



- **The wonder of you**

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If you were ever the last one picked for a team during PE class or been the subject of some crude practical joke in biology class, then the horrors of surviving teenage years will not be a mystery to you. But being picked on, bullied or pressured by your peers is not the domain of teens alone; it can start at a much earlier stage and can have long-term ramifications.

Imagine being able to turn back time and be free to make different choices, select different reactions and feel secure in simply being yourself?

At **YOU (Your Own Understanding)**, a free programme here in Dubai, the focus is on enabling children and teens to feel **empowered** while also **enhancing their understanding** of themselves to help them achieve their **purpose in life**.

Devika Singh who is both the media manager and a committee member and speaker at **YOU**, finds that the prevention element of the programme is one of the main reasons she got involved. "I've always been interested in prevention-based programmes and so I jumped at the opportunity to offer free classes to children that cover different areas of development like social, emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual growth. I believe it's important to build a foundation of emotional strength and this is one way to do it from an early stage," she says.

Devika leads the emotional and intellectual development sessions, which touch on anger control, self-esteem, relationship managements, peer pressure, conflict resolution and bullying. The sessions are held once a week and are open to children across the city.

Due to high demand, the registration process allows students to sign up online and be chosen randomly each week in order to fairly accommodate the high number of applicants. The sessions all follow a five-step process that begins with teaching children to appreciate the uniqueness they possess through their organisation song, 'Wonder of You'.

This is then followed by an exercise of understanding themselves, meditation, workshops and finally, a 'YOU Pay It Forward' plan where the kids are able to give back what they have learnt and pass it on. This comes in the form of a pledge to commit a random act of kindness towards someone you may know or not know. "The philosophy of paying it forward is that it gives kids a tangible thing to track their progress and behaviour.

"We've been collecting ideas for good deeds over the past year - things that are realistic and can be carried out and most of all that keeps kids involved and having fun," Devika says.

While the topics covered can range from grooming and body care to character education and goal setting, one of Devika's focuses is on bullying. "We usually start by finding age-appropriate definitions - whether it's for the kids, teens, or youth clubs and end with a game that illustrates the concept and has them do a little role play." "Bullying is definitely on the rise, for many different reasons. The media plays a role because kids are exposed to a lot more violence in what they watch and research shows that it influences the way they behave.

There are also a lot more dual income families, which can lead to less supervision and coaching for kids. Obviously, not everyone is bullied but it is quite prominent," she says. Devika finds that once a definition is put in place and both the bullies and bullied in the sessions are comfortable with those definitions, the role-play offers a chance for to reverse roles and understand the other side. "It differs with each age group and with teenagers, if they've been bullied since childhood, there is a sense of learned helplessness that they've accepted and it's classes like this that can help them find a name for how they feel and learn new ways to change that." Devika also points out that these sessions offer the chance to understand the other side; the difference between girls and boys and the types of bullying involved. "As a result of brain structure, girls' strategy is to alienate an individual and turn everyone against her long-term while boys tend to have it out and then resolve things quickly. "It's helpful for boys and girls to realise the differences and be aware of the damage each can cause," she adds.

The organisation is committed to bringing awareness to the youth of today and create a wave of transformation that will help shape the children who participate. "We receive very honest assessments from the kids with the feedback forms. For many of them, it's a chance not only to work on issues like **self-esteem** but it's also a fun environment where they can play games, have fun and learn something new.

"The next session at **YOU** begins on September 13. For registration and more information visit www.you-dubai.com

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