Chinook

Family Life Newsletter

Cooperative Extension Service

Department of Family & Consumer Sciences
College of Agriculture, University of Wyoming

Caring before it's too Late

Youth Violence Prevention

He was born three weeks premature, so they always called him "runt." With a sensitive stomach, he cried more often and needed 5 feedings instead of 4. "Let him tough it out, don't spoil him," his grandma said. Kids picked on him at day care, but when he went to kinder-garten, dad said, "Hit 'em when they're not lookin'." That's how dad got his cooperation, and it scared his classmates. The child lived for shoot-'em-up cartoons and target practice. He got his own BB gun at 8 with money he "earned" protecting school mates from getting beat up by his friends. He'd been to the principal's office more times than he could count and the sheriff already had a file on his mischief, but nobody expected his gang would hold up a convenience store and shoot the 17 yr-old clerk when he was only 12 years old.

They should have.

Local newspapers across Wyoming do not carry accounts about violent children daily as do papers in other states. Yet surveys of violence risk indicators and behavior suggest that all the contributing factors are present in small-town America:

➤ Child abuse, neglect, and punitive parenting models violence and
➤ Peer and community cultures that value individualism and aggression
➤ High availability to media violence, esp. in unsupervised after-school hours (TV, video games, etc.)
➤ High availability and usage of controlled substances (tobacco, alcohol, drugs)
➤ Relatively limited options for slow or alternative learners
➤ Lower-than-average incomes and high mobility

Before local headlines mirror the daily records of major cities, small towns have time to understand and prevent these tragedies—and offer youth a more promising future.

This newsletter describes issues and strategies for reducing violence and building prosocial skills of children and youth.

Inside this issue:

For additional resources, visit

Dreamcatcher
Family
Life
website

www. uwyo.edu/ag/ces/dream.htm

Research Update: Youth Violence Prevention

Suicide, Bullying, and Social Support

K.Rigby & P.Slee. (1999). Suicidal ideation among adolescent school children, involvement in bully-victim problems, and perceived social support. *Suicide and Life-threatening Behavior,* 29(2), 119-130. Bully-victim problems correlate with humiliation and thoughts of suicide. **(Bullying** is the repeated oppression – physical or psychological – by a more powerful person, including:

- Physical – kicking or hitting
- Verbal – teasing and name calling
  - Indirect – exclusion and rumor spreading

Research indicates:

- Teen suicide rare
- Victim data sketchy
- Interpersonal conflicts increase problems
- Victimization related to low self-esteem
- Bullies more prone to depression

Social support decreases suicidal ideation:

- Reduces illness and effects of stress

Social Support & Emotional Problems

Helsen, Marianne, Wilma Vollebergh, and Wim Meeus. (2000). Social Support from Parents and Friends and Emotional Problems in Adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence.* Vol. 29, No. 3 (319-335).

A study of Dutch teens:

- Parents are primary supports, although import of peer support increases in adolescence
- Support patterns vary for boys and girls (Girls receive more social support, friend-ships more intense for girls, boys' larger friend groups more superficial)
- Extent of perceived social support similar for boys and girls
- Parental and friends' support correlate positively but are relatively independent support systems
- Parental support is (vs. peers) more strongly related to emotional problems in adolescents
- Social support is only a weak predictor of emotional problems

Effective Recreation Programs for Youth

Baldwin, Cheryl K. 2000. Theory, Program, and Outcomes: Assessing the Challenges of Evaluating At-Risk Youth Recreation Programs. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration.* Vol. 18 No. 1 P 19.

Sociological approaches

-Cultural approach- norms, values, behaviors, beliefs create risks;

change occurs via media or education (male toughness, verbal skill deficits, privacy, TV use, community norms)

-Structural approach- social forces (poverty or lack of opportunity, norms of hostility) create climate of violence; address poverty, discrimination, group tensions first

-Interactionist approach- violence cycles (fed by power, drug, weapons abuse) increase negative consequences behavior; law enforcement, skill training reduces incidence

-Economic approach- rational self-interest can be cultivated to fit social norms or non-violence CDC Theories on Causation of Youth Violence www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/yvpt/theory.htm

Parent Support & Teen Substance Abuse

Wills, Thomas Ashby and Cleary, Sean D. (1996) How are Social Support Effects Mediated? A Test With Parental Support and Adolescent Substance Use. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.* 71(5), 937-952.

Support from family, friends, and community networks (closeness, confiding) related to better physical & mental health:

- Parent support buffers negative events, reducing negative outcomes
- Parent support related Inversely to substance use early to mid-adolescence
- Support mediated via Coping/self-control and academic competence
- Support teaches problem-solving skills

Stats and Facts: Working with at-risk Youth

Wyoming School Safety Statistics					
	Felt too unsafe to go to school	Carried a weapon on school property	Threatened or injured with a weapon on school property	In a physical fight on school property	Property stolen or deliberately damaged on school property
Female	3.4 %	3.6 %	3.8 %	7.4 %	31.3 %
Male	5.2 %	22.4%	10.7%	20.5%	35.7 %

*Center for Disease Control's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (August 14, 1998)
 http://www.colorado.edu.cspv/safeschools/mapstats/states/statedata.html

School Safety, U.S.		
	Felt too unsafe to go to school	Carried a weapon on school property
Grade		
9	5.5%	10.2%
10	4.0%	7.7%
11	4.2%	9.4%
12	2.6%	7.0%

*Center for Disease Control's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (August 14, 1998)
 http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/safeschools/mapstats/usastats.html

School Incidents of a Threatening or Injurious Nature, U.S.		
	Threatened or injured with a weapon on school property	In a physical fight on school property
Grade		
9	10.1%	21.3%
10	7.9%	17.0%
11	5.9%	12.5%
12	5.8%	9.5%

*Center for Disease Control's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (August 14, 1998)
 http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/safeschools/mapstats/usastats.html

Risk Behaviors That Improved, 1991-1999, U.S.			
	1991	1995	1999
Carried a Gun	NA	7.6 %	4.9 %
Carried a weapon on school property	NA	9.8 %	6.9 %

*Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, Youth Risk Behavior Trends
 http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/yrbs/trend.htm

Youth Violence in Schools
- Sample: primary and secondary schools in several community sizes, 25 states
- Less than 1% of homicides among school-aged occur on or near school
- 65% of school violent deaths were students
- 83% of school homicide or suicide victims were males
- 28% of fatal injuries happened inside buildings; 36% outside; 35% off campus
- 32.9% of students had property damaged or stolen at school at least once in the past year

Source: Facts about Violence among youth in Schools. www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/schoolvi.htm

Facts, continued

Causes of Violence
- Epidemic child and family poverty
- Pervasive drug and alcohol abuse
- Easy access to deadly firearms
- Abused and neglected children
- Poor education and lack of jobs
- Media glamorization of violence
- Declining support for families

Risk Factors Linked to Violent Behavior
Individual factors
- Personality: low self-esteem, impulsive, risk-taking temperament
- Personal history: victimization, frustration, reinforcement of prior aggression and violence
- Indirect behavior models: images in television, videos, comic books, movies, popular music, etc.
- Direct behavioral models: in the family, among peers, neighborhood
- Disregard for consequences: indifference to punishment or social disapproval

Situational factors
- Interpersonal circumstances: possession of weapon, changing patterns of police surveillance
- Challenge or incentive: group or gang rivalry; ethnic rivalry,; interpersonal quarrel; craving for possession, power, or control
- Disinhibitor: (elements that lead to loss of control) alcohol, drugs, anger, rage, crowd or gang effect, or subjective imagery

**The most effective prevention programs will address risks across multiple levels (individual, family, community, larger social system).

Source: WSU Research Review: Factors that Contribute to Violence. www.cahe.wsu.edu

Four Steps to Dramatically Reduce School and Youth Violence
1. Assure all children and teens access to youth development programs.
2. Assure all babies and preschoolers quality educational childcare.
3. Help schools identify troubled children earlier, and provide counseling and training.
4. Improve deficient parenting and prevent child abuse through parenting-coaching and providing adequate child protective services.

Source: America's Front Line against Crime. www.fightcrime.org

Family Environment and Youth Violence
- Child abuse is one of the strongest predictors of youth violence, early pregnancy, and abusive parenting
- The safest family environment for a child is a home in which biological parents are married
- Cohabitation after divorce or instead of marriage is a major factor in physical, emotional, and sexual abuse
- Incidence of child abuse decreases significantly with family income—thus children of low-income parents benefit more when parents remain married
- Child abuse is frequently intergenerational—patterns of abuse are unlikely to change without intervention
- Child abuse is most prevalent in "communities of abuse" characterized by family breakdown
- Child abuse is directly associated with serious violent crime

Source: P.Fagan. (1997). The child abuse crisis: The disintegration of marriage, family, and the American community. Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, www.heritage.org

Principles of Conflict Resolution

4 principles are important for effective implementation of the conflict resolution processes consensus decision-making.

Separate people from the problem. Individuals will see themselves working better together when they start seeing problems as having two parts: substantive issues and relationship issues.

Focus on interests, not positions. Interests are what defines problems and need to be addressed to make the agreement last. Positions are something that individuals decide they want; interests are the underlying reasons why they take the certain position.

Invent options for mutual gain. Disputants brainstorm on options for resolving the conflict and postpone any criticism of the ideas being brought up. This gives the opportunity to build and perhaps agree on ideas presented.

Use objective criteria. Objective criteria are determined by disputants based on fair standards and procedures. In doing this, agreements will reflect some fair standard and neither party needs to give in to the other.

Conflict resolution is when individuals become side-by-side partners in finding a resolution suitable for both. There are six foundation abilities that promotes the use of the four principles.
- **Orientation abilities** combines values, beliefs, attitudes, and propensities that are compatible with effective conflict resolution (i.e. trust, fairness, tolerance, justice, and self-respect)
- **Perception abilities** holds the understanding that conflict lies in how individuals perceive reality
- **Emotion abilities** encompass behaviors to manage emotions effectively
- **Communication abilities** is having the behaviors of listening and speaking that allow for the effective exchange of facts and feelings
- **Creative thinking abilities** include behaviors that enable individuals to be innovative in defining problems and making decisions
- **Critical thinking abilities** combines the behaviors of analyzing, hypothesizing, predicting, strategizing, comparing/contrasting, and evaluating.

Problem solving is the second factor in genuine conflict resolution. The 6 steps in are:
1. Set the stage
2. Gather perspectives
3. Identify interests
4. Create options
5. Evaluate options
6. Generate agreement

Principles of Conflict Resolution, cont'd.

There are four approaches to conflict resolution education.
1. Process curriculum: Characterized by teaching the foundation abilities, principles, and problem solving practices
2. Mediation program: Participants assist in conflict to reach a solution.
3. Peaceable classroom: A whole class-room approach characterized by teaching the foundation abilities, principles, and problem solving practices
4. Peaceable school: Builds on the peaceable classroom approach by using conflict resolution as a system of operation for managing the school and classroom

Source: Crawford, Donna and Richard Bodine. (1996). Conflict Resolution Education: A guide to implementing programs in schools, youth-serving organizations, and community and juvenile justice settings. *Program Report.* pg 10-12.

Predictors of Youth Violence

Drawing on research reviews and longitudinal studies with non-incarcerated/not exclusively criminal samples of juveniles, acts involving physical harm, and identified risk factors, the following patterns were identified:

Individual Factors
- *Hyperactivity, concentration, restlessness, risk taking* are moderate predictors
- *Sensation-seeking and early involvement in drugs* dramatically increases violence risks

Family Factors
- *Parental attitudes favorable to crime and violence* double the risk of violence by age 18
- *Child maltreatment* of any kind is strongly associated with violence in teen years
- *Poor family management (clear expectations, monitoring, discipline)* predict delinquency and drug abuse, with harsh parenting resulting in the most teen violence

School Factors
- *Low academic performance* at ages 10, 14, & 16 increased risk for youth violence
- Behavior problems at school by age 10 presage problems with violence by age 18
- *Low commitment, aspirations, and multiple transitions* by age 14-16 spell trouble

Peer Factors
- *Delinquent friends* in the pre-teen/early adolescence period predicts later violence risk
- *Gang membership* at age 14 triples the risk of involvement in violence

Community and Neighborhood
- *Community disorganization, availability of drugs, and association with adults involved in criminal activity* at age 14-16 reliably predicts later involvement in violence

Keys to Interpreting Patterns:
- Cumulative risks (co-occurrence of factors above or other risks) increases likelihood of violence and delinquency
- Protective factors (e.g., caring adults, school or extracurricular success) reduces risk

Source: J.D. Hawkins, T.I. Herrenkohl, D.P. Farrington, D. Brewer, R.F. Catalano, T.W. Harachi, & L. Chthern. (1999). *Predictors of youth violence*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, US Dept.of Justice. http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/violvict.html

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Teaching Peace Skills

Violence prevention is a complex and overwhelming social policy issue…until you realize that it begins with simple, practical ideas and actions that build respectful and cooperative relationships. While relationships take give-and-take from two sides, each person can lead a life of integrity by acting like he or she wants others to behave (even if others aren't willing to match their behavior). Simple steps toward more positive relationships, which can be applied to individuals or groups, include:

- ***Find trusted guides to show the way****:* Select positive role models to lead a group or to imitate as an individual
  Helpful techniques: *Leadership Coaching,* selecting a child, giving brief instructions (where to go, how to do a simple task), allowing him or her to direct peers, and providing support as they do; *Volunteer Development,* inviting role models (older peers, parents, and community members) to supervise, demonstrate, or help 1-on-1

- ***Stop harm and blame****:* Set a standard for respectful behavior and constructive problem-solving and others will be willing to take responsibility for actions
  Helpful techniques: Use *win-win* conflict resolution, mediating mutually-beneficial solutions to differences; *Teach helping words* to replace hurting words, rehearsing with regular role-plays; *Establish rules for compensation and reconciliation* for incidental violations and as consequences handed down by a peer jury

- ***Honor good acts and accomplishments****:* Recognize achievement, following rules, and decent behavior rather than taking it for granted or focusing on violations
  Helpful techniques: *Discipline via affirmation* rather than criticism—emphasize what needs to be done; *Take praise breaks* to acknowledge those who follow rules, help others, express creativity, or achieve standards; *Practice praise circles* among youth by asking each to note talents or contributions of peers

- ***Strive to improve****:* Encourage growth and change rather than reminding persons of their former violations through negative labels
  Helpful techniques: *Asking questions* at the beginning, middle, and end of events, to clarify goals and expectations, set high standards; Use *pit stops* to encourage sharing of innovative ideas; try pair or small *group problem solving*, to brainstorm better strategies and outcomes, whatever the project

- ***Offer help****:* Offer constructive suggestions and practical support
  Helpful techniques: *Empowerment* of peers, beginning with asking whether they need help and what help they require (rather than imposing help arbitrarily)

- ***Make amends****:* Be willing to offer apology, show cooperation, or restore something that was taken or damaged
  Helpful techniques: *Compensation* for damage—replacement or service to victim where replacement is not possible; *apology and dialogue* where emotional harm occurs, to foster reconciliation and understanding between victim and perpetrator

Dating Violence Prevention

Early Warning Signs

Extreme jealousy: The key word is "extreme". Boys and girls can become extremely jealous, where one gets mad when the other talks to people or expresses warm feelings for anyone else.
Possessiveness: This person will not want the other to share time or attention to anyone else, which is a danger sign.
Controlling attitude: When one person completely rules the relationship and makes all the decisions.
Low self-esteem: These people do not like themselves very much. They may say, "I'm nothing without you" and "You are my world" to their partner.
Unpredictable mood swings: When a person has a dramatic shift from being jealous, controlling, or angry to being sweet, charming and loving.
Alcohol and drug use: Alcohol and drug use lower a person's self control but are not the direct cause of violence.
Explosive anger: These people may seem to get too angry. They punch walls, yell loudly, name call, or threaten other with violence

Make time in a relationship:

- *Meaning*: Meaning is in people, not words. People need to demonstrate tolerance and acceptance of other people's views of the world.
- *Avoid*: People need to avoid over-expectations. People need to
- allow for failure in themselves and others and forgive others and themselves.
- *Kindness*: Kindness is a part of love and acceptance and is what people express, or fail to express everyday.
- *Encourage*: Encourage people to express what they are on the outside, rather the inside.
- *Time*: Take time to listen to other people. Try to "get" what the other person is trying to say, and respond in a good way.
- *Individuality*: Remember to express individuality in a relationship, it should be recognized and celebrated.
- *Monitor*: Keep track of anger and learn to express all feelings appropriately. Communication is irreversible, what is communicated can be forgiven, but it cannot be taken back.
- *Exhibit*: Show respect and appreciation for oneself and others. Relationships that grow are based on mutuality and are balanced with Me, You, and Us.

Source: Kraizer, Sherryll and C. Lyn Larson. (1996) Dating Violence: Intervention and prevention for teenagers. *National Resource Center for Youth Services*. 76-77.

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Resources and Policy: Turning Pencils into Peace-wands

Organizations

Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, University of Colorado. Blueprints summaries of effective programs and other information online: http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/

Partnership Against Violence (PAVNET) provides research-based information, statistics, and funding for anti-violence programs. www.pavnet.org/front.html

Virginia Youth Violence Project, Univ. of VA. Surveys, research results, practical tools for parents and schools. http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/curry/centers/youthvio/

Extension CYFERNET Youth Violence Prevention resources: research, key issues, practical tools. www.nnfr.org/violence/

Michigan State Extension VISTA Project shows how much can be done to prevent youth violence. www.msue.msu.edu/msue/cyf/youth/vista.html

National Campaign Against Youth Violence. Understanding prevention and designing successful programs. www.nonviolence.net/

Institute for Urban and Minority Education, Columbia University. Reviews research on several violence-related issues, with one esp. on girls and violence. http://iume.tc.columbia.edu/choices/briefs/choices01.html

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Fact sheets and back-ground research on causes and alternatives to youth violence. http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/yvpt/datviol.htm

Vera Institute of Justice brief "Beyond Blame and Panic" reviews violence prevention key issues. www.vera.org

ASCD Connecting with Today's Youth offers a provocative essay on the image and reality of youth culture and violence. www.ascd.org/readingroom/edlead/9912/tell.html

Books

J.M. Richman & M.W. Fraser. (2001). *The context of youth violence.* Praeger.

J.Garbarino. (1997). *Lost Boys: Why our sons turn violent and how we can save them.* Vintage. Pre-view via reading guide: www.readinggroupguides.com/guides/lost_boys.html

Developing Social Competence

- Increasing numbers & severity of aggression and antisocial behavior (from genetics or trauma) lead to poor impulse control, post-traumatic stress disorder, or depression
- For most children, increasing social connections, affirmation, rewards for good behavior, reducing threats prevent or reverse negatives (esp. if training early, intense); family and school settings emphasizing inclusion and affirmation build esteem
- Early warning signs include social withdrawal, excessive feelings of isolation and rejection, victimization, poor school performance, artistic expressions of violence, preoccupation with violent media, uncontrolled anger and aggression, substance abuse, and intolerance of cultural differences

Most Effective School-based Violence Prevention Strategies
- Social competence skill-building
- Creating a positive, calm climate
- Establishing behavioral standards
- Using violence-reduction responses

For a more detailed summary of this topic, see http://iume.tc.columbia.edu/choices/briefs/choices03.html

Paradoxes: A Parting Thought

Sticks and Stones: Thinking Beyond the Cliches of Youth Violence

"Get yourself under control!"
Self-control is fundamental for conflict resolution and violence prevention. Yet certain circumstances heighten the pressure on youth to be responsible partners in social interaction. These factors include personality, behavior disorders, taunting and discrimination. Kids who are included, supported, and affirmed find it much easier to take responsibility for themselves.

"No harm, no foul."
Safe schools and neighborhoods are usually bullet- and or bully-free. Yet insults, threats, shunning, and gossip can inflict as much or more damage on a young spirit—and create a climate in which there seems no safe place to turn. Adults who, like bad referees, turn a blind eye to such cruelty inadvertently reinforce the climate of peer abuse.

"Their troubles are not our problem."
Adults and kids in low-violence settings tend to see violence as "somebody else's problem" (until it comes to their neighborhood). In reality, the whole community must be part of the solution—interpersonally, as we treat other individuals, and socially, as we extend justice to groups, neighborhoods, and circumstances.

"Grow up. Learn not to fight."
Sadly, adults who pose as parents, teachers, and youth leaders offer less-than-consistent role models. Physical and emotional abuse, talk of revenge and denigration of others encourages youth to see aggression as a sign of maturity.

"Guns don't kill people. People kill people."
People are, after all, on the decision-end of weapons. Few kids with access to guns even think of using them against others. Yet too many kids have access to firearms, without supervision or safety training, and with media, peer pressure, and fragile egos that allow or encourage violence as a form of self-expression.