PHYSICAL & EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE PERPETRATION

While incidents of school violence are subject to intense media attention, it is in fact the case that incidents of violence are on the decline and, actually, schools are among the safest places for youth (Dinkes, Kemp, & Baum, 2009; Eaton et al., 2008). Perhaps as a reaction to the urgency communicated by high–profile cases of school violence, schools have instituted various practices that, after years of research, have come to be seen as ineffective, and even harmful. For example, Zero Tolerance policies, which have been argued to increase the consistency of rule enforcement, have proved ineffective for decreasing the behaviors they are meant to extinguish (for review, see American Psychological Association, 2008). What is more, the high suspension and expulsion rates caused by zero tolerance policies have been linked to reductions in school climate and students' academic achievement; increases in student behavior problems; disproportionate discipline of minority youth; and increased likelihood of delayed graduation and dropout (APA, 2008). For more information, review the California Department of Education's Zero Tolerance brief at: cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/se/zerotolerance.asp

Effective evidence–based strategies that reduce rates of physical and emotional violence perpetration have a common denominator—non–punitive, restorative prevention and intervention practices. Supports in this area have two strands:

1. Improving the environment to decrease the reinforcement students receive for acts of aggression, and

2. Establishing sanctions that decrease the likelihood that students will reoffend.

What Works Briefs summarize state–of–the–art practices, strategies, and programs for improving school climate. Based on current scholarship in education, school psychology, and other related disciplines, each *What Works Brief* provides a number of practical recommendations for school staff, parents, and community members. *What Works Briefs* can be used separately to target specific issues, or together to address more complex, system–wide issues. All *What Works Briefs* are organized into three sections: Quick Wins: What Teachers & Adults Can Do Right Now; Universal Supports: School–wide Policies, Practices, & Programs; and, finally, Targeted Supports: Intensive Supports for At–Risk Youth.

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Establish clear, consistent, and fair classroom rules and expectations

» Students must have a voice in the selection of the norms and expectations for themselves and their peers. Have all students in the class sign their names to the agreed–upon rules and expectations as a representation of the classroom community's norms.

» Rules and expectations should focus on what the student *should do*, rather than what they should not do.

» Enforce these rules consistently, uniformly, and without negotiation. Any deviation from standardized enforcement of classroom and schoolwide rules and expectations by an adult will communicate preference among students, a process that undermines the sense of community.

» Avoid threats. Threats are coercive and undermine the climate of the classroom. The need for threats is eliminated when rules, expectations, and related consequences are transparent, fair, and distributed consistently.

» Be an advocate for clear, consistent, and fair schoolwide discipline policies and practices that:

  • Are rooted in a shared mission among school community members (staff, families, and students),

  • Involve parents in discipline decisions, and

  • Reconsider Zero Tolerance policies.

» Volunteer to be an advisor to a "student discipline advisory board," wherein students maintain voice and ownership over classroom and schoolwide rules and expectations. As members of the advisory board, students would be given the opportunity to inform both policies and related disciplinary actions.

Be visible, active, and interested

» Use relationship–building strategies, as outlined in the following *What Works Briefs: Caring Relationships and High Expectations (#1) and School Connectedness (#4)*.

» Volunteer to provide a physical presence during typically unstructured (and non–supervised) times, such as during passing periods, lunch breaks, and in parking lots. Advocate for collecting neighborhood volunteers to be present during these times, including parents and grandparents.

» Notice positive actions taken by students. Provide praise and encouragement for responsible choices, such as informing an adult about a potential threat to school safety.

» Take special interest in students that appear socially isolated. Build relationships with these students and also refer them to appropriate school–based student support personnel.

Universal supports reduce the likelihood that youth will engage in aggressive and violent acts. They target the whole student population, rather than any single at–risk group. Because they generally require more planning across people, programs, or communities, universal supports for violence prevention may take longer to implement than "quick wins."

Institute the use of positive, restorative discipline practices

» Implement school–wide positive classroom management practices. References for practices include:

- Transformative Classroom Management. Founded upon evidence–based principles of motivation and engagement, Transformative Classroom Management practices help schools increase students' interest in learning and willingness to follow school and classroom behavioral norms. transformativeclassroom.com

- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. PBIS is an organizing framework for helping school personnel organize and deliver evidence–based behavior management practices. While secondary schools face a variety of challenges in implementing PBIS (Flannery, Sugai, & Anderson, 2009), reductions in disruptive behavior in middle school samples have been noted (e.g., Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006). pbis.org

» RESTORATIVE JUSTICE. Restorative justice programs are based on the premise that individuals and/or groups in conflict must work together to resolve the problem and repair the resultant damage caused to their relationship. Restorative justice programs applied in school settings focus on the relationship between the perpetrator of the crime (i.e., incident requiring disciplinary strategy) and members of the school community, including potential victims, bystanders, and their families. According to McClusky and colleagues (2008), the practice of restorative justice contributes to school conflict resolution in a variety of ways, including: involvement of all parties in conflict resolution through a fair process; a focus on repairing relationships and trust, rather than on retribution or punishment; and a focus on sharing views and experiences and developing empathy for others in the school community. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime recently published a *Handbook on Restorative Justice Programmes*. It is available for download at: unodc.org/pdf/criminal_justice/06–56290_Ebook.pdf

» CONFLICT RESOLUTION EDUCATION. Consider implementing a conflict resolution education program, such as a peer mediation program and/or curriculum. Conflict resolution programs take many forms, from training a core group of students as peer mediators to training all students in the school. The goal of conflict resolution programs is to build students' ability to apply learned self–awareness and communication skills to prevent and resolve interpersonal conflicts as they naturally arise within their peer groups. Conflict resolution education programs have strong positive effects for reducing disciplinary infractions and suspensions in high–school aged adolescents, with more comprehensive programs showing greater results (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007). View the Association for Conflict Resolution's *Recommended Standards for School–Based Peer Mediation Programs 2007* at: mediate.com/acreducation/pg18.cfm

Improve knowledge, rethink current practices, and establish evidence–based policies and procedures

» Establish district– and school–wide policies and procedures for responding to actual or potential violence.

» Provide professional development opportunities in crisis prevention and intervention, culturally competent practice, and positive behavior approaches.

» Reconsider Zero Tolerance Policies.

» Improve collaboration and communication with parents, law enforcement, juvenile justice, and mental health professionals to target both building skills in youth who perpetrate violence (or have threatened to do so), and to build an array of thoughtful, meaningful, and appropriate sanctions.

» Create a continuum of sanctions that have meaningful implications for students, rather than serving to isolate them from the school community. For example, provide restorative opportunities, such as opportunities to provide community service within local organizations during the time they would normally be suspended.

» Increase training for teachers in culturally responsive classroom behavior management and instruction.

TARGETED SUPPORTS: INTENSIVE SUPPORTS FOR AT–RISK YOUTH

Children who perpetrate aggressive acts tend to have emotional needs of their own. These students often experience challenging home lives with few supports for the development of their interpersonal skills. By high school, these students often require explicit instruction on skills for the regulation of emotion, including anger and frustration, that they may not have had the opportunity to learn. Targeted supports in this area also target the social ecology of the individual student, including their family life. Often times, this work occurs in a one–to–one setting with a trained psychologist, counselor, or therapist. Therefore, the first line of action is for schools to identify referral resources in the community. Community agencies often employ the types of skilled staff and evidence–based therapeutic interventions that may not be available in the school setting.

Establish Learning Support Teams (LSTs)

Learning Support Teams (LSTs) are established to locate school and local resources, including agencies that provide family and youth health and mental health services; identify school needs and existing resources; and coordinate service delivery across programs and settings. LSTs are used to reduce fragmentation in service availability and ensure that resources are delivered to appropriate students.

For more information on LSTs, visit the UCLA Center for Mental Health in the Schools: smhp.psych.ucla.edu

Establish Student Assistance Programs

Student Assistance Programs (SAPs) (a.k.a., Student Assistance Teams, Child Study Teams, Student Study Teams) are established to perform a number of important duties, including: (1) providing a process within which teachers can refer students that appear to be at–risk, (2) providing a process within which administration can refer students who appear to have behavioral and/or emotional difficulties stemming from challenging life situations, and (3) connecting students to appropriate resources, both at school and within the community. SAPs usually include teachers, administrators, and student assistance staff (counselors, psychologists, speech therapists).

For more information on SAPs, visit:

» The California SAP Resource Center casapresources. org/home.php

» The UCLA Center for Mental Health in the Schools smhp.psych.ucla.edu

Consider Evidence–based Programs for Youth Involved in Aggressive & Violent Acts

AGGRESSION REPLACEMENT TRAINING® (ART®) is a cognitive behavioral intervention program to help children and adolescents improve social skill competence and moral reasoning, better manage anger, and reduce aggressive behavior. The program specifically targets chronically aggressive children and adolescents and consists of 10 weeks (30 sessions) of intervention training, and is divided into three components—social skills training, anger–control training, and training in moral reasoning. Incremental learning, reinforcement techniques, and guided group discussions enhance skill acquisition and reinforce the lessons in the curriculum. promoteprevent.org

MULTISYSTEMIC THERAPY (MST) is an intensive family– and community–based treatment that addresses the multiple determinants of serious antisocial behavior. MST addresses the multiple factors known to be related to delinquency across the key settings, or systems, within which youth are embedded. MST strives to promote behavior change in the youth's natural environment, using the strengths of each system (e.g., family, peers, school, neighborhood, indigenous support network) to facilitate change. colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/modelprograms/MST.html

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PROGRAM (SFP) is a family skills training program designed to increase resilience and reduce risk factors for behavioral, emotional, academic, and social problems in children and adolescents 3 to 16 years old. SFP comprises three life–skills courses delivered in 14 weekly, 2–hour sessions. The Parenting Skills sessions are designed to help parents learn to increase desired behaviors in children by using attention and rewards, clear communication, effective discipline, substance use education, problem solving, and limit setting. The Children's Life Skills sessions are designed to help children learn effective communication, understand their feelings, improve social and problem–solving skills, resist peer pressure, understand the consequences of substance use, and comply with parental rules. In the Family Life Skills sessions, families engage in structured family activities, practice therapeutic child play, conduct family meetings, learn communication skills, practice effective discipline, reinforce positive behaviors in each other, and plan family activities together. Participation in ongoing family support groups and booster sessions is encouraged to increase generalization and the use of skills learned. nrepp.samhsa.gov/ViewIntervention.aspx?id=44

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