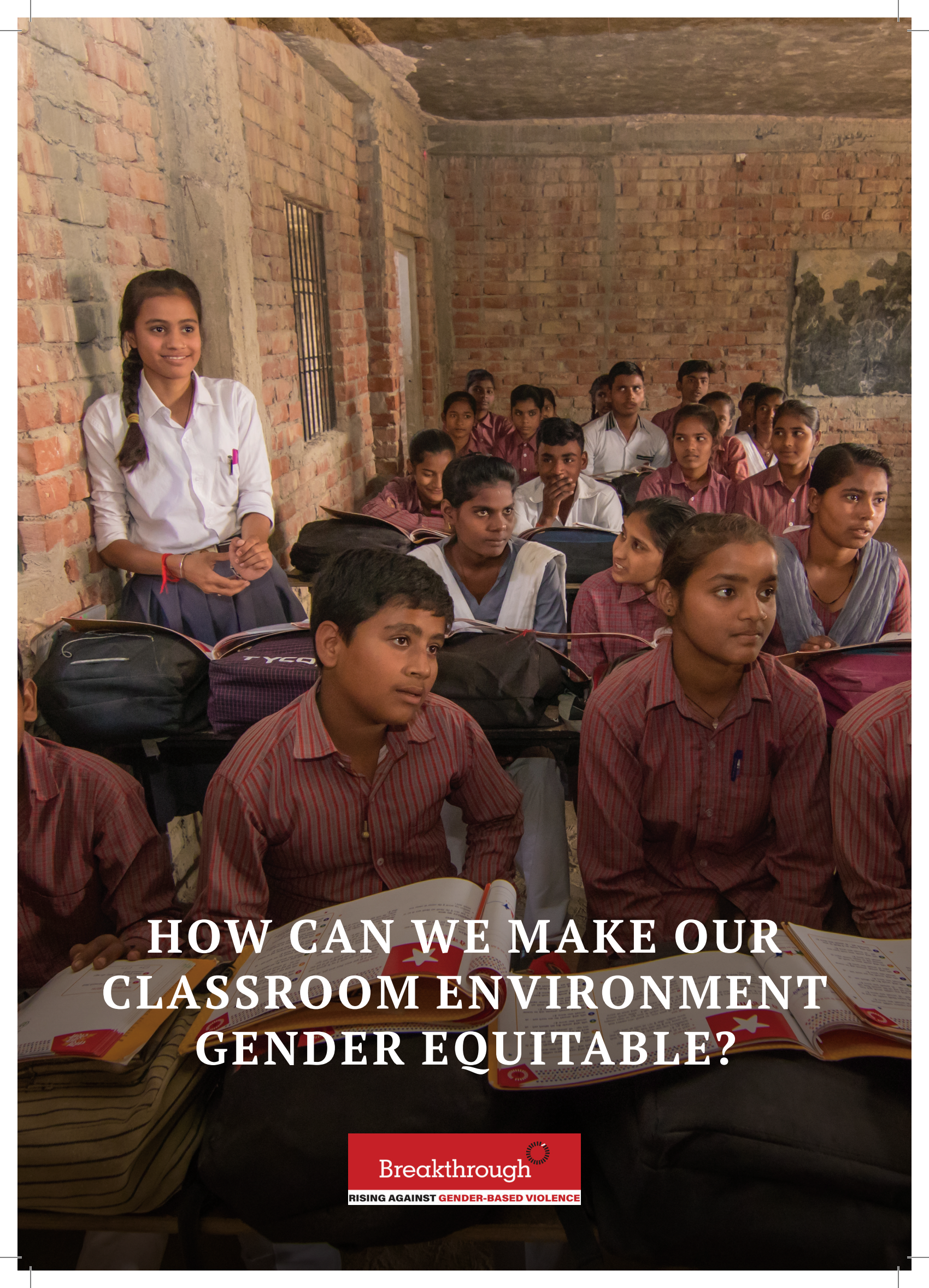


A group of students in a classroom setting. A girl in a white shirt and blue skirt stands on the left, smiling. Other students are seated at desks, looking towards the camera. The classroom has brick walls and a window with bars.

HOW CAN WE MAKE OUR CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT GENDER EQUITABLE?

Breakthrough



RISING AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



Children are born without the knowledge of what it means to be a 'boy' or a 'girl'. The adults, older children and societal expectations mould them as per gender stereotypes. With this realisation, we as their influencers and educators can actively encourage gender equity, and the earlier we start, the more effective we can be. Gender equality is crucial to create a fair and just world. It is one of the important pillars of knowledge and skills laid out in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. In schools, our children, through books, resources, and teachers, will learn that we are more similar than we are different. As children grow into adults, it is important, they follow their passions and never let gender stereotyping restrict their choices.

As teachers, we can make our classrooms gender-just by taking care of the following:



Use inclusive language in the classroom

We generally divide the class into girls and boys, male and female. As we all are aware, gender is a social construct, so the classroom should become an area where social norms are discarded and children are free to become anything they want to be. Words or phrases such as "You boys" or "You girls" should be avoided. Instead take the name of the student or if you are addressing the entire class call them students.



Avoid stereotyping children

For example, boys are noisy and loud; girls are calm and sweet or boys show less emotion and girls cry more easily. We must avoid the use of adjectives like beautiful, pretty, obedient, submissive for girls, and brave, courageous, strong, handsome for boys. Generally, girls are praised for the neatness of their work or their looks or for their creativity, while boys are more likely to receive attributes based on strength, effort and ability. Avoid such gender





biased attitudes and try to see the uniqueness of each child.



Seat and group students together

It is common for students to segregate themselves according to their gender when choosing friends and seating arrangements. Also, we sometimes encourage this by asking girls and boys to form separate lines in the hallway or even organizing separate sports activities for each group. It is always better to form mixed groups to break regressive gender norms and promote healthy interaction between all genders.



Use gender-neutral language

When sharing examples with students, challenge the perceptions of the professions typically associated with a particular gender like construction work, army, nursing etc. We must use gender neutral terms when referring to occupations, e.g. Chairperson, Police Officer, Flight Attendant etc. Special emphasis must be given to sharing examples of women and transgender achievers who have contributed to different fields. When referring to the group as a whole, we must avoid using gendered terms like 'guys,' which may make female students feel excluded. Instead, use gender-neutral terms like 'everyone.' Further, avoid using he/ his/ him as defaults in our language.



Stay mindful about student interactions

We try to comfort the girls more and toughen up the boys by discouraging their free emotional expressions.

This can lead to aggression due to suppressed feelings, a lack of empathy and compassion among boys. Hence, encourage all children to share feelings and emotions equally.



Become a role model

We can be powerful positive gender role models for our students. They learn from observing their teachers' attitudes and behaviours and the way they teach and interact. Our professional relationships and interactions in school with the Principal, other teachers, parents and support staff should also reflect gender balanced and

equitable attitudes. It is better to have common staff rooms and dining spaces to set an example for all students and inspire them to work together in mixed groups.



Influence parents to be gender equitable

During parent-teacher meetings, we have the power and influence to sow seeds of equality by promoting education for all children irrespective of their gender. We must stress upon the importance of shared household responsibilities, leisure time for girls and promote gender equitable practices like eating together as a family instead of women eating leftovers later as well as ensuring proper nutrition especially for young girls.



Promote healthy classroom culture

It should be built in a manner that interactions between all students reflect mutual respect for all genders. The classroom ethos should be made open and supportive, so that all students feel free to share their personal experiences without apprehensions.



Ask all students to participate in a variety of classroom chores

For example, boys can do painting, decoration or rangoli etc. whereas other genders can look after seating arrangements, escorting guests, managing stage etc. Allocation of classroom duties should reflect gender neutrality.



Encourage equal participation in co-curricular activities

Equal participation of all genders in co-curricular activities like drama, debates, campaigns and sports activities. As an example, a campaign called 'We can do anything!' where students can create posters with positive messages showing that anyone can strive for their passion, regardless of their gender. However, care must be taken to avoid these from becoming selective and partial; the most effective co-curricular activities are often those which involve the entire school's members in a challenging manner to bring in cultural shifts.



Use project-based learning

Intentionally try creating and integrating mixed gender groups within small group projects. By working together in mixed gender groups all students can—if supported well—better understand the nuance of individual behaviours rather than stereotyping ‘girls’ and ‘boys.’ Projects can also be assigned to explore concepts in and around gender and cultural equity, or to do work in select spaces and communities to develop healthy interactions between different genders.

Challenging Gender Stereotypes and Norms in Schools

Gender norms and expectations operate in our families, schools and communities. These gender norms and expectations can lead to harm and inequality. We must identify and challenge these unjust gender norms and expectations to create gender-just families, schools and communities. Here are some of the ways to challenge harmful and unjust gender stereotypes and norms in schools:

- The lack of women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) or career and technical education subjects can be overcome by promoting and encouraging more girls into these fields. We can change this by making the school a bias-free zone!
- Ensure playground and sports facilities are accessible to all students. Anyone can play cricket, football, weight lifting etc. or any other sport of their choice.
- Bullying is the most prevalent form of violence in schools, it can also manifest as gender based

violence and discrimination. It regularly affects more than one in three students between the ages of 13 and 15 worldwide, it should be strictly banned.

- Schools should adopt a Child-centred and a ‘do no harm’ approach – child rights, needs, safety and protection should be at the centre. Everyone in school should have a clear understanding of the Code of Conduct in child protection and safeguarding, especially when a child discloses an incident of harassment or violence including sexual violence.
- Establish clear, safe and accessible procedures and mechanisms to report cases of violence and assist victims. CHILDLINE 1098 is a free emergency phone service that can be used 24-hour a day, 365 days a year, for children in need of aid and assistance. The CHILDLINE network not only responds to the emergency needs of children but also links them to relevant services for their long-term care and rehabilitation.
- Frame your school’s gender policy based on the values of dignity and equity. For eg: If the policy mentions ‘fair distribution of work’, then students irrespective of their gender can present the bouquets, sing songs, or organise events. The code of conduct for teachers could ensure responsibilities are rotated regularly among all students. Further, the school principal would ensure fair distribution of tasks in various committees and access to leadership positions for all teachers irrespective of their gender. Everyone will get a fair chance to design, execute and plan administration and budget spending.



RIISING AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Breakthrough Trust

Contact: +91-11-41666101-06

Web: inbreakthrough.org