



Violence Prevention and Interventions in Schools and Community

A Position Statement of the American Association of Health Education (AAHE)

Violence, in our society, has the potential to directly and indirectly affect the lives of all individuals. The impact of violence has become a major public health problem worldwide. Throughout the world, violence contributes to the leading causes of death among people aged 15-44 years.¹ Therefore, it is imperative that schools and communities address this growing problem. The underlying causes of violence are varied and as complex as the individual acts and people involved. Factors that contribute to acts of violence include, but are not limited to, poverty, unemployment, hopelessness, lack of education, inadequate housing, poor parental role models, cultural beliefs that objectify women and empower men to be the aggressors, lack of societal support systems, discrimination, ignorance about people who are different, religious self-righteousness, stress, economic uncertainty, substance abuse, and portrayal of violence in the media. In addition, the more individuals are exposed to violence, the greater the potential for violence to be normalized.² A comprehensive approach to violence prevention in the schools will be attained when program planners recognize the developmental and socio-cultural risk factors that increase the likelihood of violent behavior and implement effective process, impact, and outcome evaluations to measure program success.

Youth are being exposed to increasing levels of violent acts, both as witnesses and as victims. Acts of violence include but are not limited to threats, slapping, hitting, punching, shoving, shouting, emotional abuse, physical abuse, harassment, sexist and racist innuendoes, violent environments (domestic violence), bullying, as well as trivial lawsuits. Schools play a significant role in reducing the occurrence of violence in our society. Violence prevention and intervention in the schools must be comprehensive in nature in order to achieve effective results.³

The planning and implementation of violence prevention and intervention programs must involve home, school, peers, health care and social service agencies, religious institutions, law enforcement and judicial systems, civic organizations, business and industry, and the media. By involving all facets of the community, schools will be able to create an atmosphere that encourages teachers, students and staff to focus their efforts on learning. These efforts should include: 1) developing an ethic of caring for teachers, students, and staff, 2) creating a safe school environment to facilitate productive use of time, 3) developing fair and consistently applied behavioral standards for students and school personnel including peaceful solutions for resolving conflict, 4) facilitating student and school personnel understanding of the negative consequences of violence, 5) providing opportunities for teacher, student and staff training, 6) providing opportunities to showcase life affirming activities and programs throughout the school community and 7) applying early intervention strategies to eliminate

violence. For evaluation purposes, baseline data should be collected prior to any school violence prevention efforts. A comprehensive violence prevention program and intervention should be an integral part of any coordinated school health program. Working with communities, schools are capable of tailoring a comprehensive violence prevention program within a coordinated school health program model.⁴

References

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