

PREVENTION PROGRAMMING

Violence is primarily considered to be learned behaviour. Violence can impact children at many points in their lives including before school (internalizing societal messages about how girls and boys should behave), during school years (gendered-messages that are reinforced by treating boys and girls differently, bullying, verbal slurs, harassment and dating violence) and into adult life in forms of harassment, sexual assault and intimate partner abuse (Boland, 1995). In the hope that learning about violence and abuse at an early age can prevent its occurrence later on, schools and community agencies often accept the mandate to offer violence prevention programs

This section describes different models of prevention and types of prevention programs, making the case for schools as a logical venue within which to offer violence prevention efforts. It raises a number of key issues including the need to focus on gender-based violence, the often-ignored links between various forms of violence and the common skills that can address these. It suggests the need to both provide multiple programs across time and to extend violence prevention efforts beyond children to the school culture, to parents and into the community. Finally, it presents issues with respect to planning and funding programs.

What is Prevention?

“Prevention provides an escape from a negative life course, and helps to develop competency and knowledge that leads to a more desired life course in general” (Veinot, December 1999, p.1).

Prevention is about changing directions. The basic premise of violence prevention programming is that if violence is learned, it can be unlearned and individuals can choose non-violent alternatives.

Violence prevention programs can be directed at a total population (universal or primary prevention), at a group considered ‘at-risk’ (secondary prevention) or at a group already experiencing violence either as victimizers or victims (tertiary prevention). Our primary focus in this resource manual is on universal, school-based violence prevention programs, that is, those directed at all children/youth and delivered in the school setting. Stopping violence before it occurs is the main goal of universal prevention programs. School-based violence prevention efforts for children/youth are generally based on the principle that education can change awareness, knowledge and teach skills (and maybe change behaviour) as well as empower children and youth.

Schools and Prevention Efforts

Gender-based violence occurs in both private (family, intimate relationships) and public spheres (school, community)(National Crime Prevention Centre, 2000). Schools can play a significant role in teaching non-violence. The reasons for focusing on schools

as the venue for prevention efforts are several. First, schools are a key social learning milieu for children, thus, providing a context in which to learn non-violent social skills. Second, social, behavioural and academic successes at school often forecast adjustment and productivity in adult life (National Crime Prevention Centre, 2001). As such, it makes sense to attempt to improve children's capacity for pro-social behaviour both now and in future. Third, there is a growing perception that schools are not what they used to be or what they could and need to be – a safe and caring learning environment. A number of violence prevention programs provide strategies to address the entire school culture. Fourth, teachers seem to spend an inordinate amount of time and energy resolving conflicts and managing disruptive behaviours in the classroom and school grounds. If children can be empowered to solve some of their own conflicts, teachers spend less time doing so. Fifth, early intervention is deemed essential to unlearning violence and learning non-violent choices. Addressing programs to children when they are school-aged could prevent violence later when they are adolescents. Finally, violence in its many forms is increasingly being viewed as a major health issue that can be addressed within school curricula.

External Versus Internal Violence Prevention Programs

Violence prevention programs are often offered in schools by an external agency with expertise in addressing a particular form of violence (Tutty, 1991). For example, sexual assault centers were the first to develop child sexual abuse prevention programs; dating violence prevention was first offered by staff from shelters for abused women. One advantage of externally offered programs is that those who present the program are most often professionals that know the material well and are comfortable with the topic. The program can be presented more uniformly, without teachers adding in idiosyncratic material. For example, in sexual abuse programs even trained teachers may emphasize “stranger-danger” rather than focusing on the more common abuse by caretakers or relatives. Staff from external programs can comfortably discuss the violence prevention concepts with children, thus relieving teachers of some of the responsibility to handle disclosures and potentially embarrassing material. Teachers are often reluctant to take a major role in violence prevention programs, feeling that such duties are beyond the scope of their jobs.

A disadvantage of external programs is that use of the program is voluntary; only a portion of the children in an area will have access to the program. Teachers or principals who invite the program may already be sensitized to the abuse issue and may have previously provided some information to their students. Those most likely to need the information, individuals who know little about the problem, are least likely to be aware of the programs. Another disadvantage of external programs is that staff is in the schools for only a limited time.

Internal programs are integrated directly into the schools' curricula, into health or family life education classes, for example. Teachers both present the material and assume responsibility for leading role-plays and answering questions from children. Schools are a natural environment for prevention programs, addressing entire populations of children

with an approach that fits with the purpose of the institution – providing education. Children may more likely disclose to teachers; however, training is especially important, as teachers, like most of the population, often feel uncomfortable discussing sensitive topics with children. In addition, teachers may themselves have been the victims of interpersonal violence, and discussing the topic may be difficult.

Another advantage of internal programs is that teachers can integrate violence prevention concepts with other relevant topics, such as self-esteem and resolving conflict, or as issues emerge between students. A disadvantage of school-based curricula, as mentioned previously, is that some teachers may feel that the topic area is beyond what they should be expected to teach. Despite having a prepared curriculum, teachers may feel uncomfortable presenting the material, a reaction that is likely communicated to students.

The ideal, perhaps, is an integration of both external and internal programs. For example, staff from external agencies may present the prevention materials within the school and are responsible for leading student discussions. They provide supplementary materials for the teachers to utilize in follow-up discussions in their classrooms. Teacher training is a key component in integrating the two types of programs. One disadvantage of such an integrated approach is that collaboration is time-consuming and requires considerable co-operation. However, the result is a prevention program that targets its message to larger segments of the community.

Current Trends and Implications for Prevention Programming

A proliferation of school-based violence prevention programs, developed in the past thirty years, address school violence, bullying, sexual abuse, dating violence, discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault and the sexual exploitation of children and youth. In general, school-based violence prevention programs have been narrowly focused, tending to address only one form of violence. This ignores the similarities across both the dynamics of interpersonal violence and ways to address violence. Further, it does not consciously build on the strengths and connections between the various programs.

1. Linking Forms of Violence

Until recently, violence prevention programs have not typically acknowledged the fundamental similarity between all forms of abuse: one person (or a group of people) exercising power and control over another. Dating violence and sexual harassment programs have most successfully recognized the power and control dynamics of violence; however, not all of these programs explicitly utilize this perspective. By presenting all violence prevention programs from a common framework, school administrators could strengthen the generalization of learning from one program area to others (Thurston, Meadows, Tutty & Bradshaw, 1999).

When we more broadly define violence as the exercise of power, intimidation or force that results in hurt, fear or injury, we expand what should be included in violence

prevention. For example, in addition to addressing physical intimidation, bullying programs need to include non-physical forms of bullying such as gossiping or spreading rumours, excluding or rejecting others. Further, reducing these emotionally abusive forms of bullying needs to be included in the outcomes measured in evaluations.

2. Taking Gender Into Account

Violence prevention strategies need to be implemented in a gender-sensitive manner. In schools, this sensitivity should cover two aspects: gender differences in who perpetrates and who is victimized by violence and assessing the possible differential impact of violence prevention programs on boys as compared to girls. The majority of programs do not identify the fact that girls and young women are the most likely victims of many forms of violence (dating violence, child sexual abuse, sexual assault, sexual harassment and child sexual exploitation). Secondly, some recent evaluations show that boys and young men have a different reaction (typically poorer attitudes, less knowledge) than girls or young women after participating in the same program. We will elaborate on each of these points.

When describing the different forms of violence, one should clarify the gender differences in victim-victimizer rates, especially for adolescents. Nonetheless, it is important to note the fact that boys and men are also victims of abuse. Presenters should avoid blaming men in general or stereotyping either men as perpetrators or women as victims. This can be accomplished by stressing the impact of socialization in our culture in which the overwhelming messages about being male or female set the stage for violence. Traditional sex-role beliefs that women should be subservient to men and that women and children are essentially the property of the partner/father are examples of such messages. Providing youth an understanding of the gender socialization in our culture could increase both girls' and boys' awareness of these detrimental messages and helps them to understand how such attitudes can lead to violence. We recommend that all violence prevention and conflict resolution programs with youth incorporate some information about gender-role stereotyping and gender expectations.

Both children and school staff need education about gender bias and stereotyping. Teachers need opportunities to consider how to avoid making comparisons or generalizations of students based on gender, for example, assigning chores or duties without respect to sex. This would promote a school culture that takes the idea of equality and mutual respect seriously and models this to students through teacher-to-teacher and teacher-to-student interactions.

When gender analyses have been conducted on the impact of various violence prevention programs, the evidence often shows differential effects on girls and boys. In several evaluations of dating violence prevention programs, boys and young men had worse attitudes after the prevention program than before. This "backlash effect" likely results from young men feeling blamed by descriptions of gender-based abuse.

Research conducted by Artz and colleagues in 2000 showed that girls and young woman score higher in appropriate knowledge and attitudes in topics such as dating violence both before and after prevention programs than do boys in the same classes. This suggests that anti-violence programs for girls may need a different focus, if young women already know much of the information. Young women and girls may also need different approaches at different developmental stages than do boys.

Artz et al. (2000) also looked at gender differences in how receptive some Canadian students are to peer helping, as in peer mediation. Nearly one-quarter of the elementary school boys rating peer helping as a waste of time 'often' or 'always', while less than one-tenth of the girls agreed. Artz and colleagues examined elementary children's attitudes towards seeking help when bullied and attitudes towards those victimized by bullies. When compared to girls, boys were more likely to agree that victims should not 'complain' about the bullying incident, while girls were more likely to endorse telling a teacher or other adult. Boys were significantly more likely to see name calling and teasing as acceptable and to regard bullies as cowards, while less likely to befriend children who are bullied and more likely to see them as 'wimps' than the girls.

Preventing violence should focus on all children, both girls and boys. We must make a concerted effort to better engage young men in preventing violence against girls and young women that alleviates a perception of being blamed for all violence, without shifting to a gender neutral presentation. At this time, we have no research evidence that changing the content and/or the presentation style would lead to more positive results for boys and young men in reaction to violence prevention programming.

Recently, however, several researchers and educators have advocated conducting violence prevention programs in gender-specific groups since the situations and ways in which girls and young women are violent differs from boys (Artz et al., 2000; Cummings & Leschied, 2001). Further, girls and young women rate separate gender groups as more positive than mixed gender groups for topics like dating violence, sexual harassment and sexual assault (CRI-VIFF, 1999). Anecdotally, representatives from several Canadian dating violence programs have had positive reactions from young men when they shifted to separate gender groups in which the boys learned about the effects of traditional sex-role gender stereotypes on young women. Programs such as "Making Waves" from New Brunswick then bring the groups back together for a joint discussion, again with very positive feedback.

We are not suggesting that all prevention programs be offered separately by gender, but rather that we provide both gender-specific and mixed-gender discussion groups, especially for adolescents. This may address the differing needs of girls and boys, while providing opportunities for each gender to also learn about the concerns and experiences of the other.

3. Common Skill Sets

The major themes of prevention programs include socializing children, by promoting non-violent values such as egalitarian behaviour and the right to be different, and developing the skills to put these values into practice. The skills that address violence across its varied forms are similar. They include good communication; non-violent conflict resolution choices; the ability to understand and take the perspective of others into account; problem solving that includes learning about alternatives to violence; healthy relationships built on respect for self and others; and support- and help-seeking skills. This common skill set provides the opportunity to link, build-upon and reinforce the learning from one violence prevention program to another.

4. Multiple Programs Across Time

It is unlikely that one program can effectively address the multiple forms of violence that students potentially face. Programs must be developmentally appropriate and repetition over the years is recommended. Violence prevention is not a quick-fix (one show, one video, one curriculum), but multifaceted (Minnesota Department of Education, March 1995). Violence prevention programs in schools should ensure continuity; the process should begin early and interventions should be repeated regularly throughout the stages of child development. Several programs included in this resource manual were designed to address one form of violence, such as bullying, across the entire school experience, from Kindergarten to Grade 12. More often, however, programs address one specific form of violence for a limited age group of children. This means that schools need to offer a series of prevention programs and the responsibility for integrating the various pieces into a whole remains on the shoulders of the school teachers and administration.

Fitting various prevention programs within the parameters of schools, classrooms and overburdened teachers is challenging (Resources Implementation Sub-Committee of the Action Committee Against Violence, 2001). As mentioned previously, prevention programs are best linked to curriculum, so that they become part of the regular program of studies. The Alberta Teachers' Association curriculum, Safe and Caring Schools, is an example of a violence prevention approach that integrates the knowledge and skills into the school's regular curricula.

The early school grades appear to be particularly strategic times to facilitate children's academic and social competence as well as to enhance personal safety and conflict-resolution skills. Start early and continue to present prevention strategies in age-appropriate ways throughout the elementary, junior high and high school years. The most comprehensive approach to presenting violence prevention skills and that violence is never acceptable include:

- The emotional, social, health and legal consequences of violence (including emotional, physical and sexual violence or violence based on race, class, age, gender, sexual orientation and abilities) and its impact on victims, perpetrators and the community

- Identifying and express feelings in non-violent ways, wants and needs, and accepting rejection
- Prosocial and self-esteem enhancing skills
- How to deal with peer pressure
- How to peacefully resolve conflict – conflict resolution, mediation, arbitration, restorative intervention and reintegration
- Identifying anger and how to respond appropriately
- Making choices and decisions including refusing and resisting violence
- Understanding the way in which the popular media reinforces sexism, violence against girls and women, sexual stereotypes and racism
- Information about the legal and criminal definitions and consequences of violence
- Information about the gendered nature of many forms of violence and the dynamics of different forms of abuse including child abuse/sexual abuse, discrimination/racism, sexual harassment, homophobia, sexual assault, bullying and the sexual exploitation of children and youth

Programs should use approaches that engage young people. This typically entails using a variety of interactive techniques to capture the attention of children and adolescents. Teachers and school staff are not the only ones who can lead violence prevention efforts. Inviting students take leadership is not a new idea. It has been used for over thirty years in peer mediation approaches.

Today there is a growing movement to utilize peer education in violence prevention programs especially with respect to gender-based violence. Having students lead presentations or develop and offer plays to their peers are but two examples of ways to more actively involve adolescents or children. The hope is that hearing the message from their peers will seem more relevant and have a stronger impact.

5. Teachers and School Staff Training

Teachers, administrators and all staff who interact with students (janitors, lunchroom staff, school nurses) need opportunities to examine their own attitudes about violence and their expectations for student behaviour. Ongoing as well as targeted training can assist the entire school staff in coming to a common understanding about specific concepts, such as the forms that violence takes. In-service training can also teach all school staff about how to de-escalate conflict, to call for help when needed and to use restorative interventions instead of shaming, intimidation or physical force. Violence prevention training for school staff should also include strategies/protocols to deal with disclosures prior to program being presented to students.

6. Changing School Culture

Preventing violence should concern the entire community. Violence is not simply an individual problem, but takes place within and is impacted by multiple, social contexts (family, school, neighbourhood, community, society). Violence prevention is best viewed from an ecological or health promotion perspective in which, in addition to individual

change, the focus is also to improve schools and communities. School-based violence prevention programs that are concerned with multiple levels of school functioning (students, educators, school staff, parents, community) rather than just aiming at changes in the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of individuals (especially when the individuals are children with relatively little power) are thought to be more successful. However, at this time, we do not have the research evidence to verify this perception.

We encourage all violence prevention programs to find ways to become part of the culture and overall direction for the school. This is necessary to create an environment in which violence, including gender-based violence, is not tolerated (Boland, 1995; Thurston et al, 1999). Currently many violence prevention programs encourage multi-component programming that promotes a safe-and-caring learning environment. To this end, provincial, school district/board and school-wide initiatives are beginning to replace a solely classroom-focus. For example, the Toronto District School Board is developing a bullying prevention handbook/document for schools. The handbook will have background information on bullying, steps to creating a school wide bullying prevention policy, staff and parent awareness, responding to bullying incidents and a student curriculum for grades K-8. Similarly, Alberta Learning's Safe and Caring Schools and British Columbia's Safe School Centre are provincial initiatives that promote the fostering of safe and supportive school environments.

Bullying prevention initiatives have led the way in recognizing the need to change school culture to support and reinforcing positive, non-violent behaviours, defining inappropriate behaviour and establishing clear consequences when this occurs. To date, the prevention efforts that address other forms of violence, and that have generally existed for longer, have not typically proposed a focus on school-culture.

Creating a nonviolent school climate involves multiple components such as instituting a school-wide prevention plan that addresses all forms of violence impacting school-aged children and youth, examines policies and procedures to address violence, teacher and school staff training and extends the learning into the community through parent training and community partnerships. This philosophy is based on the understanding that children and youth make decisions that are shaped by their ideas about life and the choices modeled by others. School-wide support enables children to see pro-social skills modeled by teachers and other staff. The consequences of violence must be clear and consistently enforced, but merely applying punishment for violence, without teaching alternatives, will not effectively change behaviours, and may exacerbate undesirable actions (Minnesota Department of Education, March 1995). Teachers, school administration and others need training to respond immediately and consistently to incidents of violence (Boland, 1995). Policies and procedures need to spell out how to handle both violent incidents under the school's jurisdiction and disclosures of violence that take place elsewhere.

7. School-Community Connections

Children learn appropriate and inappropriate behaviours in a variety of settings. Therefore, families, schools, faith communities, organized sports and the media can all either perpetuate violence or help to build children's attitudes and skills through modelling and promoting positive youth development. One way in which to involve the community is to coordinate training and teaching efforts with local resources such as, shelters, sexual assault centres, educational theatre companies and peer educators). Many of the programs reviewed in this resource manual were developed and implemented by community organizations for delivery within the school as well as other community settings.

Another area of school-community partnership is in providing special resources such as counselling for children who require support after a violence prevention program has been implemented. A range of intervention services should be available in the school and/or the community should students need assistance after participating in a prevention program. Protocols for accessing these services should be developed before programs are presented.

Some communities are becoming active partners with schools by providing community organizations and school personnel with forums and information about community resources in preventing and intervening violence. . School personnel are often inundated with pamphlets and other marketing materials from various prevention programs. However, they typically have neither the training nor the time to make informed choices about what programs to utilize. In 1999, Thurston and colleagues suggested the need for a community advocate to be a knowledgeable liaison between programs and schools. Soon after, the Calgary based Action Committee against Violence developed a Youth Violence Prevention Co-ordinator position for this purpose. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the coordinator position (Tutty & Nixon, 2000) confirmed its utility in assisting school personnel in identifying good available programs and promoting programs that had been evaluated. Further, the Coordinator developed and circulated an inventory of the continuum of services for youth violence prevention in the city of Calgary.

8. Parent Involvement

The family is the primary educator in the development of children's values and attitudes with the school playing a supportive role. In order to maintain and enhance the school-home partnership, parents must be kept informed. Involving parents in violence prevention activities and knowledge will strengthen their ability to be positive role models and reinforce the concepts and skills about which children and youth are learning at school. Through parent meetings, orientation sessions, workshop presentations, participation in classroom lesson activities, letters, handouts, and invitation to school activities, parents can share in the teaching of non-violence problem solving and communicate with their children about sensitive subjects such as child sexual abuse, bullying, dating violence and sexual harassment.

9. Planning a Comprehensive Violence Prevention Response

Changing the response to violence within a school culture requires a philosophical agreement by all stakeholders about the value of violence prevention and a shared belief that working together will make a difference. This means communication and teamwork not only among teachers, administration, support staff and the school board, but also with parents and members of the community, the students and leaders in the field of violence prevention. To be more successful, school violence prevention programs need the support of high-level school administrators in order to ensure sufficient resources to cover the costs of prevention programs.

Planning a comprehensive, integrated violence prevention approach in schools requires action on several fronts. First, take a look at the ‘big’ picture: include the broad spectrum of violence prevention in your planning. Consider violence prevention as a whole, rather than as separate and unrelated pieces.

Know the needs of your school. You might conduct a “school audit” or assess the school’s violence prevention needs and accomplishments. Examine the school’s policies and procedures. Assess the resources, both financial and people, to offer training and implement the program.

Finding sustainable funding in these times of dwindling resources is challenging. A number of programs receive financial support during their development, initial implementation and evaluation, when they are considered “innovative”. All too often, though, no new funding is available once the pilot is completed. Alternatively, in times of financial restraint, prevention programs are often the first to lose funding, because they are considered expendable.

Create a process that ensures ongoing ‘buy-in’ from all stakeholders. School-based activities can keep everyone motivated and informed. Examples include holding student conferences and forums that highlight violence prevention. Two examples of such student conferences are from Labrador in Canada: the annual Young Women’s Conference sponsored by the Labrador West Family Crisis Shelter and Violence is Not Love Youth Symposium sponsored by the Grace Sparkes House. Events such as these foster student involvement and provide leadership opportunities for adolescents to instruct and motivate younger students. Another school activity is artwork or poster contests that express the school’s vision about violence prevention. The city of Calgary sponsors a Turn Off the Violence poster completion that culminates in a week of school activities each November, while a school in Yorkton Saskatchewan used children’s artwork to create a calendar that was sent to every student’s household as a way of keeping violence prevention ideas alive over the entire year. Celebrating and acknowledging successes by staff and students is also important in nurturing a caring and peaceful school culture. Calgary’s Peace Hero’s Program is an example of celebrating peace initiatives in local schools. Pathways to Peace Points are awarded to school initiatives (e.g., conflict resolution program, school safety audit, letter writing campaign to stop media violence, peace poster contest) that promote peaceful solutions in the

school community, empower youth, and turn awareness into action. Each spring the schools that receive a score of more than 80 points receive a gold, silver or bronze Peace Heroes medal.

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