Chandigarh Newsline
MONDAY ■ SEPTEMBER 18, 2000

I suggest...

COMMUNICATE!

SUCHITA MALIK

HELLO! Can I talk to you a little later, SSP. I'm a little busy. I'm being grilled by a 14-year-old girl right now regarding facilities Chandigarh offers to children... children's library, planetarium, science museum, power cuts, nylon socks etc etc." "Fourteen year old girl! She can't be employed..." said the other voice on the telephone in wonder! "Employed, by no means... she is a student of Carmel Convent and has come to interview me..." said the soft-spoken Lady with a disarming smile and an equally humble demeanour to match.

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The Lady was none other than Vineeta Rai, our gracious advisor to the UT Administrator. And the girl in question was Surabhi, my daughter, who had suddenly caught a fancy to interview the low-profile bureaucrat and confront her with the children's felt demands. After all, it was a part of her reporting assignment for the School Express and Surabhi's excitement knew no bounds since the time she had set her eyes on this interview.

I remember her nervous call to the advisor's office introducing herself and making a request for an interview. "Interview?" said the bewildered PA and added hastily that they would get back to her after consulting 'madam'. A couple of hours later had come the tinker and it was the advisor's office calling for Surabhi and informing her about the interview for the next day at 10.30 am.

"But, I have my school... er, I don't want to miss my school, please," had said Surabhi in a requesting tone. "OK, you talk to 'madam' yourself", pat came the reply and the PA put her direct to the advisor. "Yes, Surabhi, it's so nice talking to you dear, I am extremely busy tomorrow... I wish I had known about your plans.. I would have delayed my meetings for you.. or you can join me for lunch tomorrow and talk.. or what about anytime on Wednesday, then I can give you as much time as you want," had said the warm lady while Surabhi could barely blurt out "yes, Ma'am! It's all right Ma'am! Wednesday would be just fine too, Ma'am! Good Night Ma'am!"

Surabhi reached the advisor's office with Vikram, her younger brother. The duo was with the advisor for more than half an hour. The affectionate lady immediately made them comfortable with some personal talk with a glass of coke and some biscuits. Kids being kids, they shot all kinds of questions at her with a big list of children's demands. It was interesting to see how the questions were heard and answered with a lot of patience. At the end of the interview, children's suggestions were carefully noted down and an assurance given that something would definitely be done at the earliest.

I was left wondering... I wonder whether such a positive response and interpersonal communication on a one-to-one basis by teachers, parents, neighbours, educationists, academicians could possible give new direction to our youth who are going astray and are in dire need of it.