

SPRING 1999

## Violence and Children: Innovative Approaches for School-Family-Community Partnership Teams

Most people view violence as a physical act – visible wounds that leave a lasting mark. The effects of violence, whether intentional or not, however, leave a much deeper scar in the minds and hearts of our children and families, our schools and our communities. Although recent studies show an overall decline in violence in our country, children's exposure to and involvement in violent situations in homes, schools and communities has increased, and those most affected are our youngest children. In 1995, CT's Department of Children and Families reported over 37,000 cases of child abuse or neglect of which two thirds involved children under 10 years old.

As children mature, the nature of the violence they encounter is from peers, specifically, threats and bullying. Studies report that 1 in 10 students report being regularly harassed or attacked by bullies. We know that violence negatively affects the ability of young people to learn and that children exposed to violence are often too anxious to absorb what is going on in the classroom. They may have difficulty controlling their own anger, or have trouble forming trusting relationships with adults, teachers, or others in positions of authority. Youth living in danger develop defenses against their fears; energy spent in this way makes these youth less available for learning. Students who fear bullies skip school, or get physically sick from the stress. Additionally, victims of bullies are far more likely to bring a weapon to school to protect themselves. Some young people feel threatened their lives will be cut short, so they do not make plans for the pursuit of their future.

Whether youth are the targets of physical abuse or witnesses to danger, the harmful impact demands attention and action by adults. Young people need to believe that adults hold high expectations for them, are in charge and are capable of protecting them.

Research has identified key protective factors that contribute to a young person's ability to emerge healthy from dangerous and risky environments. Protective factors are conditions that can buffer or mitigate stressful events. As long as the balance between stressful events and protective factors is favorable, there can be a shift from vulnerability to resiliency. Protective factors include an educational environment that promotes constructive coping skills, participation in meaningful activities and a connection with an adult who models positive social behavior.

Effective strategies that incorporate protective factors and contribute to healthy learning environments include the following school sponsored activities and programs:

- \* School planning and policy development involving parents and educators
- \* Conflict management for adults and children
- \* Peer Mediation programs
- \* Staff development on diversity and tolerance
- \* Violence prevention across all grades
- \* School Resource Officer programs
- \* Youth Leadership programs
- \* After-school enrichment programs
- \* Student Assistance programs

Schools can be powerful forces for change. They can build the infrastructure to develop and maintain coalitions and partnerships that prevent violence and provide a safe, supportive learning environment for all young people.

### Youth Violence in Connecticut

Over 100 school districts in CT responded to the Safe Schools & Communities Coalition's survey on youth violence. Preliminary results from the 1998 survey found that:

- \* 36% of the school districts indicated that student violence has increased in the last 3 years.
- \* The most frequently occurring types of school violence are vandalism (84%), assaults on students (81%), sexual harassment (63%) and weapons in schools (53%).
- \* Perceptions of causes of violence in schools include family situations (85%), violence in the media (69%), lack of conflict management skills (70%), increased tolerance for violence by society and parents (64%), and abusive, violent role models (64%).
- \* Most effective school programs are student assistance teams (75%), peer mediation (71%), school-police officer (75%), staff development (67%) and youth leadership/support (58%).

### Highlighting Our Partners:

This work could not be done without the contributions of many groups. In this issue we recognize . . .

Capitol Region Education Council  
Partnerships in Early Childhood

Drugs Don't Work! The Governor's  
Prevention Partnership - Training &  
Technical Assistance

United Way of Connecticut - CT Parents Plus

"When children feel safe at home they are ready to grow. When safe in the neighborhood, children are ready to play, explore and form relationships with other children. When they are safe at school they are ready to learn."  
- Dr. James Garbarino,  
Cornell University

## Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children

A compelling new longitudinal study by Hart and Risley (1995) reads like a detective story of the best kind. It describes the authors' years of research on the roots of intellectual difference between children. The authors observed the daily lives of one-and two-year old children in typical American families. They found staggering contrasts in the *amount* and *type* of verbal interaction in families of different economic classes. For example, by age 4 an average child in a professional family would have accumulated experience with almost 45 million words, an average child in a working-class family would have accumulated experience with 26 million words, and an average child in a family receiving public assistance would have accumulated experience with 13 million words.

Hart and Risley also looked at the *type* of parent-child interaction to determine how much of parents' conversation was considered "encouragements" (such as "that's right," "good job," or "I love you") or "discouragements" (such as "that's bad," "stop it," or "shut up"). The authors found that during the first 4 years of life, all children heard encouragements and discouragements but the amounts were different depending on the economic background of the family. Children from professional families experienced the most encouragements and fewest discouragements in a ratio of about 6 to 1. Children from working-class families heard more encouragements than discouragements but only at a ratio of about 2 to 1. Children from low-income families differed from the other two groups in that they experienced more discouragements than encouragements in a ratio of about 2 to 1.

These differences in the amount and kind of parent-child verbal interaction children experience in the early years were strongly linked to differences in children's early rates of vocabulary growth, vocabulary use, and general accomplishments and were strong indicators of differences in school performance at age 9.

The authors make a powerful case that the amount of time parents spend talking to their children in the early years of life and the nature of what parents say directly influence children's future accomplishments. This work reminds educators of the importance of early parent education and the strong connection between children's early experiences and later school success.

Hart, B. and Risley T.R. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes. This book is available for loan, free of charge, from the SERC library. See page 4 for more information on School-Family-Community Partnership Resources.



## Schools Share Partnership Practices

Many Connecticut schools are developing active School-Family-Community Partnerships. An effective partnership offers a broad array of opportunities for schools, families and communities to interact. Not all partnerships look the same. Successful ones exhibit as much variety as the local conditions that create them. Partnerships work best when they recognize and accommodate differences among families, communities and cultures.

### H.A.T.S. O.F.F.

Hale Action Team Supports Our Fantastic Families has been responsible for many positive changes in how parents are involved in math learning at [Nathan Hale School](#) in Meriden. Among the most successful school-wide initiatives is a math interactive bulletin board located prominently in the school's main lobby. Measuring 4 feet by 15 feet, the board engages children and family members in measuring, estimating, computing, and problem-solving activities. Before, during and after school, lively conversation and active participation surround the bulletin board. The theme of the activities changes bi-monthly providing new and exciting activities for understanding math. The display also provides "take-home" information for parents on the school's math goals.

### Winning Partnerships at SAND Everywhere School

Congratulations to [SAND Everywhere Elementary School](#) in Hartford !! Their work in developing school-family-community partnerships was recognized by Drugs Don't Work! The Governor's Prevention Partnership in a ceremony at the state capitol. Betsy LeBorious, Sr. Program Coordinator at Drugs Don't Work!, said "SAND deserves to be recognized for the leadership and commitment the school has demonstrated by striving to involve all parents as partners to support and improve the academic achievement of their children."

Many of the school's activities are focused on helping parents with parenting through programs such as basic literacy and GED/ESL programs for parents right in the school, and ongoing skill training for the demands of parenting. SAND enlists parent volunteers to reach out to other families in the neighborhood through the Parent to Parent Program.

Two-way communication between home and school is also a priority at SAND. New families receive a Welcome Packet that includes a friendly introduction to the school, information on school programs, community resources, and a variety of activities parents can do to help their child succeed in school. The Action Team used a Parent Interest Survey to find out how parents would like to participate in the school. Parents' responses resulted in the new Parent Arts and Crafts Club held by parents as an after-school activity for students.

Action Team members note the important role the Family Resource Center has played in implementing partnership programs. A catalyst, such as a family resource center, can be an important part of a school-family-community partnership's success.

Bridgeport  
 \*Maplewood School  
 Bristol  
 Greene Hills  
 South Side  
[Cheshire](#)  
 Highland  
 Norton  
[Danbury](#)  
 Stadley Rough  
[East Granby](#)  
 Allgrove  
[East Hartford](#)  
 East Hartford Middle  
[Enfield](#)  
 Eli Whitney  
 Henry Barnard  
 Nathan Hale  
[Griswold](#)  
 Griswold Elementary  
[Hartford](#)  
 Kinsella  
 S.A.N.D. Everywhere  
[Manchester](#)  
 Highland Park  
 Robertson  
[Meriden](#)  
 Nathan Hale  
[Middletown](#)  
 Bielefield  
 \*Lawrence School  
[New Britain](#)  
 \*Roosevelt Middle School  
[New Haven](#)  
 \*Davis Street Magnet  
[New London](#)  
 Jennings  
[Old Saybrook](#)  
 Goodwin  
[Norwich](#)  
 Veterans' Memorial  
[Plantsville](#)  
 Strong  
[Trumbull](#)  
 Daniels Farm  
 Tashua School  
[Waterbury](#)  
 \*Barnard School  
[West Hartford](#)  
 Norfeldt  
[West Haven](#)  
 \*Savin Rock Community  
 School  
[Windsor](#)  
 Clover Street  
 Oliver Ellsworth  
[Winsted](#)  
 Batcheller  
 \*New to the Network.  
 Welcome!

## Resource Materials on S-F-C Partnerships Available For Loan

Be sure to visit the SERC Library located in Middletown at 25 Industrial Park Road. The library is open Monday through Saturday to the public. Membership is free!! Call for hours and directions (860/632-1485) and to check out the extensive library of books, journals and videos related to School-Family-Community partnerships. These materials are helpful for administrators, teachers and family members and cover a broad array of issues. You may also request an annotated bibliography of the library materials on this topic. Listed are a few examples of what is available for loan:

### **Reducing School Violence Through Conflict Resolution.**

Johnson, D.W. & Johnson, R.T. (1995). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. This book is about teaching students to be peacemakers. It includes practical strategies as well as specific suggestions to teach conflict resolution procedures and skills. The authors discuss how schools can create a cooperative learning environment where students learn how to negotiate and mediate peer conflicts and teachers use academic controversies to enhance learning.

### **Peer Mediation: conflict resolution in schools.**

Schrumpf, F., Crawford, D. K. & Bodine, R. J. (1997). Champaign, IL: Research Press. This program guide and student manual is designed to prepare students in grades 6-12 to be peer mediators. Using a set of basic and advanced activities, students are able to successfully fulfill most mediation requests.

### **Teaching Young Children in Violent Times.**

Levin, D. (1993). Cambridge, MA: Educators for Social Responsibility. Designed for use in preschool through grade 3, this guide focuses on violence prevention and conflict resolution addressing the cultural context for violence in children's lives. Developmentally appropriate activities and ideas using dialogue, graphs, puppetry, games and curriculum webs are offered.

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