

The Problem of Youth Violence

The problem

- The United States has the highest youth homicide and suicide rate among the wealthiest developed nations (*Task Force on Violence, 1999*).

Magnitude and scope of violence

- Homicide is second leading cause of death for youth ages 15 to 19 and suicide is the third (*Cohen & Potter, 1999*).
- Sixteen million adolescents in the United States have witnessed some type of violent assault in their lifetimes, including up to 95% of children in our inner cities (*US DHHS, 2001*).

Impact on health

- Firearm injuries cost up to \$2.3 billion annually in medical costs (*Cook, 1999*).
- Recent research shows changes to brain structure and chemistry following exposure to extreme violence (*Niehoff, 1999*).

Violence can be prevented

- Violence is not inevitable. Like polio and other public health threats, violence can be prevented.
- Numbers show that some progress is being made because youth violence has been in decline from 1994 to 1999 (*Snyder, 1999; FBI, 1997*).

Discussion

- Violence among young people is an output of their desire to create. They don't know how to use their energy creatively, so they do the opposite and destroy.

Violence is learned in the home

- More than 3 million children witness physical and verbal domestic abuse in their homes each year (*Horn, 2000; Carlson, 1984; Jaff, 1990*).
- Effects of witnessing domestic violence can include traumatic stress reflected in higher levels of depression and anxiety, attention and learning problems, and greater likelihood of developing aggressive and anti-social behavior (*Hawley, 2000*).

Violence is learned by being victimized by intimates

- 826,000 children in the United States were maltreated in 1999 (*US DHHS*).
- Experiencing child abuse and neglect increases the likelihood of arrest as a juvenile by 53% and of committing a violent crime by 38% (*Widom, 1992*).

Violence is learned from peers

- One in 7 school children is either a bully or has been the victim of a bully (*Brooks, et al, 2000; Batsche G, et al, 1998*).
- Between 10% and 30% of teens experience violence while dating. This is not surprising in light of a survey of two Chicago high schools, in which 28% of boys responding believed that “girls needed to be punched or slapped sometimes” (*American Medical Association Alliance, 1999*).

Violence is learned from media

- A child views about 25 acts of violence a day on television. By age 18, that child will view 16,000 simulated murders and some 200,000 acts of violence (*Commission for the Prevention of Youth Violence, 2000; Donnerstein et al, 1994*).

Discussion questions

- What are examples of violent media that concern you? Why?

Alcohol & drugs

- 50% of youth homicide victims have elevated blood alcohol, as do 50% of youth who commit homicide (*Adams et al, 1992; Prothrow-Stith et al, 1992; Mann et al, 1998*).

Gangs

- Youth gangs are responsible for a disproportionate share of all criminal offenses, both violent and nonviolent (*Snyder et al, 2000*).

Guns

- Teenage boys are more likely to die from gunshot wounds than from all natural causes combined (*Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1996*).
- Family and friends are the primary source of guns for young people (*Sheley & Wright, 1998*).

Discussion questions

- What risk factors do you see in your community and/or school?
- Which ones concern you the most?

Factors that “protect” youth

- Relationship with a responsible adult
- Positive school experiences
- Plans and dreams (future orientation)
- Ability to control impulses

(Search Institute, 2000)

Discussion questions

- What resources are there for violence prevention in your community?
- What can you do to prevent youth violence?

What you can do to prevent violence...

- Get involved.
- De-normalize violence—it's not normal.

(Commission for the Prevention of Youth Violence, 2000).

Media— What you can do to prevent violence

- Watch what you and your family watch.
- Become media literate.

Media literacy skills

- Plan ahead what you are going to watch/hear.
- Ask yourself about the motivations of producers.
- Ask yourself how the problems depicted could be solved without the use of violence.
- Imagine what the real-life consequences of the violence you see in the show would be.

(American Academy of Pediatrics, 1999).

Firearms— What you can do to prevent violence

- Walk away if you see a gun.
- Don't keep guns in the home.
- Use safe firearm storage procedures and know if parents in homes youth visit also do so.

Firearm safety procedures

- Store ammunition and guns separately.
- Keep both in locked containers.
- Adult keeps keys/access code secure on person at all times.
- Put trigger locks on firearms.

(American Academy of Pediatrics, 2000).

What you can do to prevent violence

- Talk to a trusted adult if you or one of your friends is being bullied.
- About problems with alcohol and drugs.
- About violence in the home or school.