial for future life, this stage is relatively non-critical compared with infancy, as their self-awareness is increasingly mature with independent thinking, judgment and relatively strong self-protection ability. For students in non-critical periods, instead of neglect or laissez-faire, empowerment should be achieved through silent care, equal communication and role modeling.

### 3. Conclusion

Striving to compose a new chapter in education for Chinese modernization and continuously providing talent support and intellectual guarantee for the high-quality economic and social development in the new era calls on schools at all levels, especially primary and secondary schools undertaking basic education, to strengthen mental health education. It is necessary to help today's children and adolescents lay a solid and healthy foundation, buckle the first button of life, cultivate positive psychological qualities and achieve sound personality development, so that they can become builders and successors of tomorrow's high-quality development.

As a bridge and bond connecting the school's Party and government with the next generation and caring for their mental health growth, the CCNG in primary and secondary schools enjoys broad prospects under the sound situation of integrated development of education, science and technology in the new era. By actively participating in the systematic project of school-family-community collaborative education, it will surely accomplish remarkable achievements.

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