

Hari Om

Balavihar Sevak Orientation by Brni Sumati Chaitanya

"Children are not vessels to be filled, but lamps to be lit." - Swami Chinmayananda

Never can our children's education be complete unless we impart to them a true appreciation of the eternal values of life, and help them to open up their sense of beauty and rhythm.

All that each one of us has are gifts from God. What we do with what we have is our gift to god. Let us make our complete life a gift to Narayana.

"Do not just invest on the child but also invest in the child."- Swami Chinmayananda

"Dear Children,

From the Lord, when we reached here we came as a good child of light. But as we live among others, the animal in us comes up and we become bad children of darkness. To avoid this fall, we must always remember the great Lord of Love, the flute player of Jamuna banks. Balavihar is meant for this.

With the song of the glorious Lord in your heart, grow to be great men and women of Bharat. The country needs you; you deserve a great country." - Swami Chinmayananda

What is Balavihar? How does it work?

- Balavihar is a group of children, meeting once a week, at a set venue, for 90 minutes, for the sole purpose of learning our precious culture, spiritual wisdom, and related values through books, stories, and games.
- Inculcating the values of Sanatana Dharma, as taught in our scriptures--Shrimad Bhagavad Geeta, Upanishads, Epics and Puranas--will help our children grow into responsible citizens of tomorrow.
- Balavihar classes for various age groups are conducted by trained sevaks and sevikas. These voluntary dedicated workers impart to our children in their formative years, the glory of our rich culture, aiming at character formation and reverence for our ancient heritage.
- The high ideals and values from our great scriptures are taught in the form of stories, games, quizzes, crafts, bhajans, hymns, shlokas, skits, dances, etc.

Why is Balavihar essential to a community?

- The character-building of a nation must start from the cradle and play-fields.
- The healthy, positive values practiced by our children will help them grow into responsible, truthful individuals in society, who will set trends for future generations, and help establish a world of peace and harmony.
- In ancient times, the Gurukula system was perfect in providing an all-round education for children, where their growth was monitored 24 hours by the teacher himself. Such individual attention is difficult these days where only academic education is given importance in schools--therefore the need and importance of Balavihar.
- The joint family system, where elders play a major role in shaping the character of the children, is dying away--therefore the need and importance of Balavihar.
- In today's nuclear family system, many parents are too busy or not well-informed to guide and facilitate the all-round development of their children--therefore the need and importance of Balvihar.

Who is eligible to join a Balavihar?

- Children from ages 5-12 years are eligible to join Balavihar.
- Students are divided into junior and senior groups based on grade and learning:

- Junior Balavihar: 5-9 years
- Senior Balavihar: 10-12 years
- Junior CHYK (Chinmaya Yuva Kendra or youth wing): 13-16 years
- Senior CHYK: 17-25 years

How do we start a Balavihar?

The essential units of Balavihar include the sevaks, venue, children, and parents.

1. Sevaks

Sevaks should be clear about their roles before they start participating in Balavihar.

- **The Sevak**

- Balvihar activity should be considered by all sevaks as a personal sadhana.
- A sevak must attend a study group for personal self-unfoldment.
- A sevak must be sincere, dedicated, patient, and polite and cultivate a keen sense of humour.
- Above all, a sevak must have humility and desire to learn from others.

- **The Sevak and Balavihar**

- Ideally, two sevaks should be present to commence Balavihar. Two can help each other to plan and organize the class.
- Sevaks must develop zeal and enthusiasm for their work and be innovative.
- Sevaks must be regular and punctual in attendance. Whenever absent, sevaks must arrange for an appropriate class substitute.
- Sevaks should be prepared, in detail, for at least five classes before the inaugural session, which is in addition to the annual general and special planning of classes, festivals, competitions, quizzes, skits, dances, etc.
- For future reference, maintain a record book giving details about what has been done in every class and on special occasions, festivals, etc.
- Sevaks should have regular meetings with the local Balavihar Coordinator.
- The classroom should be ready 10 minutes prior to the scheduled class time.
- Sevaks should plan annual visits to the temples, ashrams, and other places of interest
- Invite speakers, Acharyas, or specialists in particular activities.

- **The Sevak and Parents**

- Hold regular meetings with the parents to get their feedback.
- Become a family friend and make all students and parents feel part of our Chinmaya Family.
- Involve parents in the planning and organizing celebrations of major festivals. Benefits: parents' participation brings new ideas and enthusiasm; the sevaks do not get overworked; children realize the importance of the activities; through the children, parents also get the same education.
- Keep parents informed about Mission activities such as yajnas, visiting Acharyas, camps. etc.
- Encourage parents to join study classes, participate in the Geeta Chanting Competition (for adults: chanting and memory), visit Chinmaya Centers, and organize Mission activities.
- Please remember not to push or force anyone into Mission activities. But encourage them to participate.

- **The Sevak and Children**

- The role of a sevak is that of a loving parent in class. Success depends upon our spontaneous ability to love children.
- A sevak must lead by example.
- Maintain a list of all students and contact information (address, phone, e-mail, behavior, etc)

- Children on their birthdays should be made to do Arati and the group can sing the birthday song composed by Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayanandaji.
 - Avoid favoritism and criticizing or demeaning children.
 - Appreciate and congratulate children for their good behavior. But do not compare a child's behavior with another one.
 - Make every child feel special by maintaining eye contact in class.
 - Some children demand attention (due to various reasons) by being restless and distracting others. Give them their due attention, and be firm but polite while instructing.
 - Some children demand attention by being silent. Give them attention with softness. If their silence persists, try to find out the reasons from their parents. If there is no major reason, then one may apply firm but polite ways of instruction.
 - Children must be trained to clear up the hall before they leave.
 - Always, remember to smile.
- **The Sevak and the coordinator**
Regular meetings with the local Balvihar coordinator
 - **Pitfalls to be avoided by Sevaks**
 - Constant changing of time and venue of the class
 - Irregular attendance
 - Lack of punctuality
 - Inadequate preparation for class
 - Cancellation of class without prior notice to children, parents, and host
 - Attempts to dominate and project own personality
 - Exploiting contacts for furthering personal gains
 - Absence of enthusiasm and personal conviction regarding the subject he/she teaches
 - Absence of effective follow-up if children are absent. Attempts to find out the reasons for a child's absence help make the parents and children more earnest.

2. Venue and Time

- A devotee's home or community hall with easy access and the least disturbances possible.
- The venue should not change frequently. Inform children and parents at least two weeks before any change in venue.
- The day and time should be convenient for the sevaks, host, children, and parents.
- An airy, well ventilated, spacious room, with a mat on the floor, is simple and good.
- Keep a clean and beautiful altar (table, cover, Gurudeva's photo, Guru parampara photo, idol of the Lord, lamp, arati lamp, flowers, agarbatti, matchbox, oil, wicks, and prasad).

3. Publicity and Inauguration

- Advertise for Balavihar and the Inauguration Day through pamphlets, posters, etc.
- Registration forms must be completed and signed by the parents (see attached sample).
- The inauguration ceremony should be conducted on a suitable date and time at the Balavihar venue.
- The venue is to be set up as indicated above.
- Invite an eminent person to inaugurate. The guest should be aware of the aims of Chinmaya Mission and Balavihar. He/She should be able to communicate well to both the elders and the children. The guest's speech should be short, sweet, interesting, inspiring, and to the point.
- Invite parents and other community members to inspire the children.
- The sevaks should introduce themselves to the parents and children, and share with them the importance and workings of Balavihar.
- Give all necessary instructions to the children for future classes, events, and other activities

4. Parents

- Inform parents about Pujya Gurudev and Chinmaya Mission and its vision (optional: give a book / pamphlet on Chinmaya Mission)
- Explain "Why Balavihar".
- Explain to the parents their role and responsibility. Ask parents to give regular feedback to the sevakin-charge and to participate wholeheartedly when requested.
- Encourage parents to join study classes.

5. Children

• Necessary instructions:

- Dress code: Ideally decent dress in which one can sit comfortably with crossed legs. Traditional dresses for the special festival class.
- Materials to be brought by the children: A note-book, pen, pencil, eraser, chanting material (My prayers or Book of Hymns)
- Announce the day and time of the class.
- Importance of punctuality, sincerity and regularity should be given

Curriculum: Each Balavihar class must cover the following:

- Thematic approach: Every class must have a theme.
- Hindu philosophy, culture, and rituals: Why many forms of God? Why do we . . . ?
- Symbolism in Hinduism
- Subhashitas
- Festivals and their significance
- Great characters as role-models from the Epics, Puranas, and recent history
- Eternal values of life from Bhagavad Geeta, etc.
- Our Vedic heritage: math, science, and ancient discoveries, etc.

- **Curriculum** (attached – as devised by Acharya Smt Darshana Nanavaty, Chinmaya Mission Houston and adapted to meet UK National Curriculum requirements)

Three types of Balavihar classes:

1. A Typical Class: This is a regular class, for which the schedule is as follows:

- Prayer
- Topic of the day
- Story
- Song/Shloka
- Game/Arts & Crafts/Skit (based on the topic of the day)
- Japa/Meditation
- Mission Pledge
- Arati and Prostration
- Prasad

2. An Atypical Class

- An atypical class is celebrating special occasions like festivals, Grandparents' Day, Mother's Day, etc.
- The purpose of festival celebrations is to tell children the significance of every festival and demonstrate traditional ways of celebrating.
- Plan and prepare for celebrations at least a month before the date. Sevaks may take help of the parents.
- Children can be trained for dramas. Sevaks or parents can write a script, which should be simple and short (10-15 minutes).

- Children must be trained to clear up the hall before they leave.

A sample schedule of an atypical class can be as follows:

- Prayers
- Attendance
- Topic of the day (Example: Holi; the significance of Holi is "Good alone wins. Therefore let us always be good." Why do we . . . ?)
- Story time: Bhakta Prahlad
- Activity for the festival Holi: making Holika and burning the bad or expression drawing
- Chanting: Dashavatara Stotram
- Bhajan
- Arati and Prostration
- Prasad

3. Annual Meet and Graduation Ceremony

- A Balavihar or a few Balavihar in the same area can have an Annual Meet.
- It must start and end with prayers.
- It can be a Fun Fair: parents make food at home and bring, creative games (no gambling games)etc.
- Invite Mission and family members.
- Children can collect old but good clothes, toys, books, etc and give them in charity.
- Money collected can be either donated or put in corpus funds, which can be used for other Balavihar activities, such sponsoring a page in BV Children's Magazine or for a Jnana Yajna.
- The Annual Meet can also include a Graduation Ceremony. Graduation certificates can be presented to children graduating from Junior to Senior Balavihar or from Senior Balavihar to Junior CHYK. (Sample certificate attached.)

Activities of Balavihar

1. Stories

Things to be remembered while telling a story:

- The purpose of storytelling in a Balavihar class is to bring life to values.
- Telling a story is an art and hence, can be cultivated through practice.
- Visualize the story and practice storytelling before the session.
- Tell the story slowly, with sounds and gestures.
- Avoid describing in detail scenes of violence and emotional torture.

2. Songs and Chants

Things to be remembered:

- Purpose of singing bhajans & inspiring value-based songs is to create love for God and the values.
- Prepare the song well before the session.
- Sing with joy and actions if possible. Use cymbals and other musical instruments if available.
- Encourage children to play musical instruments if they are learning.
- Devotional songs can be of different deities.
- Songs should be simple and easy for the children to learn. Long and dragging songs often become boring.
- Sanskrit chants can be made interesting by singing with actions.

3. Games

Have value-based and innovative games. You may even encourage children to make their own games.

4. Arts and Crafts

The Arts and Crafts projects should support the topic of the class. The materials can be either sponsored

or sevaks can request the parents to contribute.

5. Food

Prasad is one of the most important parts of a Balavihar class. Some children initially come only because of the prasad they would get at the end of the class.

Request Balavihar mothers to make the naivedya by turn. Avoid readymade sweets, chocolates, biscuits, etc. On birthdays parents can serve special snacks in the Balavihar class.

6. Outings

Sevaks may plan field trips to nearby ashrams, temples, historical places, orphanages, senior citizens' home, etc. Mission acharyas or senior Mission members can accompany the group or address them. This is to instill devotion, patriotism, and the spirit of service.

7. Camps

Children can be encouraged to join 2-3 days Balavihar camps organized by the Mission. Camps act as crash courses to Balavihar classes and also give children enlightening entertainment, with an environment to be independent, adventurous, friendly, sensitive, tolerant, and patient.

8. Bhagavad Geeta Chanting Competition

Every year, Mission centers conduct Geeta chanting competitions for children and adults. Encourage community children and adults to participate. For their practice at home, they can buy the Geeta Chanting Learning Kit (booklet with audio tape) from the local Mission center.

9. Library

Collect value-based and spiritual books, audios, and videos to make a library. Children can share their books with others. Encourage them to share aloud what they read. This will improve not just their reading habits, but will also give them confidence to speak in public. Encourage children to also organize and lead various activities.

CONCLUSION: Balavihar . . .

- Trains children and inculcates in them a reverence for our ancient culture and the eagerness to live an inspired life of noble values.
- Creates self-confidence to cheerfully serve and act; inculcates personal discipline with a true spirit of leadership.
- Moulds the children's capacity to express and assert their individuality.
- Strives to bring out dormant faculties and detect defects; cultivates and improves children's creative abilities.
- Helps children develop a healthy resistance against cheap temptations in today's world; provides them with an atmosphere to grow with noble ideals, healthy emotions, and physical disciplines.
- Aims at a balanced development of the child.

ANNEX 1

Curriculum

<u>ASSESSMENT STAGE</u>	<u>SYLLABUS</u>	<u>GRADES</u>	
Key Stage 1	Spiritual Alphabet Values Bala Ramayana Bala Bhagavatam Festivals – Basic Basic Prayers	1-3	Can name alphabet, Identify 3-4 values, Name key characters Name key characters Name 4 main festivals Chant all opening and Closing prayers
		4-5	Identify and explain Upto 7 values, explain parts of Ramayana, explain at least 1 festival Explain at least 1 of the basic prayers and chant 6 verses of Guru Stotram
Assessment will be in the form a short one-to-one oral discussion, around age 6 ½ (at the teachers' discretion.) Teaching will be in the form of stories, songs, craft, games.			
Key Stage 2	Bala Ramayana Bala Bhagavatam Festivals and Culture – Intermediate Intermediate Prayers Hanuman Chalisa – Basic Symbolism in Hinduism - Basic	1-3	Explain story Explain at least 3 'Krishna' stories Name ALL Festivals and explain 2 key ones Chant <u>all</u> prayers Chant at least 10 verses Explain 3 main symbols (Om, Trinity)
		4-6	Understand basic symbolism of Puranas, and their structure within Scriptures; understand symbolism of 3 main festivals, understand and explain the meaning of prayers, understand and explain meaning of at least 6 verses of the Hanuman Chalisa; Explain all symbols in syllabus
Assessment will be in the form of 3 separate 20 minute (mainly multiple –choice) written tests, around age 10 ½ (at teachers' discretion) . Teaching will be in the form of stories, games, drama and discussion. There will also be some role-play and children will be asked to research and present ideas to the class. Craft work will be limited to festivals and celebrations.			
Key Stage 3	Dasavatara Introduction to Hindu Culture Hinduism Module M Festivals and Culture	4-6	Explain all 10 avataras Explain structure and underlying Philosophy C Grade Explain symbolism of all major festivals
		5-8	Be able to discuss and analyse Selected topics from Hindu Culture, Hanuman Chalisa and Symbolism in Hinduism B+ Grade in GCSE Module M

Additional texts:

I Love you Letters
 PS Mr God
 Mahabharata
 – Basic
 Hanuman Chalisa –
 Intermediate
 Symbolism in Hinduism
 Intermediate

There will be an internal (CM) assessment as well as external assessment (GCSE Board), *when the child is around 14.*

The GCSE is a 2 hour written paper.

GCSE	Hinduism Module F Game of Life I Love you letters Art of God Symbolism Know what you have Art of Living Vision of the Geeta
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There will be an internal (CM) assessment as well as external assessment (GCSE Board), at **age 16/17**

The GCSE is a 2 hour written paper. The GCSE Module F can be taken earlier, and the very able students may be allowed to take the two modules (M and F) together.

Curriculum for Teachers :

Art of Living
 Symbolism in Hinduism
 Introduction to Hindu Culture

All Teachers should attend at least one study class and per week.