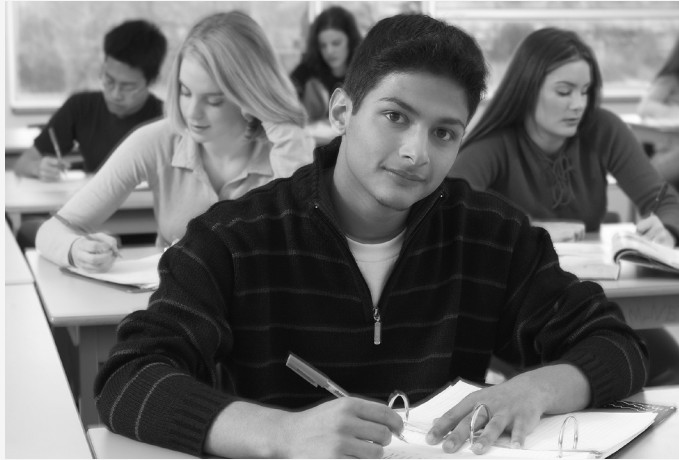


# The Science of PeaceBuilders®

PeaceBuilders is a **science-based** program. This means that when the program was created by a team of psychologists and education professionals, they



applied the proven findings of a number of research studies. PeaceBuilders is also a **research-validated** program. This means that after PeaceBuilders was implemented, research was done to measure the impact of the program on the lives of children. Those findings are significant.

In one of the most famous studies on resiliency, Dr. Emmy Werner conducted a 31-year study looking at “at-risk” children. These children were exposed to many “risk factors” in their environments, such as poverty, abuse, substance abuse, mental illness and lack of education. Many of these children grew up having some of the same issues as their parents, resulting in a lack of success in interpersonal relationships, education and employment. Yet, some of these children grew up to be

“resilient,” that is, they were able to “bounce back” from the risk and to be successful in relationships, education, and employment.

The study focused on why some children “made it” and others did not. The most significant and profound factor in the lives of successful children was the presence of a caring, nurturing adult in their childhood; someone who believed in them and expected the best from them. Most often, this person was a teacher. PeaceBuilders teaches young people to seek out these adults in their lives and to gain the skills and integrity to become the kind of adults who can provide this kind of care and dedication to others.

In a famous study called the “Robbers Cave,” two groups of eleven-year-old boys were chosen to attend a special camp during the summer. Each group was given a group name with t-shirts and flags. Soon, there were put-downs, name-calling and aggression. Merging

# The Science of PeaceBuilders® continued

the two groups did not help. Only when there was a **common language** and **common purpose**; getting food and water for the whole camp, was the aggressive behavior changed and there was a sense of camaraderie established.

In another study by Dr. Dennis Embry, a **language of identity** was used to help young children choose safe behaviors. I am a Safe Player. Safe Players (desired behavior, eg. Wear a bike helmet, look both ways before crossing, etc.) Thus, in the PeaceBuilders Pledge™, all people at the site, adults or young people say, "I am a PeaceBuilder." The pledge also describes the kind and caring behaviors that PeaceBuilders do. When young people misbehave, adults ask, "What would a PeaceBuilder do?" This reminds children of their positive identity and helps them align their behavior with it.

PeaceBuilders uses the practice of praising young people for kind, caring, and responsible behavior. This is based on the Seattle Social Development Study, which showed that when all school adults greeted students, using their names and showing personal interest in them, and gave out "caught being good" notes, substance abuse and teen pregnancy were dramatically reduced ten years later.

G. Roy Mayer also did studies in south central Los Angeles. Adults did two things: Avoided accidental reinforcement of negative behavior, such as calling out a young person's name in front of the class or writing a name on the board and gave notes of praise for prosocial behavior. Problem behavior, vandalism and school dropping out were reduced and academic achievement increased.

PeaceBuilders is also based on brain science. Two substances in the human brain are notable in the discussion about aggression and violence or peace: serotonin and dopamine. When levels of serotonin are normal, people are more able to think abstractly and therefore more ready to learn and achieve. They feel positive, friendly and cooperative. Serotonin is decreased by insults, perceived threats and through being the target of aggression. This leads to depression, which decreases the ability to learn. It can also lead to aggression and violence as seen in some of the school violence incidents that have been publicized in the past few years. Dopamine is released when a person achieves a goal, such as in winning a game, or learning something new, or getting a good grade. It may also be released when someone does something that is wrong. It may be helpful to think

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of it as “the thrill of getting away with something.” It is therefore, important that adults who work with young people are both strict and caring, and that they do not reinforce negative behavior. PeaceBuilders promotes a style of positive classroom management, designed to achieve the highest possible prosocial behavior on the part of young people.

PeaceBuilders is **research-validated**. In a comparison study funded by the Centers for Disease Control, nine of 80 schools implemented PeaceBuilders. These schools were chosen because of violence, crime, drugs and poverty. Students in these schools were followed for five years. When there is violence, there are symptoms of victimization. Young people usually go to the school nurse’s office for these. In the PeaceBuilders schools, there were far fewer visits to the nurse’s office for fighting injuries and illnesses. Young people who are bullied are often affected by real or imagined illnesses in order to escape the threatening environment. These problems affect attendance, legal liability and the potential for a “persistently dangerous” ranking. There were also significantly fewer office visits for discipline and therefore, fewer suspensions. Students at the PeaceBuilders schools demonstrated increased social competence. They

were better adjusted to school and had improved social skills. Low levels of social competence predict juvenile delinquency, violent crime and school failure. The study also found that PeaceBuilders benefits high risk aggressive children the most. These children reported more decreases in aggression and more increases in social competence in comparison to children at medium and low levels of risk. This is a remarkable finding, but is predictable from the core theory of the science of peace that predicts aggressive and difficult behaviors are adaptive for children living, learning and navigating social environments with high levels of violence.

When introduced to the simple philosophy and strategies of PeaceBuilders, most people think, “Why of course it works!” PeaceBuilders stands upon a strong foundation of research, yet some may also say that we must only go to the “Academy of Common Sense.”

As PeaceBuilders is implemented in more than 600 sites across Northern America and U.S. Territories in schools, after-school organizations, youth groups and community programs, reports indicate more positive environments, fewer discipline problems and much happier places to live, grow, learn, work and play.