

School Violence Prevention: Teachers Establishing Relationships with Students Using Counseling Strategies

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School Violence

- ◆ Statistically, schools are still safer than out in the community... but students still spend a significant portion of their waking hours in school
 - ◆ Significant proportion of social interactions take place in school
- ◆ High profile shootings in the 1990s (e.g., Littleton, CO) to the present (Chardon, OH) has raised public awareness of school violence
- ◆ School violence is not just “school shootings” – can range from verbal abuse, bullying, to other physical acts of violence (e.g., Long Beach, CA)

School Connectedness

- ◆ School Connectedness - Quality of relationships between students and school personnel
 - ◆ Student perception of belonging/acceptance, trust, dignity/respect, safety within the school context
- ◆ Associated with social and emotional well-being, academic achievement, and resiliency (e.g., Shochet et al., 2006; Smith & Sandhu, 2004)
- ◆ Vital role in preventing school (and community) violence (e.g., Brookmeyer et al., 2006; Resnick et al., 1997; Volungis, 2012)

Goal of Paper

- ◆ Enhancing school connectedness is more effective than such approaches as “zero tolerance” and profiling students
- ◆ Although there is a plethora of research recommending teachers/schools to have “high” levels of school connectedness (the “what”), the literature on actual mechanisms to develop this key construct (the “how”) is sparse
- ◆ Primary Goal: Translation of counseling strategies for teachers to utilize in their day-to-day interactions with students as a means to developing and enhancing school connectedness
 - ◆ Macro-level problem (school violence) that can be implemented through micro-level interactions with students

Developing a Teacher-Student Alliance

- ◆ Teacher-student alliance is a necessary first step in creating strong attachments that build school connectedness
 - ◆ An open and trusting relationship that is collaborative in nature
- ◆ Nurturant alliance (Bachelor, 1995)
 - ◆ Respect, nonjudgmental, empathic understanding, and attentive listening
 - ◆ Other related factors: dignity and genuineness

Facilitating Change-Inducing Relationships

- ◆ The expectation is not for teachers to play the role of counselors but rather to develop and maintain relationships with students that foster open communication
- ◆ Although not always possible, it is highly recommended that teachers find a time to get to know their students when other competing interests are not fighting for their attention
- ◆ Interactions can take place beyond the classroom... hallways, cafeteria, extracurricular activities

Facilitating Change-Inducing Relationships

- ◆ Attending & Listening
 - ◆ Proxemics – awareness of physical presence
 - ◆ Eye contact – gaze aversion
 - ◆ Nonverbal – important part of listening and communicating
 - ◆ Paralanguage – tone, pitch; use of “uh-huh” and “yes”
 - ◆ Silence – is okay

Facilitating Change-Inducing Relationships

- ◆ Reflection and Validation of Feelings:
 - ◆ The goal is not to intellectualize the student's feelings but to encourage more free expression
 - ◆ Experience feelings in a safe and non-rejecting manner
 - ◆ Most students want validation and understanding before employing intervention or problem solving strategies
 - ◆ Validation does not equate to agreeing

Facilitating Change-Inducing Relationships

◆ Restatements

- ◆ Repeating back to the student the content and meaning of the statement, but in a clearer way
- ◆ Conveys curiosity and interest in what the student is saying vs. interpreting or reacting quickly

◆ Reframing

- ◆ Explains and clarifies the student's meaning of the message
- ◆ Often adds a new context through which the behavior or incident is looked through
 - ◆ Shifts meaning/understanding in new direction for the student

Facilitating Change-Inducing Relationships

💧 Self-disclosure

- 💧 Helps students gain a better understanding of their own experience (and teacher's perspective)
- 💧 Helps students cope with challenges better and feel less alone

💧 Challenge

- 💧 Intended to foster increased awareness of students' feelings and experience
- 💧 Using humor or confronting defenses in a gentle way

Teacher-Student Alliance Outcomes – Preventing School Violence

- ◆ Broad/Implicit outcome
 - ◆ Students who feel like they have close relationships with teachers they can trust and look up to, along with having their own thoughts/feelings validated, the less prone they are to contemplate acts of violence when distressed

Teacher-Student Alliance Outcomes

– Preventing School Violence

- ◆ A more salient outcome of strong teacher-student alliances
 - ◆ Students are more willing to speak up when there is knowledge of a potential violent act
- ◆ Oftentimes perpetrators, or would-be perpetrators, share their plans of a violent act with other students before it takes place (e.g., Daniels et al., 2010; O'Toole, 2000)
 - ◆ “leakage”
- ◆ However, although leakage is a common occurrence, there are many times when students have prior knowledge of a violent act, but never report it to school personnel (O'Toole, 2000)
 - ◆ “code of silence”

Teacher-Student Alliance Outcomes – Preventing School Violence

- ◆ Students who may be hesitant to share any leakage have a greater proclivity to communicate such knowledge with a trusted teacher (Brinkley & Saarino, 2006; Daniels et al., 2010; Yablon, 2010)
- ◆ In other words, a strong teacher-student alliance, built upon basic relationship building and communication skills, may be a key factor in breaking the code of silence.