

Excellence in Prevention – descriptions of the prevention programs and strategies with the greatest evidence of success

Name of Program/Strategy: Peacemakers

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1. Overview and description

Peacemakers is a curriculum-based violence prevention program for upper elementary and middle school students. It is based on an 18-lesson psychoeducational curriculum delivered by teachers or other youth-serving professionals. The curriculum teaches students positive attitudes and values related to violence, and trains youth in conflict-related psychosocial skills such as anger management, problem solving, assertiveness, communication, and conflict resolution. The program consists of more than delivery of the curriculum; in addition, school staff use a variety of procedures to infuse program principles and techniques into the everyday culture of the school. While the focus of the intervention is on primary prevention for all students, there is also a Counselor's Manual to guide remedial work for youth referred because of aggressive behavior.

The Peacemakers program content is based mostly on studies of psychosocial variables associated with individual differences in aggression and on existing interventions (either preventive or remedial) with evidence of effectiveness. The curriculum addresses: 1) broad causal factors discerned in past research on the psychology of violence, for example, beliefs supporting the acceptability and utility of violent behavior; and 2) deficits in conflict-related psychosocial skills. Thus, the program focuses on what students want to do and on what they can do.

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The intervention begins with several sessions on violence-related attitudes, values, and self-concept issues. Then there are sessions on anger management, self-perception, conflict avoidance and resolution, problem solving, communication, assertive behavior, and work on resisting negative peer pressure and acting as an agent of positive peer pressure.

The program includes a variety of classroom activities, including didactic instruction, discussion, use of the Socratic method, role-plays, handouts with graphic design, and experiential exercises. The curriculum includes a series of stories, with accompanying writing exercises, written for the program by a children's author. This component of reading and writing facilitates the integration of the program into the academic mission of schools.

2. Implementation considerations (if available)

The intervention is based on an 18-lesson curriculum delivered by teachers or other professionals. Each lesson takes about 45 minutes to conduct.

3. Descriptive Information

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Areas of Interest | Violence Prevention |
| Outcomes | 1: An increase in knowledge of psychosocial skills 2: A decrease in self-reported aggressive behavior 3: A decrease in disciplinary incidents involving aggressive behaviors |
| Outcome Categories | Violence |
| Ages | 6-12 (Childhood) 13-17 (Adolescent) |
| Genders | Male Female |
| Races/Ethnicities | American Indian or Alaska Native Asian Black or African American Hispanic or Latino White Race/ethnicity unspecified |
| Settings | School |
| Geographic Locations | Urban Suburban Rural and/or frontier Tribal |

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|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Implementation History | |
| NIH Funding/CER Studies | |
| Adaptations | |
| Adverse Effects | |
| IOM Prevention Categories | Universal |

4. Outcomes

Outcome 1: An increase in knowledge of psychosocial skills

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|-----------------------------------|---|
| Description of Measures | |
| Key Findings | Student self-reports indicated that, from pretest to posttest, the intervention group showed an increase in knowledge of psychosocial skills, compared to the controls. |
| Studies Measuring Outcome | |
| Study Designs | |
| Quality of Research Rating | |

Outcome 2: A decrease in self-reported aggressive behavior

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|-----------------------------------|---|
| Description of Measures | |
| Key Findings | Student self-reports indicated that, from pretest to posttest, the intervention group showed a decrease in self-reported aggressive behavior, compared to the controls. |
| Studies Measuring Outcome | |
| Study Designs | |
| Quality of Research Rating | |

Outcome 3: Improved behavior at home and at school by the end of intervention

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|--------------------------------|---|
| Description of Measures | |
| Key Findings | Teacher reports indicated that, from pretest to posttest, the intervention was associated with a 41% decrease in disciplinary incidents involving aggressive behaviors, and 67% fewer suspensions for violent behavior. |

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| Studies Measuring Outcome | |
| Study Designs | |
| Quality of Research Rating | |

5. **Cost effectiveness report** (Washington State Institute of Public Policy – if available)
6. **Washington State results** (from Performance Based Prevention System (PBPS) – if available)
7. **Where is this program/strategy being used (if available)?**

| Washington Counties | Oregon Counties |
|----------------------------|------------------------|
| | |

8. Study Populations

Evaluation Methodology

Study 1

Peacemakers was evaluated by Shapiro, Burgoon, Welker, and Clough (2002) using a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest research design. Three middle schools and the fourth and fifth grades of three elementary schools in a large, Midwestern, urban public school system took part in the study. One middle school and one elementary school served as the control group; this was 29 percent of the study sample. The two groups did not differ in age or gender, but did differ in ethnicity. Half of the total sample was female, 88 percent was African-American, 8 percent was white, 1 percent was Hispanic, and 3 percent was “other.” The sample was 14 percent fourth graders, 14 percent fifth graders, 23 percent sixth graders, 27 percent seventh graders, and 22 percent eighth graders. The program took place over the 1st semester of the school year. Posttest data was collected during the beginning of the 2nd semester. Three violence-related constructs were assessed through student self-report measures: knowledge of psychosocial skills, attitudes toward guns and violence, and aggressive behavior. Teachers completed behavioral observational scales as a second measure of students’ aggressive behavior. Of the 1,822 students who filled out pretests, data was analyzed on the 672 students who also filled out valid posttests.

Evaluation Outcome

Study 1

The evaluation found that the program results in positive changes in six of the seven aggression-related variables examined when comparing the treatment and control groups: psychosocial skills, self-reported aggressive behavior, teacher-reported aggressive behavior, and the numbers of aggression-related

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disciplinary incidents, times conflict mediation services were used, and suspensions for violent behavior. The aggressive behavior checklist showed that the intervention had a stronger effect on boys than girls and middle school students compared with elementary students. The intervention's suspension-reducing effect was greater for middle school students than elementary school students. It was also found that the program had a stronger influence on the level of boys' versus girls' participation in mediation services.

Supplementary Materials

Shapiro, Jeremy P., Joella D. Burgoon, Carolyn J. Welker, and Joseph B. Clough. 2002. "Evaluation of the Peacemakers Program: School-Based Violence Prevention for Students in Grades 4 Through 8." *Psychology in the Schools* 39(1):87–100.

9. Quality of Research

Program Quality

The reviewers rated this program high in quality for its clearly stated goals and their alignment to the program rationale. The rationale itself was found to be extremely well defined, with cutting-edge theories of the interrelationship between prevention and remediation in the context of violence prevention. Reviewers also found the content to be superior and logically designed in its presentation.

Evidence of Efficacy

The evaluation of the Peacemakers Program used a pre-post, comparison group design, with 71 percent of the sample receiving the program and 29 percent in the control group. Measurement instruments included a project-developed multiple-choice test based on program content, the Attitudes toward Guns and Violence Questionnaire, and the Aggressive and Violent Behavior Questionnaire. Three violence-related constructs were assessed (knowledge of psychosocial skills, attitudes toward guns and violence, and aggressive behavior) through student self-report measures and behavioral observation scales completed by teachers. The evaluation demonstrated statistically significant results in favor of the treatment students in the areas of increase in student knowledge of conflict-related psychosocial skills; decrease in self-reported and teacher-reported student aggressive behaviors; and decrease in teacher-reported student aggression-related disciplinary incidents, use of school conflict-mediation services, and suspensions for violent behavior.

Reviewers found the evaluation study of the program to be of high quality with some strong elements. They cited the study's short term outcomes as convincing evidence of the program's potential for changing aggressive behavior. Reviewers referred to the good face validity of the instruments and the fact that the instruments measured the dimensions purported. Interpretation of the results was within the limits of the data and unit of analysis. Although the attrition rate was high, reviewers found that the attrition did not seem to have a major effect on the sample composition in regard to aggressive behavior levels. In addition, data analyses took into account initial group differences and other constraints of working with human subjects that were reflected in the data set.

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10. Readiness for Dissemination

11. Costs

| Item Description | Cost | Required by Program Developer |
|------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Teacher training (6-8 hours) | \$150/hr plus expenses | Yes |
| Teacher's manual | \$65 | Yes |
| Counselor's manual | \$50 | Yes |
| Student workbook | \$8 | Yes |

12. Contacts

For information on implementation/research:

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