



Youth Violence Prevention Strategies

Violence is a major public health issue affecting mental, physical, emotional, financial and spiritual health. Education, awareness, and prevention efforts are key components to reducing the prevalence of violence and its devastating impact on society.

Youth Speak Out:

Everyone, but especially the youth, must understand the high cost of violence, such as death, disability, incarceration, family disruption, community fear and distrust of youth, and its impact on the entire community. They must also respect the rights of others in order to earn respect. The youth themselves are speaking out and saying "Be the change you want to see in the world. Become a leader in changing the culture of violence."

To reduce the violence that runs in our communities, youth must do the following:

- **Express** anger in a positive way and address personal issues with help from peers, parents, teachers, coaches, and others.
- **Organize** and call for an *immediate* end to *all* of the violence in our communities. Come together and participate in activities that work toward decreasing the tension that exists among individuals, various neighborhoods and communities. Create councils in each community that will be staffed and led by youth and guided by concerned and committed adults. These councils should meet regularly at a safe place to share relevant ideas and concerns. From the various neighborhoods invite adults and other youth who have been identified as being a positive influence in the community.
- **Advocate** for youth involvement on government and community boards seeking input from youth in diverse communities. Efforts should be made to improve communication between police and youth in the community and to build new bridges for mutual respect.
- **Participate** in opening lines of communication between youth and adults during community forums and other activities aimed at reducing violence. Reach out to parents, family members, and other adults to encourage them to participate in activities that youth enjoy. Youth are strongly encouraged to take advantage of all positive opportunities offered.
- **Practice** the proper way to conduct one's self when stopped by the police. Be aware of your rights and responsibilities when dealing with the police. Take advantage of programs that provide these skills as well as other information. There are brochures and pamphlets provided by social service and government agencies. For example, the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) and the NAACP Pittsburgh Branch produced a pamphlet entitled "*You and the Police: Rights, Responsibilities and Realities.*" The City of Pittsburgh has published *Information for People Concerned about Police Conduct.*

- **Call** upon parents, guardians and loved ones to be good role models. Share with them the important role they play in influencing the lives and attitudes of children. If necessary, *demand* they be good parents by being *present* in their lives. All too often some young people have been forced to take on the role of parenting younger siblings when parents or other family members have been unable to do so. Sometimes young people must take in the leadership role in displaying positive family and community values.
- **Demand** that parents, guardians and/or other caregivers take control of their households and provide the nurturing and discipline that children need from the earliest ages. To do so earns the respect of their children.
- **Show** respect for parents, guardians and other adults in your household so that they can trust children and youth to make responsible decisions. Lead by example and show younger siblings how to treat parents respectfully, so that when they become older, they will also be trusted to make good decisions.
- **Interact** with other youth in a respectful way to get respect in return.
- **Lead**, don't follow! Be strong and act independently. Young people should not try to be what *others* want them to be, unless those goals are positive. Far too many youths follow other youth who exhibit serious negative behaviors such as getting involved in unhealthy, and possibly criminal, actions. Be a role model to younger children and encourage them to achieve positive goals, as well.
- **Reject** the mindset that everyone else is the cause of ones' negative life circumstances. This kind of attitude encourages one to play the role of victim and fosters feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, and not having the ability to change ones' life situation. Understand that one *does* have the *personal* power to change life's' circumstances. Develop and adopt the faith to do so.
- **Utilize** ones' talents and skills for positive purposes. It is in ones' own best interest to pursue legal avenues to make money. Recognize that being involved in drugs and in other illegal activities contributes to the breakdown of the family and the community, imprisonment and even death. Remember that short term money will likely lead to short time lives!
- **Encourage** ones' peers to look at legal employment as the preferred lifestyle, one that should be sought by *all* members of the community. Discourage them from continuing illegal and criminal behaviors. Help them understand if they continue they will be forced to suffer the consequences.
- **Influence** ones' girlfriend or boyfriend in a positive manner. In many instances both young men and young women negatively influence, and even compete for authority, in their relationships. Be supportive of doing the —right thing. There is more value to a relationship when both parties wait before taking it the next level.
- **Delay** sexual involvement. Both boys and young men *and* girls and young women should place greater value on their bodies. Some girls and some young women believe they need to be sexually involved to maintain a relationship, which may include getting pregnant. Some young men believe that some young women use sex just to —trapll a man. Moreover, in some situations, because of the way girls and young women present

themselves some young men may feel pressured to engage in sexual activity. In all cases, such behaviors should be strongly discouraged. Sexual activity before becoming emotionally, and/or financially secure or responsible can lead to STDs, unplanned pregnancies, broken lives and broken dreams.

- **Discuss** healthy sexuality and how to build healthy relationships with parents, guardians, or other trusted adults, before becoming sexually active. Young men *and* young women both should participate in sexuality and family life planning education where available. Teen fathers and teen mothers should seek out and participate in parenting support/education programs.
- **Respect** the fact that boys and young men do not have the earning capacity of older males. Neither should boys or young men be expected to compete with adult males.
- **Understand** the fact that girls and young women should, in no way, encourage or force their boyfriends or partners to get involved in criminal behavior to provide for their needs or wants. Remember that material possessions do not bring happiness and should not determine someone's self-worth – you are *who* you are inside and not *what* you appear to be on the outside.
- **End** rumoring. Girls and young women are strongly encouraged to quit the rumors, which pit male against male. Such behaviors far too often lead to physical confrontations between competing young males, sometimes leading to death. Such deaths profoundly affect everyone involved spreading to the entire community.
- **Advance** academically. Realize the importance of making good grades and of being actively involved in positive school activities. Share with other students the fact that being a good student is the very best way to guarantee future employment and career success, and a much healthier community. Such students should be seen as the heroes of the school not the brunt of jokes and ridicule. Understand that to be smart is *not* acting *white*, and being smart is giving one the opportunity to be “green” as in making money.
- **Mentor** younger children. Utilize ones' talents to improve the educational achievement of the younger people in ones' community. This is a constructive use of time and talent and it will positively affect the climate of the neighborhood in which one lives. Volunteering not only helps others, it also makes one feel better about him/her self.
- **Stay** in school and attain the highest level of education possible. Explore other avenues for further education beyond high school that lead toward a career path. These avenues may be technical or trade schools, as well as colleges and universities.
- **Complete** training programs that build trust/respect/self-esteem and give instruction on job application skills, interviewing skills, interpersonal skills, goal setting and job preparation. Take advantage of support systems and training that will teach one how to remain employed and advance ones' career goals.
- **Demand** that *all* adults work diligently to assist youth in obtaining meaningful and legal employment. Youth should not feel that the only way to become financially stable is to engage in illegal or criminal behavior. Youth should seek employment opportunities with major businesses and corporations, as well as businesses in local communities.
- **Form** peer support/tutoring groups in schools, community centers, and religious institutions. Train to become peer educators in conflict resolution and anger management.

- **Participate** in student advisory boards that are balanced and diverse. Volunteer to become advocates/liaisons between the student population and school administration so that youth can have a strong voice in their education.
- **Train** volunteers to serve as youth counselors who can also participate in related activities such as speak-out assemblies at churches, schools and community events.
- **Participate** in the political process by voting in each and every election because voting *does* impact every aspect of society. Even youth who have not reached voting age can make a difference. Get involved in the political process; participate in activities such as voter registration, flyer distribution, and making phone calls for getting out the vote.
- **Become involved** with the Coalition Against Violence. Youth from across neighborhood boundaries work together in all initiatives and strategies.
- **Develop** an anti-violence youth task force as an umbrella group of the Coalition Against Violence.

Youth Empowerment:

- **Empower** the youth to speak for themselves. Encourage them to speak out at school board city and county council meetings about the plight of youth and insist they provide whatever is necessary to change the culture of violence in the schools and in the community. Seek out adults who are willing to provide 'training' on public speaking.
- **Help** youth discover for themselves their interests, gifts and talents. Motivate them to display and use their talents.
- **Expose** children, when they are young, to different kinds of educational, recreational, cultural, and spiritual events.
- **Provide** programs and activities for strengthening resiliency, including those that foster discipline, accountability, teamwork, self-esteem and character building to give them a sense of purpose, pride, and healthy self-worth.
- **Encourage** all youth to participate in positive uplifting activities and events.
- **Ensure** that all students have an opportunity to become involved in leadership programs by creating a safe group atmosphere and setting. Offer classes that develop leadership building skills and encourage peer leadership programs.
- **Get** students involved in community service and encourage volunteerism; give youth ownership of planning, implementation, and presenting.
- **Empower** youth to organize for peace and other topics important to them.
- **Teach** youth to be stakeholders in their own neighborhoods and communities.
- **Educate** youth about the importance of civic engagement beyond civics class in ninth grade and involve them in the election process as volunteers during elections. Encourage students of voting to register, vote, and even consider running for public office.

- **Reach out** to those youths who say they don't want to change: encourage them to realize their creative talents and motivate them to succeed. Realize that some youth cannot be reached, but do not be discouraged. The main focus is to make every attempt to reach those 'who are on the fence.'
- **Give** girls healthy alternatives, because they can be as aggressive and abusive as teen boys. Provide healthy alternatives for boys as well.
- **Engage** youth, starting at elementary school. Focus on development of violence prevention, anti-violence, anti-bullying, alcohol and other drug awareness and education at the elementary level, or earlier, because the earlier the intervention the better to impact violent behaviors.
- **Encourage** older siblings to show a more positive way to their younger siblings.

Action Steps for Families and the Community:

- **Provide** transportation from neighborhoods and local municipalities to encourage more youth participation in positive events.
- **Actively seek** more adults to serve as mentors, informal teachers and positive role models.
- **Encourage** community groups, communities of faith, schools and other places to provide space for drop-in programs for children and youth.
- **Demand** funding for 'safe spaces' or havens. These could be libraries, extended day programs, or supervised after-school programs.
- **Support** classroom-based programs for all students to engage in discussions of community issues important to them.
- **Develop** a youth-oriented directory listing grassroots organizations and community nonprofits that are willing to provide venues for leadership education and engagement to interested youth.
- **Respond** to community violence in ways that prevent further conflict; provide first responders, mediators, grief workers, community leaders, and other citizens who are trained or equipped with the necessary skills.
- **Encourage** older siblings to show a more positive way for the younger siblings.
- **Learn** family structure to determine who is engaging in violent behavior; engage families as one unit to become less violent.
- **Provide** more city-wide programs that take kids through reality checks by showing young kids what could happen if they continue to display negative, violent behavior. For example, "Scared Straight" programs, or programs that show children about the jails, etc.
- **Encourage** the youth who are currently in rehabilitative juvenile programs to explain to younger students their process of transformation.

- **Insist** that policy makers institute viable, workable programs to address the issue of violence. Insist that government support existing programs that have proven success and provide the necessary funds to replicate throughout the city.
- **Utilize** “experts” who actually run city-wide programs instead of going to other cities for expertise.
- **Persuade** more grassroots organizations to become involved in the process of making positive change for youth and the entire community.
- **Encourage** adults to mentor youth who have been “written off.”
- **Reach out** to those youths who say they don’t want to change and encourage them to realize their creative talents and motivate them to succeed.
- **Speak out** at school board, city and county council meetings about the plight of our youth and insist they provide whatever is necessary to change the culture of violence in the schools and in the community. Seek out adults who are willing to provide “training” on public speaking.
- **Seek out** adults who can urge student athletes to display more appropriate behavior and become positive role models for other youth.
- **Provide support** for parents to encourage them to take an active and positive role in the lives of their children before they become “street-wise” and engage in violent activities that can lead to injuries, incarceration, and/or death.
- **Provide** family education. Understand family structures to determine who is engaging in violent behavior and provide support for the entire family.
- **Actively show** youth what could happen if they continue to engage in negative and/or violent behavior by providing more programs that take them through reality checks, such as “Scared Straight.”
- **Help** youth who are currently in rehabilitative juvenile programs to explain to younger students their process of transformation.
- **Insist** that policy makers institute viable, workable programs to address issues relative to violence.
- **Utilize** more local experts who are providing effective programs that address the issue of violence before seeking expertise elsewhere. Insist on government support for local program with effective, proven success and provide the necessary funds to replicate such programs throughout the city and region.
- **Seek** and encourage adults to mentor youth who have been ‘written off.’
- **Identify** adults who will insist that all student athletes display appropriate behavior and become more positive role models for other youth.

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