



Best Practices of Youth Violence Prevention

A Sourcebook For Community Action



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



- Staff developers guide teachers in applying new skills.
- Administrators are briefed about the intervention's concepts and how they can support the effort.
- Peer models for nonviolent conflict resolution intervene in arguments and disputes on the playground and in the lunchroom.

The RCCP curriculum contains 51 weekly lessons, each lasting 30 to 60 minutes. These lessons or “workshops” focus on active listening, assertiveness, emotional expression, perspective-taking, cooperation, negotiation, problem solving, conflict analysis, and countering expressions of bias. Teachers facilitate role-playing exercises, interviewing, small-group discussion, and brainstorming to achieve a high level of student interaction (Aber et al. 1996).

Evaluation of RCCP has revealed mixed results. The beliefs and thought processes that put students at risk for aggression increased among all students as the school-year progressed. However, when teachers administered many RCCP lessons, students' aggressive attitudes increased much more slowly. When teachers taught only a few RCCP lessons, students experienced a faster increase than average. In addition to the number of lessons taught, the context of the child's life was found to impact the effect of this program. The positive effects resulting from frequent exposure to the RCCP curriculum were weakened among children from high-risk classrooms and neighborhoods (Aber et al. 1998; Roderick 1998).

PeaceBuilders is a school-wide intervention that teaches five principles: praise people, avoid put-downs, seek wise people as advisors and friends, notice and correct hurts we cause, and right wrongs. The program uses nine broad techniques for behavior change (Embry et al. 1996):

- common language for “community norms”
- real-life models and story characters who depict positive behaviors
- environmental cues to indicate desired behaviors
- role plays to increase the range of responses to conflict
- rehearsals of positive responses to negative situations
- rewards—both individual and group—for prosocial behaviors
- reduction in threats to reduce reactivity
- self- and peer monitoring
- activities to promote maintenance of change across time and context

Initial outcomes over a two-year period showed that exposure to PeaceBuilders significantly increased teacher-rated social competence and student-reported prosocial behavior. Fewer effects were seen for students' aggressive behavior (Flannery et al., unpublished). Additionally, in a separate study assessing whether the program had any impact on visits to the school nurse, the researchers found that nurse visits—including those related to injuries—decreased 12 percent in intervention schools, while they remained static in comparison schools. The rates of injuries related to fighting showed little change in intervention schools, but they increased 56 percent in the comparison schools (Krug et al. 1997).

The PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) Curriculum was developed to help students in kindergarten through fifth grade develop essential skills in emotional literacy, positive peer relations, and problem solving. Teachers blended intervention materials with the regular curriculum, and activities were conducted both in and out of the classroom. Parents were also given materials for use at home to help students generalize the lessons learned in class.

Four clinical trials of PATHS over the past 15 years have demonstrated improvements in social and emotional competencies and reductions in aggression and other risk factors (e.g., depression) across a wide range of elementary school children, including students with special needs. Some improvements were also seen in cognitive skills. These findings were reflected in teacher ratings, student self-reports, child testing and interviewing, and independent ratings by classroom observers (Greenberg et al. 1995; Greenberg and Kusche 1998).

Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum was developed to reduce aggression and increase prosocial behavior. Grossman and colleagues (1997) conducted a randomized trial among 790 second- and third-grade students in six matched pairs of urban and suburban elementary schools in Washington state. At both two weeks and six months after the intervention, the researchers found a moderate decrease in physical aggression and an increase in neutral and prosocial behavior in school. There was no measurement of behavior change outside the school setting. While this intervention appears promising for elementary schools, it has had disappointing effects when implemented in middle schools. In one study, the curriculum led to a decrease in boys' aggressive behaviors, but the results were short-lived (Orpinas et al. 1995). In a second study, the curriculum failed to reduce aggressive behaviors (Orpinas et al. 2000).