

Antisocial Behavior IN SCHOOL

EVIDENCE-
BASED
PRACTICES

Second Edition

HILL M. WALKER ELIZABETH RAMSEY FRANK M. GRESHAM

PeaceBuilders: Addressing the Root Causes of Violence Among Young Children

Background

For perhaps a majority of individuals who ultimately become violent, the path to this destructive behavior pattern begins early in their lives as a result of the attitudes, beliefs, actions, and toxic conditions they are exposed to. These include dysfunctional families; sexual, physical, and emotional abuse; deteriorating and crime-ridden neighborhoods; weak caregiving by parents; the modeling and demonstration of violent behavior in and outside the home; and drug and alcohol abuse by support group members. The root causes of youth violence often lie in the early-life experiences of at-risk individuals and their families. It is of the utmost importance to address these problems as soon as possible in their development so as to buffer, reduce, and eliminate their influence on the growing child.

The ideal solution to society's violence problem would be (1) to effect broad changes in our societal values and attitudes regarding the use of force, intimidation, and aggression for achieving social goals and (2) to motivate and empower families and caregivers to instill empathic attitudes and prosocial, responsible forms of behavior in their children. But we will never be able to realize these goals by focusing only on the family. A true collaborative effort involving parents, children and youths, their peers, schools and teachers, communities, social service agencies, and the larger society is, in our view, necessary to forge such a solution.

Schools are a key player in this mix, representing an ideal setting for creating a culture or climate that eschews violence and promotes caring, empathy, and prosocial behavior. Teaching alternatives to violence, both directly and by example, is one of the most important functions of schools. Schools and educators, however, have come to the table as partners in this effort only recently and, quite rightly, do not see themselves as primarily responsible for this massive social problem. However, they can have a remarkable impact by focusing on the precipitating factors and root causes of subsequent violent and aggressive behavior among young children in their care.

A highly recommended and carefully researched approach to this challenge is embodied in a universal intervention for use with K-5 students called PeaceBuilders. PeaceBuilders was developed by the Heartsprings Institute of Tucson, Arizona, and is widely used to create positive school climates and to reduce conflict. This program seeks to create peaceful, caring school environments by teaching all students a common language, a set of positive values, and forms of behavior that move them in the direction of caring, altruism, self-regulation, and positive relations with key social agents in their lives (i.e., parents, teachers, and peers). All school staff and students participate in the program's implementation. The goal is to positively alter the climate and culture of the entire school by (1) changing characteristics of the school that can and do trigger aggressive, hostile behavior, (2) developing positive adult and child models of caring, positive behavior, (3) directly teaching nonviolent attitudes, values, and beliefs, and

(4) providing incentives for children to display these attitudinal and behavioral characteristics in their daily interactions in the school setting. All children and school staff learn five rules, as well as a common language for referring to them, which provides a clear focus for the intervention and its goals. They are as follows: (1) Praise others, (2) avoid putdowns, (3) seek wise people as advisors and friends, (4) notice and correct hurts that they cause, and (5) right wrongs (Flannery et al., 2003).

Teachers and other school staff are thoroughly trained in all phases and procedures of the PeaceBuilders program so that its principles and techniques permeate the school. When the program is fully installed, the school becomes a place in which positive rather than negative, destructive child behavior has a much greater likelihood of earning attention from adults and peers. PeaceBuilder rules and values are displayed throughout the school setting, and students are assisted in completing activities that teach key values, beliefs, and actions contributing to a positive school climate. School personnel constantly recognize, praise, and reward PeaceBuilder behaviors as they see them displayed by children in their daily interactions and activities. Children learn to write "praise notes" to each other as a way of expressing positive regard and friendship and, importantly, to reinforce peers for their positive, prosocial behavior. The impact of PeaceBuilders has been carefully researched and has been shown to increase positive behavioral rates and occurrences, to reduce aggression and negative behavior, and to substantially reduce the number of school nurse visits due to injuries from fighting (Embry & Flannery, 1999; Embry, Flannery, Vazsonyi, Powell, & Atha, 1996).

Intervention

Flannery and his colleagues (2003) have conducted a comprehensive intervention study of the PeaceBuilders program in eight matched schools involving approximately 4,000 students in grades K–5. These students were randomly assigned to either the PeaceBuilders program or to a wait-list control group, which received the intervention one year later. All students were followed up over multiple school years to assess both the short- and longer-term effects of the program. The sample of 4,000 participating students was highly diverse and included representation from Caucasian, African American, Hispanic-Latino/a, Native American, and Asian American subpopulations. Approximately 70% of the students in the study qualified for free or reduced-cost lunch.

The authors thoroughly assessed outcomes for the study. Their measures addressed social competence, aggressive-antisocial behavior, prosocial behavior, and PeaceBuilder behavior (target skills) using child self-reports in grades 3–5. The results of this study were quite powerful and very encouraging.

Results

Flannery et al. (2003) reported their results in the areas of social competence and aggression for the fall and spring of the 1994–95 school year to assess intervention effects as compared to nonintervention, wait-list controls and then, in the fall and spring of the following school year, to assess maintenance effects. Figures 10.2 and 10.3 show results for social competence and aggression

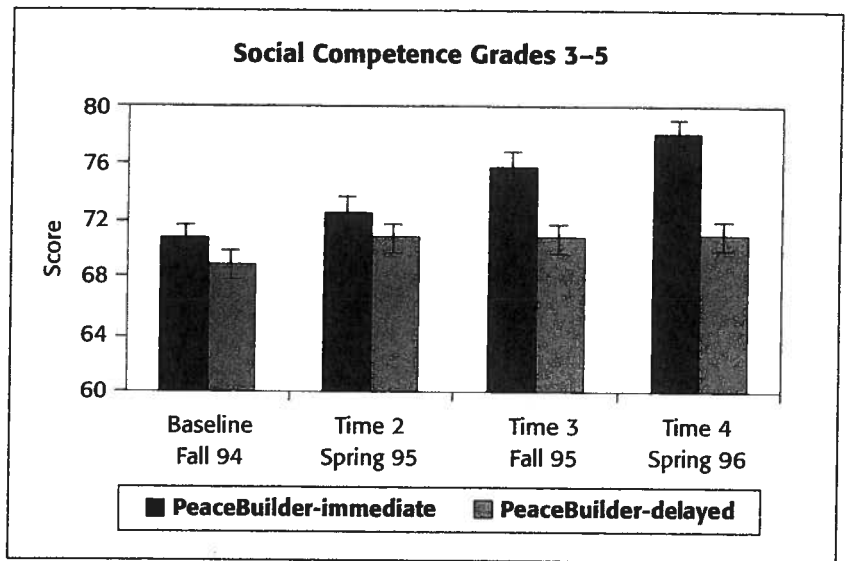
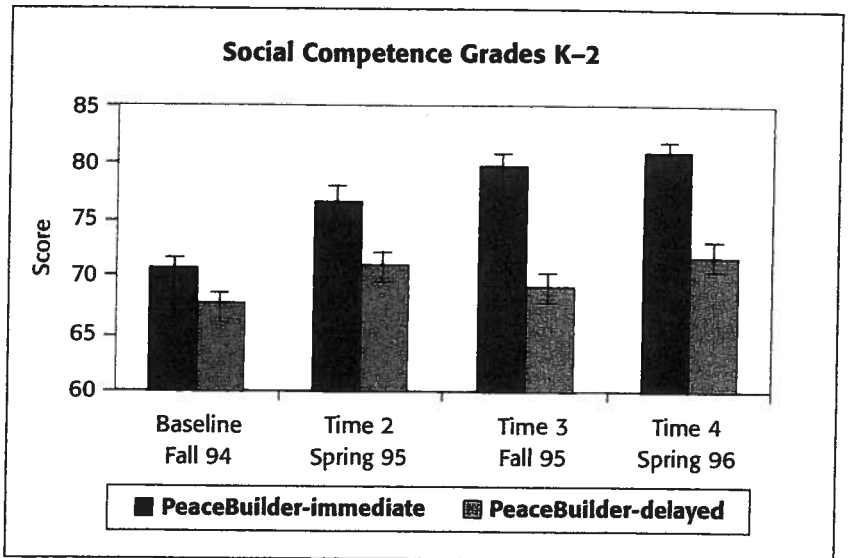


FIGURE 10.2

Results for Social Competence for Intervention (PeaceBuilder-Immediate) Participants and for Wait-List Control (PeaceBuilder-Delayed) Participants.

Source: Flannery et al. (2003).

for intervention (PeaceBuilder-immediate) participants and for wait-list control (PeaceBuilder-delayed) participants, respectively. The data in these figures are based on teacher ratings of child behavior and reflect the teachers' appraisal of the students' behavioral characteristics and how they did and did not change

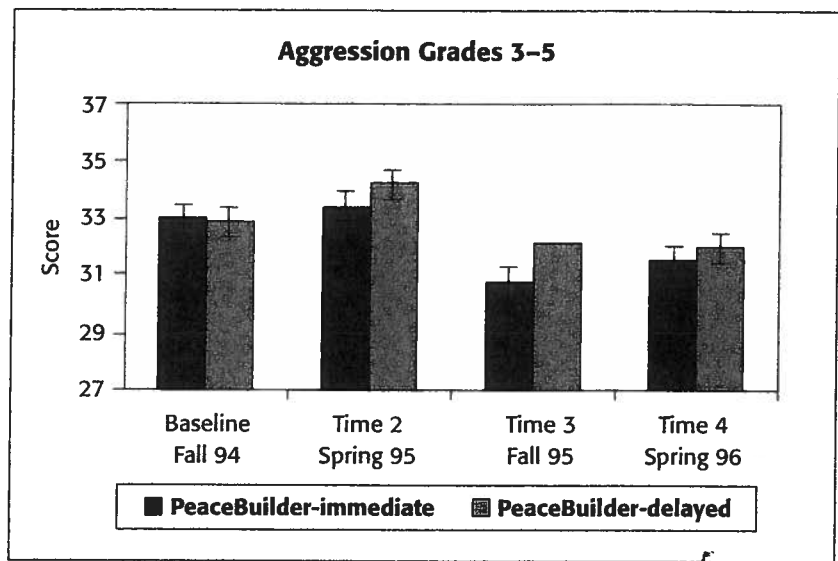
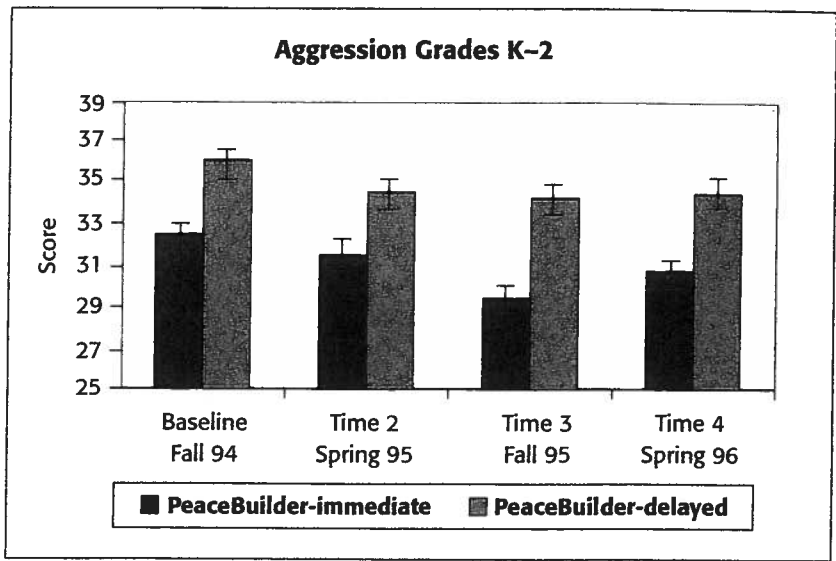


FIGURE 10.3

Results for Aggression for Intervention (PeaceBuilder-Immediate) Participants and for Wait-List Control (PeaceBuilder-Delayed) Participants.

Source: Flannery et al. (2003).

from fall to spring of each school year. They show highly significant results favoring the PeaceBuilder-immediate students over the PeaceBuilder-delayed students and are a tribute to the power and impact of this impressive universal intervention.

Discussion

PeaceBuilders is an exemplar of the kind of universal intervention that elementary schools should consider implementing to teach critical prosocial skills to all children. If programs such as PeaceBuilders were implemented in all feeder elementary schools, the social ecology of middle school settings would be qualitatively different in all the right ways. Young children love to participate in the program and view it as a fun experience. It gets everyone in the school to focus on positives, and it dramatically reduces office discipline referrals and the need for suspensions and expulsions. It is a highly recommended intervention that is easy to implement, takes very little teacher time, and costs less than \$10 per student, per year to implement. PeaceBuilders is one of *the* most cost-effective investments that educators can make in the future of young children.

The First Step to Success Program: Early Intervention for the Prevention of Antisocial Behavior Among Kindergartners

Program Components

First Step to Success is a coordinated school and home intervention program designed to prevent the development of antisocial behavior patterns among at-risk children in the K–3 grade range who have an elevated risk for this disorder. First Steps was developed and tested over a four-year period, was supported by a federal grant to the senior author, and involved a collaborative partnership between the University of Oregon Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior, the Eugene School District 4J, the Oregon Social Learning Center, and the Oregon Research Institute. First Steps addresses secondary prevention goals and outcomes in that it seeks to reduce and reverse the harm that has occurred as a result of the target child's exposure to multiple risk factors in the 0–5 age range and that is evident in his or her school performance and overall behavior.

First Steps consists of three interrelated modules that can be implemented separately or collectively. These modules were designed to be applied in concert with each other in order to provide a comprehensive screening and home–school intervention package coordinated within a single linked process. These modules focus respectively on (1) universal screening and early detection of behaviorally at-risk students in grades K–3, (2) implementation of a school intervention component that teaches an adaptive pattern of behavior for school success and the development of friendships, and (3) parent instruction in how to teach and reward school success skills at home. In combination, the First Steps program components provide a comprehensive and highly effective approach for the prevention of antisocial behavior patterns among young children. The program was designed to detect at-risk children when they begin their formal school careers and to work cooperatively with them and their parents, teachers, and peers intensively over a three-month period to ensure that they get off to the best start possible in their school careers. School success, in turn, serves as a protective factor against numerous destructive outcomes (e.g., teenage pregnancy, heavy drinking, delinquency) over the long term. Details of