DRAFT POLICY FOR RESPONSIBLE DIGITAL USE AMONG STUDENTS

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Department of Health and Family Welfare

Karnataka State Mental Health Authority (KSMHA)

Department of Education, Govt. of Karnataka

National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS)

CONTENTS

INITIATED BY:

a. Department of Health & family Welfare, Karnataka State Mental Health Authority and

b. National Institute of Mental health & Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS)

Sites: Professionals from Education, Health, Cyber safety, Public Health, NGO's working with school and Media design, Parents and Teachers

BACKGROUND

Mental health issues among children have risen sharply in recent years, with **excessive technology time and unregulated technology use** emerging as key contributors. Indian studies indicate that nearly **25% of adolescents** show signs of internet addiction, with many reporting increased **anxiety, sleep disturbances, and attention problems**.

There is now an urgent need for **teacher and parent training programs** focused on the **early identification of digital overuse and related mental health concerns**, as well as the **promotion of healthy, balanced technology habits** in both children and adults.

GOAL

To foster **digital well-being, emotional regulation, and screen-time awareness** in schools.
Target group: Schools (Grades 9–10); Pre-University / Higher Secondary (Grades 11–12), Teachers and Parents.

The model: The model focuses on improving digital awareness, peer support, early identification and support and enhancing help-seeking behaviors through a series of training of stakeholders.
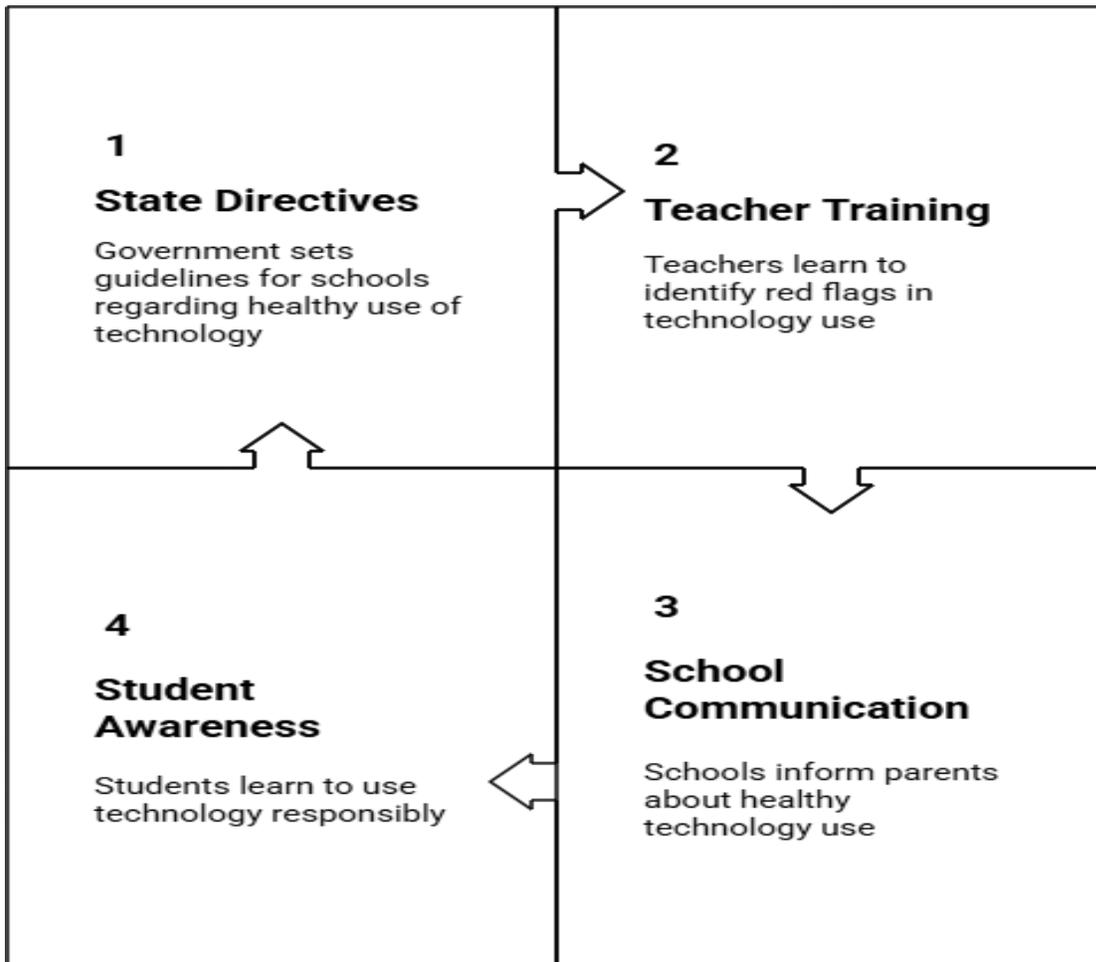
DIRECTIVES

The directives will be 3-fold**:**

- **Directives by the state government to the schools**

- **Teacher training program for healthy use of technology**

- **School communication to the parents**

These three directives will contribute for the following:

Student's awareness and healthy use of technology

1

State Directives

Government sets guidelines for schools regarding healthy use of technology

2

Teacher Training

Teachers learn to identify red flags in technology use

4

Student Awareness

Students learn to use technology responsibly

3

School Communication

Schools inform parents about healthy technology use

IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS

Led by Department of Health & family Welfare, Karnataka State Mental Health Authority, in collaboration with NIMHANS.

Stakeholder Consultations and co-development meetings that have shaped drafting of Development of Policies and Programs for Responsible Digital Use among Students till date. Insights from these consultations have implications for refinements in devolving policy and program recommendations for the state.

| Consultative meeting/sessions	Number of participants (Dates)
Multistakeholder Consultative Meeting with **Hon. Health Minister, Govt of Karnataka,** Commissioner Health, Director NIMHANS, various stake holder departments like Dept. of Education along with 60 professionals from educational institutes and universities representatives/nodal officers from across School, PU board, Collegiate Education, Health, State Project-Samagra Siksha Abhiyan, Kendriya Vidyalaya, Criminal Investigation department, media design and NGOs working school	70 (**16/10/2025**)
One focus group discussion with teachers from diverse institutions (govt, aided, Kendriya Vidyalaya, private & Parents)	49 (**31/10/25**)

Departmental Roles:

Departments Involved/ Directives proposed	Department of Health & family Welfare, KSMHA, Govt of Karnataka	Department of Education, Govt of Karnataka	National Institute of Mental Health & Neuro Sciences
Directives by the state government to the schools	To identify suitable implementation of directives among stakeholders across state educational departments	To ensure dissemination of directives to all stake holders	It will coordinate the draft for policies and program for responsible use of digital use among students
Teacher training program for healthy use of technology	To support training teachers, as well as for students digital through in person or online for responsible use of technology minimum every quarterly	- To support and planning for training of teachers and students in person or online for responsible use of technology. - Implementation of Digital use policies and promotion of offline activities and program - Formation of	- Sharing of developed information materials for responsible use of technology - Transforming the evolved intervention programs to scaling its implementation across state. - To train teachers and counselors in conducting program for

		Digital safety & well ness committee ● Evolving monitoring and reporting mechanism for cyber related issues	healthy use of technology ● To evolve peer led intervention for promotion of healthy digital use among students. ● To provide certificate course in Digital Well Being
School communication to the parents	To support training of parents through in person or online for responsible use of technology minimum every quarterly	To support and plan for evolving mechanism for providing guidance for responsible use of technology.	● Sharing of developed information material on parenting strategies for healthy use of technology. ● To train teachers and counselors in conducting program for healthy use of technology.

1. Directives by the state government to the schools

In response to the growing concerns of screen overuse, technology addiction, and cyber risks among school children as well as to promote holistic development, including academic, cognitive, emotional and social domains using technology. The **Department of Health & Family Welfare Services, Karnataka State Mental Health Authority** in collaboration with **NIMHANS based on the deliberations with the stake holders,** has recommended a set of **preventive, promotive, and responsive strategies** for all schools to implement. These steps are designed to create a safe, balanced, and psychologically healthy digital environment for students.

Steps that can be directed by the government to schools
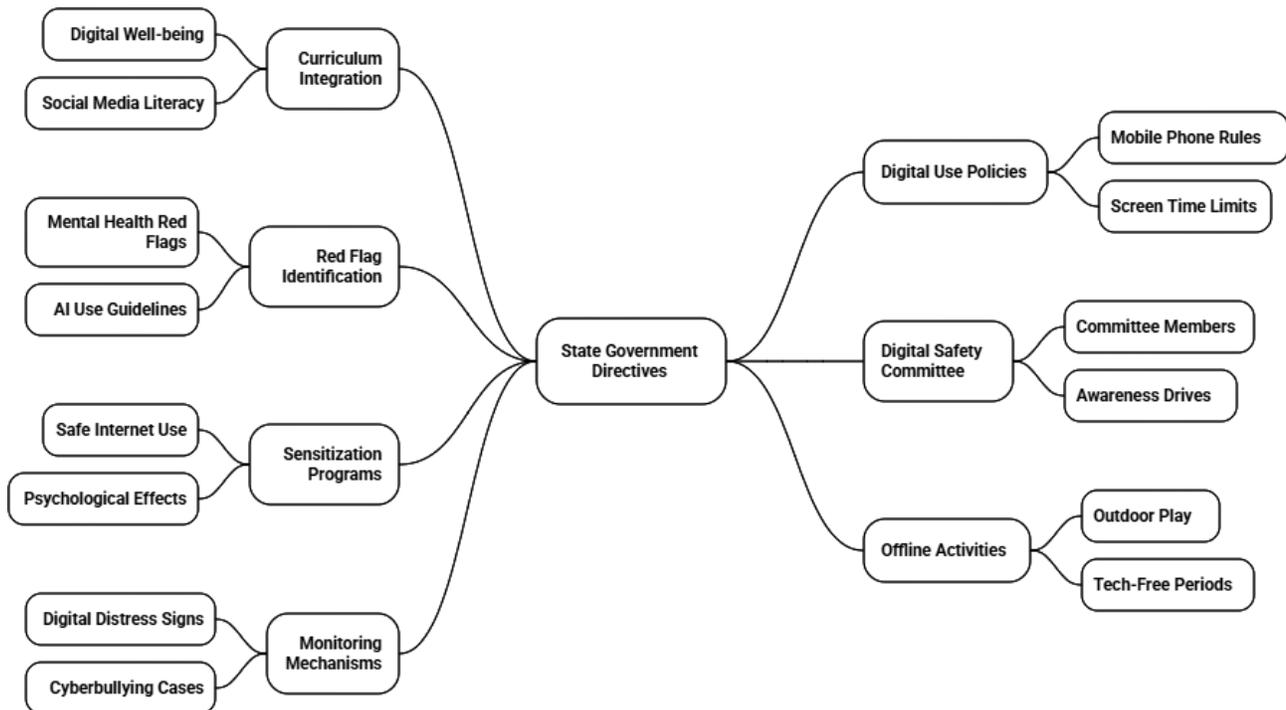
i. Curriculum integration of Digital Wellness

1. Schools must incorporate **digital well-being and social media literacy** within the life skills, value education, and ICT (Information and Communication Technology) curriculum.

2. Age-appropriate lessons on responsible digital behavior, privacy, online safety, and screen-time balance should be taught regularly.

3. Teach to practice positive digital citizenship: Be respectful, avoid cyberbullying, and think before sharing.

4. Teach students about responsible use, online etiquette, and the importance of balance. Creating safe online spaces for access to reliable information

5. Teach about Mental and Emotional Health consequences like increased anxiety, stress, cyberbullying and irritability and reduced academic performance.

6. Raising awareness around Digital privacy and its importance

7. Life skills teaching should include technology addiction and digital safety.

ii. Implementation of school Digital Use Policies

Each school is expected to frame and enforce a **Digital Use Policy** outlining:

1. Protocols for cyberbullying or digital misconduct

2. Teacher roles in moderating digital exposure

3. Age-based limits: Limit recreational screen time to not more than 1 hour per day outside of schoolwork.

4. Counselling students on safe digital use

5. National digital health mission can be created to monitor and provide framework for healthy use of technology.

6. Encourage schools to adopt traditional methods of communication instead of direct WhatsApp contact with students, and implement a "Diary system" for communication.

iii. Mechanisms for identifying red flags

1. Each school can be encouraged to train teachers and staff to identify red flags
2. Identify early mental health red flags (Attention and concentration issues, behavioral issues like loneliness, boredom, stress, and social isolation associated with technology use)
3. Encouraging students to seek help from school counsellors
4. Setting up mechanisms to refer students to seek help from mental health professionals through school counsellors.
5. Developing Clear-cut guidelines and what is healthy and what is unhealthy for different age groups
6. Creating guidelines for Artificial Intelligence Use. Developing protocol for using AI in homework and assignments, and checking for plagiarism.

iv. Formation of a Digital Safety & Wellness Committee

1. Every school must constitute a **Digital Wellness Committee**, including:

   a. Principal or Vice-Principal

   b. Counsellor or Mental health professional

   c. Designated Teachers

d. Parent representative (optional)

e. Student representative (Health monitor)

f. Cybercrime police officer

2. Developing School cells for the healthy use of technology that will oversee awareness drives, resolve cyber incidents, and track the implementation of digital detox activities.

3. Collaboration with digital technology and media industries for ethical content development, and a certified age limit for digital media use. Managing pop-up policies along with developers may lead to multiple inappropriate sites and exposure to harmful content.

4. Developing age-appropriate phones/devices for children and OS update for device as they grow older

5. Developing a special "Child plan" for phones with audio-only phones, and stopping data use by 7 PM.

v. Mandatory sensitization for teachers, parents & students

1. All schools are required to conduct **annual workshops or orientation** on:

   o Safe internet use and responsible digital citizenship

   o Psychological effects of tech overuse

   o Parental control tools and co-use strategies

   o Prevention of cybercrimes

2. Creating a neighborhood network to educate teachers, parents, and counsellors on how to handle excessive technology use.

3. Teachers must undergo training programs to identify red flags and manage student behaviors sensitively.
4. More awareness for parents in rural areas
5. Busting myths about approaching school counselors
6. Weekly sessions for promoting healthy use of digital media

vi. Promotion of offline activities and healthy routines

1. Include outdoor play and offline hobbies in daily routines.
2. Allocate time for **tech-free periods** in the timetable
3. Encourage outdoor games, reading, hobby clubs, and mindfulness periods
4. Celebrate **Digital Detox Weeks** or **Offline Joy Days** at least once per term. Digital detox day can be celebrated on 10th Dec, or schools can conduct no technology November
5. Substituting with other activities, making them mandatory like music, art, dance – developing positive addictions
6. Introducing vocational skill-based activities in schools, including mindfulness or art-based activities.
7. Integrating value education and activity-based classes as part of the curriculum.
8. Vacation homework focused on life skills training rather than academics

vii. Monitoring and reporting mechanisms

1. Teachers are expected to monitor signs of digital distress and escalate cases where emotional or behavioral consequences are observed.
2. Schools should maintain a **confidential log** of referrals to the counsellor and ensure that cases of cyberbullying or online harm are addressed with urgency and care.

- **Cyberbullying:** Includes online harassment, threats, shaming, spreading rumors, and exclusion through social media or messaging platforms.
- Victims may suffer from low self-esteem, depression, or suicidal thoughts.
- Cyberbullying is a punishable offense under juvenile or cybercrime laws.
- Students may be tricked into sharing personal information, images, or videos through grooming or catfishing, risk of sextortion, where individuals are blackmailed with compromising images.
- Many situations can lead to emotional trauma, and in some cases, involvement in police investigations.
- Students may unknowingly or deliberately engage in Hacking, illegal streaming, or bypassing controls, spreading misinformation or hate speech which may lead to legal consequences, or criminal records depending on the jurisdiction.
- Students to be encouraged **to report any threatening or suspicious online behavior to a trusted adult or school counsellor**.
- Provide counselling support and safe channels for students to report cyber or emotional issues including awareness on **Tele Manas -14416** for counselling support.
- Schools collaborating with cybercrime police stations, and cybercrime police personnel taking awareness sessions about reporting crime.
- Implementing Aadhaar-enabled sign-up to ensure age, authenticity, and avoid fake or multiple accounts.
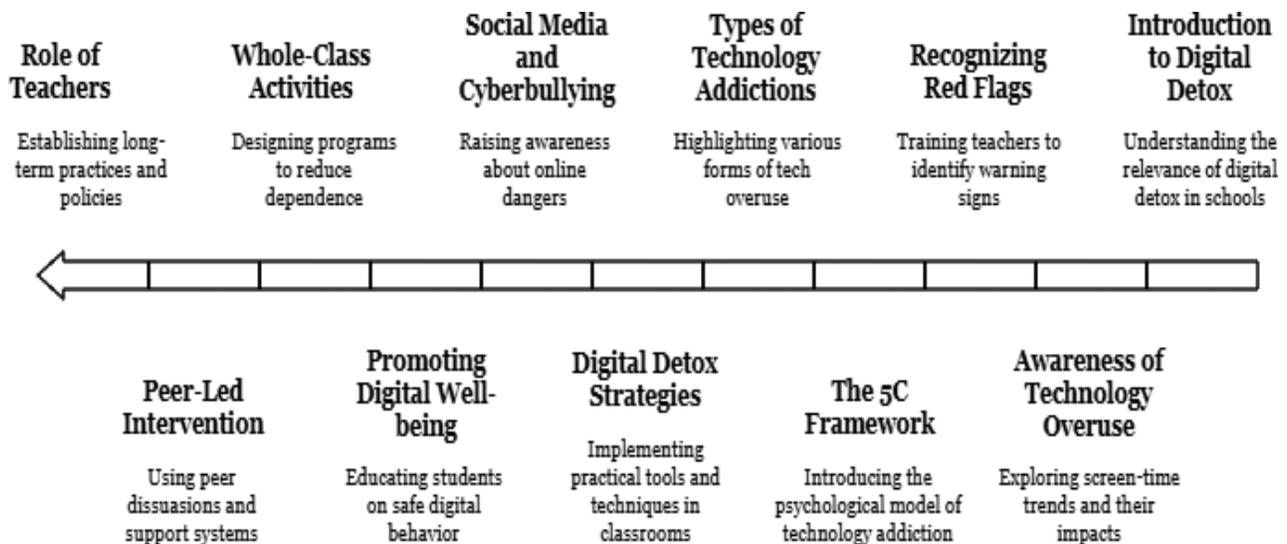
2. Teacher training program (TOT) for digital detox

Duration: 1 day

Agenda:

- Training teachers for awareness and promotion of healthy use of technology for themselves and the students.
- Can be Organized by experts from NIMHANS & Health dept.
- To be implemented in school curricula via teacher training.

Training:

Programme details

Role of Teachers	Whole-Class Activities	Social Media and Cyberbullying	Types of Technology Addictions	Recognizing Red Flags	Introduction to Digital Detox
Establishing long-term practices and policies	Designing programs to reduce dependence	Raising awareness about online dangers	Highlighting various forms of tech overuse	Training teachers to identify warning signs	Understanding the relevance of digital detox in schools

Peer-Led Intervention	Promoting Digital Well-being	Digital Detox Strategies	The 5C Framework	Awareness of Technology Overuse
Using peer dissuasions and support systems	Educating students on safe digital behavior	Implementing practical tools and techniques in classrooms	Introducing the psychological model of technology addiction	Exploring screen-time trends and their impacts

This training program equips school teachers with the knowledge and tools to recognize, address, and prevent technology overuse in students, while promoting healthy digital habits and emotional well-being.

- **Introduction to Digital Detox**

Understanding the relevance of digital detox in schools and the importance of early intervention for mental and emotional health.

- **Awareness of technology overuse in students**

Exploring current screen-time trends and their psychological, academic, and physical impacts on children. Conducting a digital literacy program for children, incorporating age-appropriate content in a way that students can relate to and engage with, for example, cartoon slides. Creating a Report Card for Digital Well-being. Conducting an awareness session about technology overuse for parents.

- **Recognizing red flags of tech overuse**

Training teachers to identify early behavioural, academic, and emotional warning signs related to excessive screen use.

- **The 5C Framework of technology addiction**

Introducing the psychological model: Craving, Control, Compulsion, Coping, and Consequences, to understand addictive patterns in tech use.

- **Types of technology addictions**

Highlighting various forms of tech overuse among school-aged children, including gaming, social media, streaming, and smartphone dependence.

- **Digital Detox strategies for classrooms**

Practical tools and management techniques for promoting digital hygiene, screen-time balance, and offline engagement within the classroom setting. Giving a Physical Education period every day. Using technology in the classroom in an innovative way - a fluid classroom - teaching can be changed with more community visits and exposure. Classrooms designed in ways to foster curiosity and engagement through the means of healthy technology use and the gamification of teaching.

- **Social media, cyberbullying & suicide risk**

Raising awareness about the emotional and psychological dangers linked to online abuse, body image issues, and social comparison, and the teacher's role in early detection. Creating an age-appropriate curriculum for cyber safety.

- **Promoting Digital Well-being, privacy & online safety**

Educating students on safe digital behavior, consent, privacy, digital footprints, and respectful online interactions (Netiquettes/Digital citizenship). Recommending websites/resources for homework assignments, to limit unnecessary scrolling or search time.

- **Whole-Class and School-Wide activities for healthy digital use**

Designing structured weekly detox programs and campaigns that involve students, teachers, and parents to reduce dependence and promote healthier digital routines. Innovative program for social connection building, like mere ghar akhar dekho where students go to each other's homes, learn about their culture.

- **Development of peer led classroom intervention for self-regulated Technology Use**

Using peer dissuasions with students in higher classes to discuss tech addiction and cyberbullying, having some contracts like 'I monitor U, U monitor me' peer reporting system to identify those at risk. Developing children support program, to discuss their technology use and challenges.

- **Role of teachers in sustaining change**

Establishing long-term practices through observation, modelling, parent communication, and school policy advocacy.

Summary & takeaways

Reinforcing the idea that early identification, consistent guidance, and collaborative efforts are essential for promoting digital balance and emotional resilience in students.

3. Guiding Parents: Creating a healthy digital environment at home

The role of parents in managing children's screen use is as vital as that of the school. Teachers and school leaders are encouraged to **actively engage with families** and offer structured guidance that promotes balance, discipline, and meaningful offline engagement at home.

Guiding Parents: Creating a healthy digital environment at home	
Promote positive reinforcement and build shared family rituals & offline bonding	Encourage social & communication skills
Set structured routines with clear screen-time rules and prioritize privacy, safety, and open conversation	Encourage social & communication skills

Below are the key directives and suggestions schools and teachers should share with parents:

- **Promote positive reinforcement and build shared family rituals & offline bonding**
  - Introduce **non-digital reinforcers**: extra playtime, one-on-one time, storytelling, or choosing a family activity.
  - Set clear rules and boundaries while introducing any new technology to children, and keep repeating the rules occasionally.

- ○ Emphasize the value of family traditions that are device-free, such as: evening walk after dinner, weekly "family story night", cooking meals together, board game or craft evenings. These rituals create emotional security and reduce children's dependency on digital entertainment.
- ○ Enhancing parental awareness of handling tantrums, and not giving in to the demand for phones/screens.

- ● **Encourage social & communication skills**
  - ○ Parents should facilitate more **peer interactions and conversations** without screens:

> - ● Invite friends over for offline play
> - ● Promote role play, group reading, or drama at home
> - ● Model face-to-face communication (e.g., no phones during conversations)

- ● **Set structured routines with clear screen-time rules and prioritize privacy, safety, and open conversation**
  - ○ Following a collaborative app rather than a restrictive one.
  - ○ Help parents create a **daily tech schedule**, including: defined screen time limits (as per age), mandatory screen-free time during meals, sleep hours, and study periods, tech curfew all screens off **1 hour before bedtime,** No Technology use during meal time, involve children in making these rules so they feel ownership.
  - ○ Mark digital free zones like bedroom, dining table, kitchen, bathroom, and motorized vehicle where no family members use technology.
  - ○ Decide upon digital fasting time where no family members use any device.
  - ○ Educate parents to talk regularly about who their children interact with online, what apps or platforms they use, the importance of **not sharing photos,**

passwords, or personal details, encourage children to come forward without fear if they encounter something distressing online.

o Parents familiarize themselves with different technologies before introducing them to the child. Set up a timer, a profile for kids to use, and review the content regularly.

- **Parental Self-regulation of Technology Use**
  o Good Modelling behaviors to the children: such us setting boundaries on their own screen use, avoid/reduced compulsive use (scrolling social media).
  o Emotional availability: Stay emotionally present during family time.
  o Attendance for parents for attending the digital wellness program and providing some reward points for attendance.

Role of different stakeholders in Policy and Program implementation of responsible digital use among students

Stakeholder	Key Roles and Responsibilities
Students	- Practicing healthy screen-time habits, digital citizenship, and online safety. - Using technology ethically and thoughtfully - Reporting cyberbullying or online risks, seeking help if in distress - Engaging in offline activities and maintaining balance - Participating in digital wellness programs and adhering to school policies
Parents	- Setting clear screen-time boundaries and device-free family times - Modelling responsible technology use and digital etiquette - Monitoring children's online activities and discussing online safety - Reinforcing positive offline routines. - Supporting participation in digital wellness programs.
School Teachers	- Integrating digital wellness and safety lessons in curriculum - Supervising technology use and identifying early warning signs - Leading awareness workshops for students and parents - Managing classroom digital routines and supporting peer-led interventions - Monitoring/reporting digital distress and ensuring safe reporting channels
	Framing and enforcing school digital use policies

Stakeholder	Key Roles and Responsibilities
Institution Heads	- Constituting Digital Wellness Committees - Ensuring staff are trained and supported in technology supervision - Overseeing policy implementation and collaboration with experts (Department of Health and Family Welfare Services, School Education, Medical Education, NIMHANS, etc.) - Monitoring school-wide technology trends and incident registrations
Government & Other Stakeholders	- Developing statewide guidelines and directives for schools - Coordinating training programs and funding digital wellness initiatives - Monitoring policy compliance and evaluating impact - Facilitating partnerships with mental health, education, and cyber safety agencies - Enabling helplines like TELE MANAS-14416 for accessible, free and confidential mental health support and frameworks for reporting digital incidents.

List of Experts who attended State level Consultative meeting on development of policies and programs for responsible digital use among students on 16th October 2025

S. No	Participants Name	Designation
1	**Shri Dinesh Gundu Rao**	**Hon'ble Minister For Health and Family Welfare, Government of Karnataka**
2	Dr Pratima Murthy	Director and Senior Professor, NIMHANS, Bengaluru, Karnataka
3	Shri K B Sivakumar	IAS Commissioner, Department of Health and Family Welfare
4	Dr Rajani Parthasarathy	Deputy Director, Mental health, Department of Health and Family welfare
5	Dr Manoj Kumar Sharma	Chief Coordinator, Service for Healthy Use of Technology (SHUT) & Professor, Dept of Clinical Psychology, NIMHANS
6	Dr Nitin Anand	Additional Professor, Dept of Clinical Psychology, NIMHANS
7	Dr Rajesh Kumar	Assistant Professor, Dept of Clinical Psychology, NIMHANS
8	Dr Ravikesh Tripathi	Assistant Professor, Dept of Clinical Psychology, NIMHANS
9	Dr. Padmashree RP	Department of Education
10	Smt. Hemavathi V	Department of Education

11	Mr. Manjesh Shetty	Crime Investigation Department
12	Dr Preethi Gadgali	Pediatrican
13	Mr Chandru	NGO Professional
14	Dr Varuni	NGO Professional
15	Dr Shantraju	Christ University
16	Mrs. Madhuri	School Counsellor, Army Public School
17	Dr. Preeti	Teacher, Delhi Public School
18	Dr. Sundar	Teacher, Delhi Public school
19	Ms. Riya	School counsellor, Christ State School
20	Dr. Ashwini Tadpatrikar	Assistant Professor, Vidhyashilp University
21	Dr. Pranjali Thakur	
22	Dr. Hemant Bhargav	Associate Professor, Dept of Yoga, NIMHANS
23	Dr KS Meena	Professor & HOD, Dept of Mental Health Education, NIMHANS
24	Dr Ajith Dahale	Professor, Dept. Of Psychiatry, NIMHANS
25	Dr. Bino Thomas	Professor, Dept of Psychiatric Social Work, NIMHANS
26	Dr Senthil Amudhan	Professor & HOD, Dept of Epidemiology, NIMHANS
27	Dr Girish Rao	Professor, Dept of, NIMHANS
28	Dr M Thomas Kishore	Professor, Dept of Clinical Psychology, NIMHANS
29	Dr. Narendranath Samantaray	Assistant Professor, Dept of Clinical Psychology, NIMHANS

30	Dr. Ravikant Pinjarkar	Assistant Professor, Dept of Clinical Psychology, NIMHANS
31	Dr Sreedevi A U	Assistant Professor, Dept of Psychiatric Social Work, NIMHANS
32	Dr Pradeep Yuvaraj	Assistant Professor, Dept of Speech pathology and Audiology, NIMHANS
33	Dr Radhakrishnan	Assistant professor, Dept of Nursing, NIMHANS
34	Dr. Jyotsna Agarwal	Additional Professor, Dept of Clinical Psychology, NIMHANS
35	Dr. Shantala Hegde	Additional Professor, Dept of Clinical Psychology, NIMHANS
36	Dr. Anamika Sahu	Assistant Professor, Dept of Clinical Psychology, NIMHANS
37	Dr. Paulomi Sudhir	Professor, Dept of Clinical Psychology, NIMHANS
38	Dr Manjula M	Professor, Dept of Clinical Psychology, NIMHANS
39	Dr Veena Satyanarayanan	Additional Professor, Dept of Clinical Psychology, NIMHANS
40	Dr Seema Mehrotra	Professor, Dept of Clinical Psychology, NIMHANS
41	Dr John Vijay Sagar	Professor & HOD, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, NIMHANS
42	Dr Ajay Goyal	Assistant Professor, Dept of Disaster Management, NIMHANS

43	Dr Birudu Raj	Assistant Professor, Dept of Psychiatric social Work, NIMHANS
44	Dr Aravind Raj	Additional Professor, Dept of Psychiatric Social Work, NIMHANS
45	Research Scholars	Department of Clinical Psychology, Department of Psychiatric Nursing, Department of Epidemiology and Department of Psychiatric Social Work

List of teachers who participated in meeting on development of policies and programs for responsible digital use among students held on 31st October 2025

Sl. NO	Names of Teachers	School Name
1	Ms Samily PP	KVRWF, Yelanka
2	Ms K Beena	PM Shri KV, Jalahalli
3	Ms Sridevi Vijay Shinde	KV DRDO, CV Raman Nagar
4	Mr Vivek Kumar	PM Shri KV CRPF
5	Mr Harikumar A	KV NAL Campus
6	Ms K Parameshwari	PM Shri KV Malleshwaram
7	Mr Shravan N	KV IISC Bengaluru
8	Mr Shivakumar K H	PM Shri KV, Jalahalli
9	Ms Lakshmi Bharath	Nalandway Foundation
10	Ms Anita Markam	PM Shri KV Jalahalli
11	Ms Mousumi De	PM Shri KV Jalahalli
12	Ms Monika Malhotra	PM Shri KV Mega Centre
13	Ms Vijayalakshmi Ravi	Christ Junior college
14	Ms Ruth Komal Jose	Christ Junior College
15	Ms Heidi Mamatha	Christ Junior College
16	Mr RK Bakolia	PM Shri KV MG Railway
17	Ms Sathiya Robert	St Thomas Aquinan School
18	Ms Sangeetha	St Thomas Aquinan School
19	Ms Kavitha Rajes	RV college
20	Ms Swathi Singh	KV ASC Centre
21	Ms Dipti	KV ASC Centre
22	Ms Priti Sharma	KV AFS, Yelahanka
23	Ms Roopashree	Purnapramati Gurukula
24	Ms Sandhya	KV ASC Centre
25	Ms Shiragi	Cambridge Modern Public School
26	Ms Shashirekha Manur	Purnapramati Gurukula

List of Parents who participated in the meeting on development of policies and programs for responsible digital use among student held on 31st October 2025

S.NO	Name of Parents
1	Ms Anita Saja
2	Ms Kusum Pandey
3	Ms Pusha Patil
4	Ms Susan Mathew
5	Ms Nabamita Gosh
6	Ms Pathiba RN
7	Ms Shalini Lohitesh
8	Ms Banashankari SC
9	Mr Abdul Khader
10	Mr Manish Bhushan
11	Mr Dheeraj Nayyar
12	Ms Hooma Roy Choudhry
13	Ms Suma Gosanan
14	Ms Remya Mohan
15	Ms Santish R C
16	Ms Hemavathi
17	Ms Jeevan
18	Ms Sumathi
19	Ms Sree M