

YOUTH PEER VIOLENCE PREVENTION TOOLKIT

1. Introduction to the Toolkit

The Youth Peer Violence Prevention Advisory Committee formed in 2003 to address the issue of youth peer violence. Committee members included representatives from the PEI Office of the Attorney General, RCMP, Evangeline Community Consultative Group, Eastern School District, PEI Department of Education, Native Council of PEI, and the PEI Community Legal Information Association. Brenda Bradford and Anne Nicholson assisted with the coordination of meetings, activities, and reports.

In 2004 the Committee received funding from the Community Mobilization Program for a seven-month project. The purpose of the project was to share information on youth peer violence and its prevention, bring community members together to discuss youth peer violence issues in each region, assess interest in forming a provincial network, and develop an action plan for addressing youth peer violence through social development. Six consultations (with community members in Kings Health Region, Queens Health Region, East Prince Health, Evangeline Region, West Prince Health, and the Native Council of PEI) resulted in the formation of a provincial network and the development of an action plan that aimed to reduce youth peer violence across the province. It was learned from the consultations that community groups and organizations need information about effective prevention programs.

In 2006 the Youth Peer Violence Prevention Advisory Committee received funding from the Community Mobilization Program for a follow-up project, Yes 4 Youth. The goal of the project was to facilitate the formation of a provincial network, establish working groups to address youth peer violence in each region, and develop and distribute a Toolkit that includes best practices in youth peer violence prevention.

The purpose of the Yes 4 Youth Toolkit is to provide information on youth peer violence and the programs that have been effective in its prevention. Section 2 of the Toolkit provides background information on youth peer violence and its impacts. Section 3 discusses the causes or contributing factors of youth peer violence. Section 4 presents information on youth peer violence prevention. Section 5 lists selected prevention programs for three age groups: up to 6 years of age; 7-12 years; and 13-18 years.

2. Background to Youth Peer Violence

Youth peer violence refers to any violence between youth in a relationship, either familial, romantic or peer. The violence can take many forms: physical, verbal, emotional, psychological, sexual, exclusion or shunning, and bullying, including cyber-bullying. The results of studies in Canada and elsewhere have indicated that youth peer violence is widespread and may be increasing, both in terms of frequency and level of violence. It is a serious problem for children and youth. Research results indicate that between 49 percent and 58 percent of elementary students are bullied at school, and as many as 32 percent are bullied once a week or more often.

The psychological impact on victims of childhood teasing and other forms of bullying can be devastating and last long into adulthood. Diminished self worth, compromised school performance, social rejection, depression and feelings of helpless and loneliness are frequently reported consequences. Other consequences may be symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide. Negative effects also include detrimental educational outcomes such as lowered achievement, school failure and/or “dropping out” before graduating. Peers who witness bullying are traumatized as well. They are afraid to report bullying or intervene. Often they participate in the bullying for fear of being the next victim. The children who bully are also at risk for problems, for example criminality and substance abuse, that may continue into adulthood. A growing body of research shows that those who have engaged in or experienced relationship in violence in adolescence are at increased risk of perpetration or victimization in adulthood as well.

3. Causes of Youth Peer Violence

A.S.A.P., A School-based Anti-Violence Program, provides the following overview of the causes of bullying behaviour, which include family factors, individual factors, school factors, dynamics of bully-victim situation, and gender differences.

Family Factors

Some contributing family factors that have been found to predict whether children will grow up to be aggressive bullies include the following:

- Lack of attention and warmth toward the child;
- Modeling aggressive behaviour at home;
- Poor supervision;
- Use of physical and verbal aggression toward the child by parents;
- Physical and verbal aggression between the parents.

Individual Factors

The best-documented individual child factor in bullying is temperament. Children who are active and impulsive in temperament may be more inclined to develop into bullies.

School Factors

The social context and supervision at school have been shown to play a major part in the frequency and severity of bullying problems. Bullying problems can be greatly reduced in severity by appropriate supervision and intervention, as well as a positive climate in a school. The social climate needs to be one where there is a warmth and acceptance of all students, and one where there are high standards for student and teacher behaviour toward one another.

Dynamics of Bully-Victim Situation

A power imbalance is found at the center of the bullying dynamic. A student who is stronger, more aggressive, bolder, and more confident than average typically bullies other students who are weaker, more timid, and who tend not to retaliate or act in an assertive manner. There is an imbalance of power between peers, and the aggressor tends to be more confident and lack empathy for the victim. The aggressor may come from a home where there is poor supervision and modeling of, and tolerance for aggressive behaviour. Victims tend to be quiet, passive children with few friends. They

may have distinguishing features that make them stand out, such as being of a different culture or ethnicity, tall, heavy, or economically disadvantaged. Victims typically do not respond effectively to aggressive actions. The aggressive activities are usually carried out so that adults are not aware of them. Victims may be ashamed and often don't tell an adult. It is a myth that bullies are insecure or in some way victims themselves. Research indicates that their self-esteem is usually average or above average.

As with other interpersonal violence, such as dating violence, racial harassment, child abuse, and wife assault, the power imbalance in youth peer violence is a main factor in understanding what is going on. Intervention must take this into account.

Gender Differences

Boys are more likely to report being bullies and perpetrating violence than girls at each age. Girls are somewhat less likely than boys to be the victims of bullying, although the rates are not as discrepant as the bullying rate.

4. Prevention of Youth Peer Violence

Research shows that half or more of all youth peer violence can be prevented, and youth with the most serious behaviour problems benefit most from effective programs. Programs that are proven to be effective are based on rigorous scientific research. The proven anti-bullying and anti-aggression programs are relatively inexpensive and will pay for themselves many times over, but it is important that they be fully implemented as designed. This typically requires additional funds for technical assistance and monitoring to insure that the implementation is done well, with the quality and intensity required to achieve expected results.

The Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) office in the US Department of Justice offers some suggestions for school-based anti-bullying programs, including:

- ▶ The school principal should be actively involved.
- ▶ A "whole school" approach should be used, which enlists the entire school in a number of ways and therefore is more likely to be effective.
- ▶ Reporting of bullying should be part of any "whole school" approach. For example, a "bully box" in the school will allow children and youths to anonymously alert teachers to any bullying problems.
- ▶ Clear, anti-bullying rules need to be established and publicized.
- ▶ Adequate supervision of young people is essential, particularly on playgrounds and in hallways where most incidents of bullying take place.
- ▶ These efforts should be maintained over time and cannot be a one-time effort.

COPS advises against relying on some anti-bullying strategies such as:

- ▶ Peer mediation approaches are not effective and might even further victimize bullied children. This is because bullying involves harassment by powerful children of children with less power.
- ▶ Zero tolerance policies may result in a high level of suspensions without full comprehension of how behaviour needs to and can be changed. It does not solve the problem of the bully, who typically spends more unsupervised time in

- ▶ the home or community if suspended or expelled.
- ▶ Simply advising victims to “stand up to bullies” can be unproductive or even dangerous without adequate adult support to prevent bullying in the schools.

5. Youth Peer Violence Prevention Programs

Programs that are proven to be effective are based on rigorous scientific research. Three “Gold Standard” models that have been rigorously tested and have been proven highly effective are: *The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program*; *Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers (LIFT)*; and *The Incredible Years*. Two other programs, which have not been as rigorously tested, do have positive initial evaluations and are beginning to be widely implemented. These programs are *Aggressors, Victims and Bystanders* and *Don’t Laugh at Me/Respect Me*.

This section of the Toolkit lists these five programs, as well as selected programs with preliminary evidence of being effective. It includes selected programs that have been implemented in Prince Edward Island. The prevention programs are listed in alphabetical order for each of three age groups: up to 6 years of age; 7-12 years; and 13-18 years. A brief description of programs and contact information is provided for each program. Programs that are designed for more than one age group are listed in the lowest age group category of programs.

AGES 0-6

Anti-Bullying Program (preschool and elementary)
Cool Tools (preschool)
First Step to Success (kindergarten)
I Can Problem Solve (preschool, kindergarten, primary, and intermediate elementary)
The Incredible Years (ages 2-8 years)
Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (kindergarten through high school)
Parent-Child Interaction Training (preschool)
Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) (ages 5-12 years)
Roots of Empathy (ROE) (pre-kindergarten through grade 8)
Safe Spaces (preschool)
Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum (pre-kindergarten through grade 9)
Story Time (preschool through grade 3)

AGES 7-12

Aggressors, Victims and Bystanders
Brain Power
Camp Arowhon's Anti-Bullying Program
Don't Laugh at Me/Respect Me
The Good Behavior Game (grades 1-2)
It's Up To Me
Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers (LIFT)
Steps to Respect (elementary)
Teasing and Bullying: Unacceptable Behaviour Program (TAB)
Think First (middle and high school)

AGES 13-18

Challenge Day
Equal Safe and Proud (ESP)
Girls Healthy Relationship Program
Healthy Relationships
Healthy Relationships For Youth
Healthy Sexuality Presentation GLBT Youth
Living Values
Love Without Violence
Making Waves
RespectEd
Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE)
Violence Prevention Curriculum for Adolescents
Virtues Project
Women and Violence: Education is Prevention (WAV:EIP)
Young Women's Lives: Building Self-Awareness For Life