



## Issue Brief

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### INTRODUCTION

*21C Issue Briefs are designed to summarize and disseminate current research on topics of special interest to Schools of the 21st Century. The goal is to provide concise, objective and constructive information on these topics, and explore the implications for 21C program implementation and/or quality.*

*Issue Briefs are developed twice a year by staff at the School of the 21st Century initiative at Yale University and are made available to members of the 21C National Network. We appreciate your comments regarding this issue and welcome suggestions for future topics.*

School of the 21st Century  
Yale University  
310 Prospect Street  
New Haven, CT 06511-2187  
Phone: (203) 432-9944 • Fax: (203) 432-9945  
[www.yale.edu/21C](http://www.yale.edu/21C)

# What Schools of the 21st Century Should Know About School-Based Violence Prevention

Public concern about violence in American society and how it affects young people has fueled intense interest in the issue of school-based violence prevention. While recent highly publicized school shootings have raised alarms about dangers in schools, in fact, schools remain generally safe places for children. Nonetheless, the incidence of violence in schools, no matter how small, and the perception of danger, are extremely serious issues that have the potential to dramatically affect children's ability to learn.

Fortunately, schools are uniquely suited to promote violence prevention, and research shows that the earlier preventive interventions begin, the greater the impact. New program evaluations have also provided greater knowledge about how to effectively teach alternatives to violence. Together, the evidence indicates that Schools of the 21st Century provide precisely the mix of services and prosocial environment that contribute to school safety and violence prevention.

## School-Based Violence: The Extent of the Problem

Most of the violence to which students are exposed occurs in their home neighborhood and in the neighborhood surrounding the school rather than in the school itself.<sup>1</sup>

While research suggests that violence in schools derives mainly from factors external to schools, it may be precipitated or aggravated by the school environment.<sup>2</sup>

A 1997 survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that the number of students carrying weapons to school has declined in recent years. Between 1993 and 1997 the percentage of American high school students who reported having carried a weapon on school property in the last month declined from 12 to 9 percent.<sup>3</sup>

School shootings remain relatively rare events. Less than one percent of all homicides among school-age children (5-19 years of age) occur in or around school grounds or on the way to and from school.<sup>4</sup>

Results of a study of school-associated violent deaths between July 1994 and June 1998 indicate that the total number of events decreased steadily since 1992. However, the number of multiple victim events appears to have increased.<sup>5</sup>

Concern about violence within a school may reduce the quality of teaching, disrupt classroom discipline, limit teachers' availability to students before or after school, and reduce students' motivation to attend school and/or participate in extracurricular activities.<sup>6</sup>

When children are defending themselves against danger or warding off

fear, their energies are drained and they have difficulty learning in school.<sup>7</sup>

Violent youth crime peaks between 3:00 and 7:00 p.m. After-school programs during these hours can keep children safe and out of trouble.<sup>8</sup>

Research has shown that the most critical factor in promoting children's social development may be bonding with positive, nurturing adults who offer unconditional acceptance and support, model prosocial behavior, and convey the importance of living positively.<sup>9</sup>

## What Can Schools Do?

Different strategies can and have been used to promote safety and prevent violence in schools. By far the most effective strategy, however, is creating a successful school; schools that promote prosocial and cooperative behavior and cultivate a culture of learning are schools that prevent violence.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, school-based violence prevention efforts are most effective when they are integrated with other services that meet the needs of children and families.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, *violence prevention should not be seen as an "add-on" or a "program" but something that is integral to the design, policies and functioning of a school.*

Though there are myriad strategies to enhance safety in schools, most fall into one of two major categories, both of which are extremely important.

The first category can broadly be called "school security" strategies and covers discipline issues. These strategies are geared towards establishing behavior standards through rules and regulations that create a positive, calm environment conducive to learning.

They include:

- establishing positive behavior goals and instituting codes of conduct,
- monitoring the campus for unsafe activities with parent volunteers, security personnel, metal detectors, or the like,
- developing comprehensive plans for dealing with crime and violence,
- responding fairly, quickly and consistently to student misconduct.

This issue brief does not deal at length with these "school security" topics but points the reader to many helpful publications and websites in the Resources section (see pages 6-7).

The second category of violence prevention strategies can be broadly described as "primary prevention" activities. Primary prevention addresses a problem before it manifests itself. In this case, primary prevention for youth violence includes approaches that build children's social competencies and teach them alternatives to violence. This includes strategies such as:

- classroom-based conflict resolution curriculum — either stand-alone or infused into the regular curriculum,
- peer mediation — a form of conflict resolution that teaches children how to resolve disputes,
- anti-bullying programs,
- mentoring,
- life skills training,
- recreation programs,
- crime prevention education, and
- parent involvement.

A growing body of research provides clues about criteria schools can use to select primary prevention interventions that will be effective in their communities. In order to effectively combat violence, schools must:

- understand the source of the violence (i.e. inside or outside the school, gangs, bullies, etc.)
- know the factors that contribute to violence (i.e. individual, family, community, school)
- learn what can protect children from becoming violent offenders or victims
- use research-based interventions with evidence of effectiveness.<sup>20</sup>

## What are the Key Risk Factors Related to Violent Behavior?

Understanding the source of violent behavior is an important step in figuring out the appropriate intervention.

From conception to age six, risk factors for violence include:

- perinatal difficulties (e.g., low birth weight, oxygen deprivation);
- physical trauma to infants; and
- minor physical abnormalities and brain damage.<sup>10</sup>

Poor family management practices increase the risk for violence by children. Such practices include:

- parents' failure to set clear expectations for their children;
- failure to supervise and monitor children's behavior;
- excessively severe, harsh, or inconsistent punishment;
- physically abusive or neglectful parenting; and
- violent disputes between parents.<sup>11</sup>

Early childhood is increasingly recognized as a key stage in the development of aggressive violent behaviors. The development of self-regulation appears to be important during these years, and it is causally linked to other processes that lead to aggressive-violent behavior. Caregiver to child ratios and the

quality of these adult/child interactions are key environmental influences in the development of self-regulation.<sup>12</sup>

During middle childhood, children form normative beliefs about aggression and develop their interpersonal negotiation skills. School factors that influence this development are interpersonal relations with peers and classmates, teachers' perceptions of children's aggression, and the probability of exposure to antisocial youth.<sup>13</sup>

A key task of early adolescence is the development of a stable peer group. Whether that peer group is primarily prosocial or antisocial in orientation significantly affects the probability of aggressive and violent behavior in the individual child.<sup>14</sup>

As children approach adolescence, rebelliousness, association with peers engaged in violence, favorable attitudes toward the use of violence, and early initiation of violent behavior all predict later violence.<sup>15</sup>

A lack of commitment to learning is predictive of juvenile crime. Schools that instill a commitment to learning promote academic success and are likely to reduce the risk for violent behavior.<sup>16</sup>

Community contexts also contribute to the risk of violence. These risk factors include:

- neighborhoods with extreme poverty and unemployment; and
- socially disorganized neighborhoods with high crime rates, high population density, high residential mobility, physical deterioration, and low levels of neighborhood attachment.<sup>17</sup>

### KEY RISK FACTORS RELATED TO VIOLENT BEHAVIOR

#### INDIVIDUAL

Perinatal difficulties or physical trauma  
History of early aggression or beliefs supportive of violence  
Social, cognitive or physical deficits

#### FAMILY

Poor monitoring or supervision of children  
Exposure to violence  
Parental drug/alcohol abuse  
Poor emotional attachment to parents or caregivers

#### PEER/SCHOOL

Association with peers engaged in high-risk or problem behavior  
Low commitment to school  
Academic failure

#### NEIGHBORHOOD

Poverty and diminished economic opportunity  
High levels of transiency and family disruption  
Exposure to violence

## What Makes Violence Prevention Programs Effective?

*Safe schools must have as a foundation a caring school environment that supports positive discipline, academic success and mental and emotional wellness.*

Safe schools must have as a foundation a caring school environment that supports positive discipline, academic success and mental and emotional wellness. Schools must also have early intervention services that address the needs of students at risk of academic or behavioral difficulties, as well as comprehensive, intensive, child and family-focused interventions for those students whose needs cannot be addressed by early intervention.<sup>21</sup>

Once these fundamental elements are in place, then schools can benefit from introducing violence prevention programs that have been evaluated and shown positive effects.

Historically, many schools adopted violence prevention programs without evidence of their effectiveness. In part this was a result of a perceived need for a quick fix, but often there simply

was no empirical data on outcomes or effectiveness. That has begun to change with many organizations including the Centers for Disease Control investing substantial resources to figure out what makes for effectiveness in this field.<sup>22</sup> To date the evidence indicates that promising programs share the key characteristics listed in the box below.<sup>23</sup>

### EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS

- develop a school culture that promotes social support and social cohesion while stigmatizing and punishing aggression and bullying.
- incorporate physical and administrative changes to promote a positive school climate, such as improvements to the physical plant or the daily schedule.
- initiate anti-violence curricula in the primary grades and reinforce it across all grade levels, targeting key stages of development. Short duration programs tend to have only short-term effects. It is important to expose children to interventions for multiple years.
- develop children's prosocial skills — such as anger management, peer negotiation, conflict management, peer resistance and active listening — to inoculate them against violent habits and diffuse their tendency to lash out physically when angry.
- develop comprehensive, multifaceted approaches including family, peer group, media and community. Programs should target both individual change and facilitate environmental change.
- have a solid grounding in development theory, i.e. what shapes aggressive and violent behavior and what can be done to positively impact children's social development? This theoretical foundation is important because it informs the nature and design of the intervention and it also provides a basis for evaluating program outcomes.
- are tailored to the age, culture, ethnic identity and socioeconomic status of the target population and take into consideration the differential risks associated with family and neighborhood characteristics.
- invest time and money in intensive staff development to ensure that programs are implemented as designed and intended. Both the quality and the quantity of implementation have an impact on effectiveness. Training for all school staff is a worthwhile investment since it gives everyone shared tools to identify and diffuse potential violence and deal safely with students at risk of anti-social behavior.
- engage parents in the prevention intervention and provide support for complementary activities/focus at home.

## Implications for Schools of the 21st Century

While Schools of the 21st Century are hardly immune from the national concern about violence and youth, there is encouraging evidence that the 21C model includes many of the key ingredients for safe schools. Indeed, there is increasing evidence that community school models such as 21C are especially well suited to provide safety precisely because they offer a comprehensive, integrated program that addresses the healthy development of children and families on social as well as educational dimensions.<sup>24</sup>

Though nothing can completely inoculate schools from the devastating effects of violence, 21C schools can take comfort in knowing that the core components of the 21C model and its guiding principles are well aligned with what we know about preventing school-based violence. 21C provides coordinated care – linking education, health, child care and other support services – to provide a system that supports children’s optimal development, supporting families and ensuring that individual children do not “fall through the cracks.”

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### Specific ways in which 21C programs are aligned with the research on violence prevention are as follows:

- 21C attends to the cognitive, physical, social and emotional development of children from birth. This is in keeping with the recognized importance of early childhood in the development of prosocial, or alternatively, aggressive/violent behavior.
- 21C helps parents develop positive parenting skills through playgroups, home visits and parent education classes. Improvements in family functioning and parenting behavior are linked to lasting and positive effects on child behavior.<sup>25</sup>
- High quality early childhood programs that emphasize language and cognitive and social development hold clear promise as an effective primary prevention strategy. Among other effects, they have been shown to contribute to children’s academic success, a key factor lessening the potential for violent behavior.
- 21C’s focus on parent involvement helps parents maintain active relationships with their children and their schools. Strong parent involvement is also associated with children’s school success.
- 21C emphasizes the importance of quality standards such as adult/child ratios in child care settings. The importance of these standards is reinforced by research on the influence of high-quality adult/child relationships in the development of self-regulation and other positive behavior among children. By providing numerous opportunities for bonding with positive, nurturing adults, including their parents, 21C addresses this critical ingredient in children’s positive social development.
- 21C schools show improvements in students’ academic achievement. Children’s success in school is clearly linked to reduced risk of violence.
- 21C schools offer quality programs for children after school hours, precisely the time children are most in danger of involvement in violent or dangerous activities.
- 21C school evaluations show high ratings on school climate. A negative school environment is linked to violence. In addition, children’s concerns about safety can interfere with their learning. Likewise, staff concerns about safety can inhibit their availability to children and parents.

## Sample School-Based Violence Prevention Programs

There are scores of violence prevention programs available, and it is important to find one that fits well with your school. The following are a few examples of violence prevention programs that meet three important criteria:

- each program is considered primary prevention — designed for general populations as opposed to so-called “at-risk” youth
- each program has undergone positive outcome evaluation
- each program has been identified in a national survey, publication or resource as a “promising” or “noteworthy” program.<sup>26</sup>

In addition, each of these programs is designed for use with young children, although several of them extend into the upper grades as well.

### **Bullying Prevention Program**

*Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life*

*Clemson University*

*158 Poole Agricultural Center*

*Clemson, SC 29634*

*(864) 656-6320*

[http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/model/ten\\_bully.htm](http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/model/ten_bully.htm)

The Bullying Prevention Program is a universal intervention for the reduction and prevention of bully/victim problems. The main arena for the program is the school, and school staff has the primary responsibility for the introduction and implementation of the program in elementary, middle, and junior high schools.

### **I Can Problem Solve**

*MCP Hahnemann University*

*245 N. 15th St., MS 626*

*Philadelphia, PA 19102*

*(215) 762-7205*

<http://www.thinkingpreteen.com/icps.htm#schools>

I Can Problem Solve helps children learn to resolve interpersonal problems and prevent antisocial behaviors. It is available in separate volumes for three developmental levels: preschool, kindergarten and primary grades, and intermediate elementary grades. The program can be incorporated into the classroom or adapted for use by counselors.

### **Peacebuilders**

*Heartsprings, Inc.*

*7482 East Wanderling Road*

*Tucson, AZ 85732*

*(520) 299-6770*

<http://www.peacebuilders.com/>

Peace Builders is an elementary (K-5) school-based model designed to reduce physical and verbal aggression by creating a “culture of peace” within the school environment. Instructors use various methods such as modeling, role-plays, and self-monitoring strategies to teach students to interact socially in a positive way.

### **(PATHS) Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies**

*Developmental Research and Programs*

*130 Nickerson Street*

*Seattle, WA 98109*

*(800) 736-2630*

<http://www.psu.edu/dept/prevention/PATHS/>

The PATHS curriculum is a comprehensive program for promoting emotional and social competencies and reducing aggression and behavior problems in elementary school-aged children. The curriculum provides teachers with lessons, materials, and instructions for teaching students emotional literacy, self-control, social competence, positive peer relations, and interpersonal problem-solving skills.

### **Resolving Conflict Creatively Program**

*RCCP National Center*

*40 Exchange Place, Suite 1111*

*New York, NY 10005*

*(212) 509-0022*

<http://www.esrnational.org/about-rccp.html>

RCCP is a K-12 school-based primary prevention program based on the philosophy that aggressive and violent behavior is learned and therefore can be reduced through education. It builds a core set of skills: communicating clearly and listening carefully, expressing feelings and dealing with anger, resolving conflicts, fostering cooperation, appreciating diversity, and countering bias.

### **Second Step**

*2203 Airport Way South, Suite 500*

*Seattle, WA 98134*

*(800) 634-4449*

*(206) 343-1223*

<http://www.cfchildren.org/violence.htm>

Second Step is a school-based social-skills curriculum for preschool through junior high that teaches children to change the attitudes and behaviors that contribute to violence. Second Step teaches social skills commonly lacking in people prone to violent and aggressive behavior: empathy, impulse control, problem solving, and anger management.

**NOTE:** This list does not imply endorsement on the part of Yale University or the School of the 21st Century.

## POTENTIAL FUNDING RESOURCES

### **Adolescent & School Health Program Funding Database**

<http://www2.cdc.gov/nccdphp/shfp/index.asp>

A searchable database of information on federal, foundation, and state-specific funding sources for school health programs.

### **Afterschool.gov**

<http://www.afterschool.gov>

A searchable database of federal resources that support children and youth programming during out-of-school hours.

### **National Youth Development Information Center**

<http://www.nydic.org/funding.html>

Provides information on foundation and federal funding opportunities for youth development programs and agencies.

### **Notices of Funding Availability**

<http://ocd.usda.gov/nofa.htm>

This website can generate a customized listing of announcements by subject that appear in the Federal Register each day inviting applications for Federal grant programs.

### **Partnerships Against Violence Network (PAVNET) Online Funding Links**

<http://www.reeusda.gov/pavnet/fund.html>

Contact information and brief descriptions of foundations and federal agencies that offer funding for programs addressing issues of violence as well as guidelines for applying for funds.

## RESOURCES ON SCHOOL SAFETY AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION

### **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

Division of Violence Prevention  
4770 Buford Highway, NE  
Mailstop K60  
Atlanta, GA  
770-488-4362  
<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/violence/index.htm>

The CDC website contains a listing of more than 100 violence prevention projects involving 25 federal agencies (with direct links). The site summarizes federally supported data collection and analysis, evaluation, research, program development and technical assistance.

### **Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence**

University of Colorado at Boulder  
Campus Box 442  
Boulder, CO 80309-0442  
303-492-1032

<http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/>  
CSPV collects research literature on the causes and prevention of violence and provides direct information services to the public by offering facts and statistics on youth violence as well as database searches on youth violence. The Center also identifies models of excellence as determined by rigorous evaluation.

### **Hamilton Fish Institute on School and Community Violence**

2121 K Street NW, # 200,  
Washington, DC 20037-1830  
(202) 496-2200  
<http://www.hamfish.org/index.html>

The Institute, with assistance from Congress, was founded in 1997 to serve as a national resource to test the effectiveness of school violence prevention methods and to develop more effective strategies. The website contains a list of school-based violence prevention programs that have been evaluated and found effective.

### **Keep Schools Safe**

National Association of Attorneys General  
750 First Street, NE, Suite 1100  
Washington, DC 20002  
202-326-6000  
<http://www.keepschoolssafe.org/>

A project of the National Association of Attorneys General and the National School Boards Association designed to provide up-to-date information on successful programs, assist communities in developing safe school plans, and provide other resources.

### **National Alliance for Safe Schools**

Ice Mountain  
P.O. Box 290  
Slanesville, WV 25444-0290  
304-496-8100  
888-510-6500  
<http://www.safeschools.org/>

Founded in 1977 by a group of school security directors, the NASS provides training, technical assistance, and security assessments to school districts interested in reducing school based crime and violence.

### **National Resource Center for Safe Schools**

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory  
101 SW Main, Suite 500  
Portland, Oregon 97204  
(503) 275-0131  
1-800-268-2275  
<http://www.safetyzone.org/>

NRCSS has abundant online resources for schools, communities, state and local education agencies, and other concerned individuals and agencies to create safe learning environments and prevent school violence.

### **Safe and Drug Free School Program**

U.S. Department of Education  
Portals Building  
600 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20202  
800-USA-LEARN  
[www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS)

SDFS program is the Federal government's primary vehicle for reducing drug, alcohol and tobacco use, and violence, through education and prevention activities in our nation's schools.

### **Safe Schools, Safe Students: A Guide to Violence Prevention Strategies**

Drug Strategies  
1575 Eye Street NW, Suite 210  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-289-9070  
<http://www.drugstrategies.org/pubs.html>

Drug Strategies is a nonprofit research organization that promotes more effective approaches to the nation's drug problems. The *Safe Schools, Safe Students* guide is a comprehensive assessment of the most widely used school violence prevention programs in the country. It provides practical assistance in developing strategies to prevent youth violence, which is often related to substance abuse.

## RECOMMENDED BOOKS FOR PARENTS, TEACHERS AND CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

***Best Practices of Youth Violence Prevention: A Sourcebook for Community Action***, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, September 2000.

***Conflict Resolution Education: Guide to Implementing Programs in Schools, Youth Serving Organizations and Community and Juvenile Justice Settings***, US Department of Education, October 1996.

***Conflict Resolution in the Schools: A Manual for Educators***, Kathryn Girard, et al (Jossey-Bass Education Series).

***Creative Conflict Resolution: More Than 200 Activities for Keeping Peace in the Classroom***, William J. Kreidler, Good Year Education Series, 1984.

***How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk***. Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish. Avon Books, 1980.

***Ready-To-Use Conflict-Resolution Activities for Elementary Students: Over 100 Step-By-Step Lessons and Illustrated Activities***, Beth Teolis, Center for Applied Research in Education, January 1999.

***Safeguarding Our Children: An Action Guide***, U.S. Department of Education, April 2000.

***Sibling Rivalry: How to Help Children Live Together So You Can Live Too*** Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish. Avon Books, 1987.

***Teaching Conflict Resolution Through Children's Literature***, William J. Kreidler, Scholastic Trade, December 1995.

***Waging Peace in Our Schools***. Linda Lantieri and Janaet Patti. Beacon Press, 1996.

### **For Children:**

***The Ant Bully***, John Nickle, Scholastic Press, March 1999.

***Bullies and Gangs***, Julie Johnson, Copper Beech Books, April 1998.

***Hands Are Not for Hitting***, Martine Agassi Ph.D., Free Spirit Publishing, May 2000.

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>22</sup> Daniel J. Flannery, "Improving School Violence Prevention Programs Through Meaningful Evaluation," *ERIC Digest* 132, February 1998.
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