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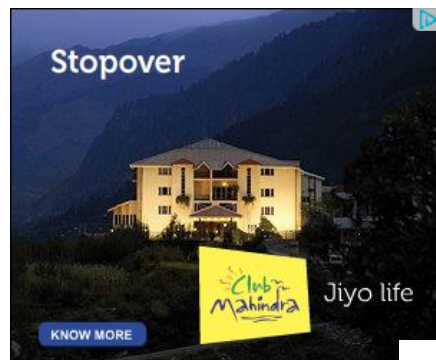
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NEHA PUSHKARNA | MAIL TODAY | NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 5, 2012 | UPDATED 09:28 IST

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Teachers' Day special: Teachers are the new 'friends' of students

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◀ Accessibility of teachers to students is pivotal to building a good relationship between the two.

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When Class X student Prakul Sharma got stuck in a math problem at nine at night, he simply sent a Whatsapp message to his teacher- and got a reply within minutes.

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Small towns' big dreams

Yes, classroom hours have extended beyond school and students and teachers are connected 24x7 not just through phone but also via email, Facebook, Twitter and Skype.

This Teachers' Day, instructors are learning to move with time while students are loving the extra attention.

Political science teacher Sapna Bhalla has 400 students as friends on Facebook.

"Times have changed," she says.

"I have students contacting me on Orkut, Facebook and WhatsApp. They need somebody to share problems with and seek guidance.

It's a great help to them if teachers are understanding and accessible, especially when both parents are working," Bhalla, who teaches at Bloom Public School in Vasant Kunj, adds.

She regularly uploads assignments, receives them and checks them without any limitation of school working hours.

That teachers have become responsive also shows up clearly in the WhatsApp messages of Sandhya Saini, Vasant Valley senior school maths teacher.

Saini recalls how a student wanted to understand a particular concept. "I quickly solved a question on paper to explain to him. Then I took a picture of it and sent it to him on the mobile instant messenger," she says.

"Students call, send a message or connect through email. I have, however, told them not to call after 11 pm," Saini adds.

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In another instance, Saini's colleague was not well when a practical exam had to be conducted for biotechnology. The teacher not only mailed the questions to her colleagues but also held a viva through Skype from her home.

Prakul says, "I am not afraid of most of my teachers and that helps me clear doubts and share problems. Our class has a closed user group on Facebook as well, with our class teacher a member.

My mother tells me this was not the case when my elder brother was in school." But whether or not students and teachers should be friends on social networking sites is a topic of debate in the West.

The department of education of New York City banned teachers from accepting students' Facebook requests in May this year.

There have been cases of online bullying; morphing and anti-teacher campaigns on social networking sites abroad and in India as well, but teachers say it's imperative to strike a balance.

"We issued a circular directing teachers not to be friends with students on Facebook. We should rather empower students to use the technology in the right way while respecting the personal space of teachers.

Our teachers stay in touch with students only through email," says Ameeta Wattal, principal of Springdales School, Pusa Road.

Rumna Mitra, who teaches at Tagore International School, Vasant Vihar, holds the same view.

"We have started discouraging social networking with students," she says, explaining, "It becomes difficult to discipline a child once you are in the 'friend' bracket." It's all about drawing a fine line then.

Mona Datta from Vasant Valley School says, "I have found a middle path. I have a closed group on Facebook where we only talk about my subject, geography. Students connect with me real-time without any scope for abuse of the platform."

Nidhi Tewari and Bela Diwan

Springdales School, Pusa Road

Nidhi stays connected with students via emails even during the summer vacations to guide them through projects and co-curricular activities.

For Bela, the web has proven useful in keeping in touch with old students. She gets requests from them to go through their work and comment.

Guiding Principle:

Social networking is a strict no-no to keep a balance.

Mona Datta and Sandhya Saini

Vasant Valley School, Vasant Kunj

Mona manages closed groups on Facebook with nearly 120 students. She posts links related to geography lessons and answers questions real-time.

Sandhya has her students on WhatsApp. She solves math questions for them on paper, takes a picture and sends it using the application.

Guiding Principle:

With students glued to technology, teachers need to use it to benefit them.

Gautam Sarkar

Modern School, Barakhamba Road

Gautam uses mobile internet to help students catch up on missed lectures. He is also available on the school domain and on phone to counsel students on any matter.

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