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In a bid to equip children in the state to deal with child abuse effectively, the education department will establish "model safe schools" in five districts that have the most number of cases reported under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act.

The "Safe School Programme" will create awareness regarding child sexual abuse among children and also provide information on legal recourses available to children. As per a circular

issued by education department on October 14, the programme aims to bridge the gap between children, police, school authorities and community to improve child protection.

HT has seen a copy of the circular. Existing 25 senior secondary schools in five districts will be developed as "Model safe schools" as per the circular.

The programme has been initiated in collaboration with the Rajasthan Police, Centre for Child Protection of the Sardar Patel University of Police under the Rajasthan Police and the United Nations International Children Education Fund.

Five each model schools will be opened in Ajmer, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer and Alwar. Children of class 8 to class 12 in all the 25 schools will have a discussion session each month with the police personnel, National Cadet Corps, National Service Scheme volunteers and teachers. "Parents will also be included in the programme as they too are a stakeholder in ensuring a safe environment for children inside and outside the school," said Nathmal Didel, director, secondary education department. "The programme also aims to build confidence among children so that they can report any incident that may have happened with them to school authorities, police officials or NCC/NSS volunteers without hesitation. Moreover, we plan to make a clear understanding among the children regarding the redressal mechanism, support systems available and the processes related to it."

As per the circular, training will also be given to the teachers of these schools. Special emphasis will be given on identifying the risks children might face inside and outside the school and telling them about safe places for them. Child rights activities welcomed the initiative and said that the move will help the children speak up about their problems without hesitation.

"Children often hesitate to speak about good touch-bad touch or any incident that they might have gone through. But the initiative will help creating awareness since the children will see that a programme is being focused completely on them and their problem. If such an initiative is being taken at the ministry level, it will be a great help to the cause of child protection," said Sangeeta Beniwal, chairperson of the Rajasthan state commission for the protection of child rights.