

What works in Violence Prevention

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After more than a decade of research on school-based violence prevention, researchers are gaining a basic sense what does and doesn't forestall violence among youth. At the recent Public Health Conference, psychologist W. Rodney Hammond, PhD, of CDC, outlined what the research shows thus far.

Several approaches that apparently don't work include using scare tactics, only teaching a few antiviolence lessons without following up in later grades, imparting information without addressing behavior change, and forcing antiviolence programming on unwilling, overworked teachers.

On the other hand, to make an antiviolence program work, Hammond suggested the following do's:

- ▶ Make the program comprehensive, involving families, communities and schools.
- ▶ Launch antiviolence curricula in the primary grades and reinforce it across grade levels.
- ▶ Tailor the program to its recipients. Take into account the age, community and socioeconomic status of your target population.
- ▶ Build personal and social assets that inoculate children against violent habits and diffuse their tendency to lash out physically when angry.
- ▶ Make program content relevant to the recipients' culture and ethnic identity to pique their interest and increase the likelihood that they'll retain it.
- ▶ Invest time and money in intensive staff development. Nobody--not even a teacher--can teach anger management and social skills without proper training and support, says Hammond.
- ▶ Develop a school culture that promotes social support and social cohesion while stigmatizing and punishing aggression and bullying.
- ▶ Use interactive teaching techniques, such as group work, cooperative learning and role-playing. Programs that develop students' violence-resistance skills, rather than just telling them, "Violence is a bad thing; you shouldn't do it," are ultimately the most effective, says Hammond.