

No student should be afraid of going to school for fear of being harassed. No parent should have to worry about such a thing happening to a child.

School Safety

UPDATE

Bullying: too little love, too much freedom

Bullying among schoolchildren is certainly a very old phenomenon. The fact that some children are frequently and systematically harassed and attacked by other children has been described in literary works, and many adults have personally experienced it from their own school days. Though many are acquainted with the bully/victim problem, it was not until fairly recently — in the early 1970s — that the phenomenon was made the subject of more systematic research. For a number of years, these efforts were largely confined to Scandinavia. In the 1980s and early 1990s, however, bullying among schoolchildren attracted attention in other countries such as England, Japan, the Netherlands, Australia, Canada, and the United States.

On the basis of surveys of more than 150,000 Norwegian students, estimates show that some 15 percent of students in grades 1 through 9 (one student in seven) are involved in bully/victim problems with some regularity either as bullies or victims. In this study, approximately 9 percent of students were victims and 7 percent bullied other students. Data from other countries, including Great Britain, indicate that this problem exists outside Norway with similar and even higher prevalence rates.

A relatively clear picture of both the typical victims and the typical bullies has emerged from research. By and large, this picture seems to apply to both boys and girls; it must be emphasized, however, that so far less research has been conducted regarding bullying among girls.

Many more boys than girls bully others, and a relatively large percentage of girls report that they are mainly bullied

by boys. Also, a somewhat higher percentage of boys are victims of bullying. Although bullying is a greater problem among boys, a good deal of bullying occurs among girls as well. Bullying using physical means is less common among girls, since girls typically use more subtle and indirect ways of harassment, such as slandering, spreading of rumors, intentional exclusion from the group, and manipulation of friendship relations. Such forms of bullying may be more difficult for adults to detect. Younger and weaker students are most exposed to bullying. A good deal of this bullying is carried out by older students.

Three myths about bullying are widely maintained. One common view holds that bully/victim problems are a consequence of large classes and/or schools: the larger the class or the school, the higher the level of bully/victim problems. Testing of this hypothesis with empirical data concluded that the size of the class or school appears to be of negligible importance for the relative frequency or level of bully/victim problems in the class or the school.

It has also been commonly maintained the aggressive behavior of the bullies toward their environment can be explained as a reaction to failures and frustrations in school. This hypothesis also failed to receive support from empirical data. Nothing in the results suggested that the behavior of the aggressive boys was a consequence of poor grades and failure in school.

Third, a widely held view explains that victimization is caused by external deviations. It is argued that students who are fat, have red hair, use glasses, or speak in an unusual manner, etc., are particularly likely to become victims of bullying. This hypothesis also received no support in empirical analyses. External differences play a much smaller role in the origin of bully/victim problems than generally assumed. In spite of the lack of empirical support, this hypothesis still seems to enjoy considerable popularity especially among students.

Since these hypotheses are unfounded, one must look for other factors to find the origins of bullying problems. Research evidence collected so far clearly suggests that personality characteristics as indicated by typical reaction patterns, in combination with physical strength or weakness in

the case of boys, play a major role in the development of bully/victim problems.

Characteristics of victims

Typical victims are more anxious and insecure than students in general. Further, they are often cautious, sensitive and quiet. When attacked by other students, victims commonly react by crying, at least in the lower grades, and by withdrawal. Also, victims suffer from low self-esteem:

They have a negative view of themselves and their situation. They often look upon themselves as failures and feel stupid, ashamed and unattractive.

Victims are often lonely and abandoned at school. As a rule, they do not have a single good friend in their class. They are typically not aggressive and do not tease others. Accordingly, bullying cannot be explained as a consequence of victims provoking their peers. Also, these children often have a negative attitude toward violence and the use of violent means. If victims are boys, they are likely to be physically weaker than boys in general.

Children or young people who are being bullied may display one or usually several of the following signs:

- Come home from school with torn or disordered clothing or with damaged books;
- Have bruises, injuries, cuts, or scratches that cannot be given a natural explanation;
- Do not bring peers home after school and seldom spend time in the homes or playgrounds of classmates;
- Are seldom or never invited for parties and may not be interested in arranging parties themselves because they expect that nobody would want to come;
- Appear afraid or reluctant to go to school, have poor appetites, repeated headaches or stomach pains, particularly in the morning;
- Request or steal extra money from family to accommodate the bullies; and
- Often relate better to adults, such as parents or teachers, than to peers.

The victim described thus far is called the passive or submissive victim. In summary, it seems that the behaviors and attitudes of the passive/submissive victims signal to others that the victims are insecure and worthless individuals who will not retaliate if they are attacked or insulted. A slightly different way of describing the passive/submissive victims is to say that they are characterized by an anxious or submissive reaction pattern combined, in the case of boys, with physical weakness.

In-depth interviews with parents of victimized boys indicate that these boys were characterized by a certain cautiousness and sensitivity at an early age. Boys with these

characteristics, especially when combined with physical weakness, are likely to have had difficulty in asserting themselves in the peer group and may have been somewhat disliked by their peers. There are good reasons to believe that these characteristics contributed to making them victims of bullying. At the same time, it is obvious that the repeated harassment by peers must have considerably increased their anxiety, insecurity and generally negative evaluation of themselves.

Another, clearly smaller group of victims is characterized by a combination of both anxious and aggressive reaction patterns. These students often have problems with concentration and behave in ways that may cause irritation and tension around them. Some of these students can be characterized as hyperactive. It is not uncommon that their behavior provokes many students in the class, thus resulting in negative reactions from classmates. The dynamics of bully/victim problems in a class with these victims differ in part from problems in a class with passive victims.

A follow-up study in young adulthood (age 23) of two groups of boys who had or had not been victimized by their peers in school showed that former victims were much more likely to be depressed and have poorer self-esteem. The findings clearly suggested that this was a result of the earlier, persistent victimization which had left its scars.

Typical bullies

A distinctive characteristic of typical bullies is their aggression toward peers, but bullies are often aggressive toward adults as well. Generally, bullies have a more positive attitude toward violence and use of violent means than do students in general. Further, they are often characterized by impulsivity and a strong need to dominate others. They express little empathy for victims. Bullies who are boys are likely to be physically stronger than boys in general and the victims in particular. Typical bullies can be described as having an aggressive reaction pattern.

A commonly held view among psychologists and psychiatrists is that individuals with aggressive and tough behavior patterns are actually anxious and insecure. The assumption that the bullies have an underlying insecurity has been tested in several studies. Nothing in the research supported this view. Rather, the bullies demonstrated unusually little anxiety and insecurity, or were average in these areas. They did not suffer from poor self-esteem.

There are also students who participate in bullying who usually do not take the initiative. These may be labelled passive bullies, followers or henchman. A group of passive bullies is likely to be fairly mixed, some of whom may be insecure and anxious.

Empirical findings suggest at least three partly interre-

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lated motives or possible psychological sources for bullying behavior. First, the bullies have a strong need for power and dominance — they seem to enjoy being in control and subduing others. Second, considering the family conditions in which many of them have been reared, it is natural to assume that they have developed a certain degree of hostility towards the environment. Such feelings and impulses may make them derive satisfaction from inflicting injury and suffering upon other individuals. Finally, there is a material component to their behavior. The bullies often coerce their victims to provide them with money, cigarettes, beer and other things of value. In addition, aggressive behavior is in many situations rewarded in the form of prestige.

Bullying can also be viewed as a component of a generally anti-social, conduct-disordered, behavior pattern. Follow-up studies have provided strong support

for this view. Approximately 60 percent of boys who were characterized as bullies in grades 6 through 9 were convicted of at least one officially registered crime by the age of 24. Even more dramatically, as many as 35 percent to 40 percent of the former bullies had three or more convictions by age 24; this was true of only 10 percent of the boys in the control group (those who were neither bullies nor victims in grades 6 through 9). Thus, as young adults, the former school bullies had a fourfold increase in the level of relatively serious, recidivist criminality as documented in official crime records. Former victims had an average or below average level of criminality in young adulthood.

What kind of rearing and other conditions during childhood are conducive to the development of an aggressive reaction pattern? Four factors, based chiefly on research with boys, have been shown to be particularly important:

- During early years, a negative attitude, which is characterized by lack of warmth and involvement, by the primary caretaker toward the child increases the risk that the child will later become aggressive and hostile toward others.
- If the primary caretaker is generally permissive and tolerant, without setting clear limits to the child's aggressive behavior toward peers, siblings and adults, the child's aggression level is likely to increase.

- Children of parents who frequently use power-assertive child-rearing methods, such as physical punishment and violent, emotional outbursts, are likely to become more aggressive than the average child.
- A child with an active and hot-headed temperament is more likely to develop into an aggressive youngster than a child with a more quiet temperament. The effect of this factor is less powerful than the first two conditions.

| Overview of core program | |
|--|---|
| <p><i>General prerequisites:</i> Awareness and involvement on the part of adults</p> | <p><i>At the school level:</i> Questionnaire survey School conference day Better supervision during recess and lunch time</p> |
| <p><i>At the class level:</i> Class rules against bullying Class meetings</p> | <p><i>At the individual level:</i> Serious talks with bullies and victims Serious talks with parents of involved students</p> |

In summary, too little love and care, combined with too much freedom in childhood, are conditions that contribute strongly to the development of an aggressive reaction pattern associated with bullies. These factors can be assumed to be important for both younger and somewhat older children. For adolescents, it is also significant whether their activities outside school are well-supervised by their parents.

The aggression levels of the boys participating in the analyses were not related to the socio-economic conditions of their families. Similarly, there were very weak or no correlations between the four childhood factors discussed and the socio-economic conditions of the family.

The victims of bullying form a large group of students who are, to a great extent, neglected by the school. Many of these youngsters are the targets of harassment for long periods of time, often for many years. It does not require much imagination to understand what it is to go through the school years in a state of more or less permanent anxiety and insecurity and with poor self-esteem. Victims' devaluation of themselves sometimes becomes so overwhelming that they see suicide as the only possible solution.

Effective school intervention

Bully/victim problems in school conflict with our basic values and principles. It is fundamental for a child to feel safe in school and to be spared the oppression and repeated, intentional humiliation implied in bullying. No student should be afraid of going to school for fear of being harassed or degraded, and no parent should need to worry about such things happening to his or her child.

A school-based intervention program has been developed

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and evaluated in connection with the campaign against bully/victim problems in Norwegian schools. The intervention program is built on a limited set of key principles derived chiefly from research on the development and modification of aggressive behavior.

The program is based on an authoritative (not authoritarian) adult-child interaction or child-rearing model in which the adults are encouraged to take responsibility for the children's total situation — not only their learning, but their social relationships as well. These principles have been translated into a number of specific measures to be used at the school, class and individual levels.

It is important to try to create a school and, ideally, a home environment characterized by warmth, positive interest and involvement with adults on one hand, and firm limits to unacceptable behavior on the other. In cases of violations of limits and rules, nonhostile, nonphysical sanctions should be consistently applied. Implied in the principles is also a certain degree of monitoring and surveillance of the students' activities in and out of school. Finally, adults both at school and home should act as authorities at least in some respects.

With regard to implementation and execution, the program is mainly based on a utilization of the existing social environment: teachers and other school personnel, students and parents. Mental health professionals thus do not play a major role in the desired restructuring of the social environment. "Experts," such as school psychologists, counselors and social workers, do, however, serve important functions as planners and coordinators, in counseling teacher and parent groups, and in handling more serious cases.

It should be emphasized that this core program in many ways represents what is sometimes called a whole school policy approach to bullying. It consists of a set of routines, rules and strategies of communication and action for dealing with existing and future bullying problems in the school.

Further understanding of the program can be gained from a brief description of the four major subgoals. They are:

- *To increase awareness of the bully/victim problem and dispel myths.* Use of a bully/victim questionnaire for an anonymous survey is an important step in obtaining more specific knowledge about the frequency and nature of the problems in a particular school.
- *To achieve involvement on the part of teachers and parents.* Active involvement implies, among other things, that adults must recognize that it is their responsibility to control to a certain degree what goes on among the children and youngsters at school. One way of doing this is to provide adequate supervision during recess time. Further,

teachers are encouraged to intervene in possible bullying situations and give an absolutely clear message to the students: Bullying is not accepted in our school.

If a bully/victim problem has been identified in the class, teachers are also strongly advised to initiate serious talks with victims and bullies, and their parents. Again, the basic message should be: We do not tolerate bullying in our school. Such an intervention on the part of the school must be regularly followed up and closely supervised; otherwise, the situation may easily become worse for the victim than before the intervention.

- *To develop clear rules against bullying.* Included in these rules are: Do not bully other students; try to help students who are bullied; and make it a point to include students who become easily left out. Such rules can also serve as a basis for class discussions about what is meant by bullying behavior and what kind of sanctions should be used for students who break the rules. It is important that the teacher make consistent use of sanctions — some form of nonhostile, nonphysical punishment — in cases of rule violations, but also give generous praise when the rules have been followed.

- *To provide support and protection for the victims.* If followed, class rules against bullying certainly support children who tend to be victimized. In addition, the teacher may enlist the help of neutral or well-adjusted students to alleviate the situation of the victims in various ways. Also, teachers are encouraged to use their imagination to help victimized students assert themselves in the class, helping to increase their perceived value in the eyes of their classmates. Parents of victims are exhorted to help their children develop new peer contacts and to teach them how to make new acquaintances and to maintain friendships.

The basic message of our findings is quite clear: It is definitely possible to dramatically reduce bully/victim problems and related problem behaviors with a suitable intervention program. This program can be implemented with relatively simple means and without major costs. Introduction of the program is also very likely to have a number of other positive effects.

Thus, whether these problems will be tackled or not no longer depends on whether we have the knowledge necessary to achieve desirable changes. It is much more a matter of our willingness to involve ourselves and to use the existing knowledge to counteract the problems.

Prepared by Dan Olweus, Ph.D., professor of psychology at the University of Bergen, Norway. He has conducted research in this area for more than 20 years and has published many books and articles on the topic. (See page 5 for information about his newest book on bullying.)

America seeks freedom from violence

Book offers practical solutions

A new book by Dan Olweus, contributing author to *School Safety Update*, is available from Blackwell Publishers, Cambridge, Massachusetts. ***Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do*** offers effective ways to counteract and prevent bully/victim problems in school.

Facts about bullying, its causes and consequences are presented, along with practical advice to educators and parents on implementing a whole school approach to bullying. (See cover story.) This intervention program has been scientifically evaluated and reports the following results:

- a reduction of bully/victim problems by more than 50 percent;
- a considerable drop in anti-social behavior, such as vandalism, fighting, theft, drunkenness and truancy; and
- clear improvements with regard to the "social climate" of the classroom and student satisfaction with school life.

Youth violence conference scheduled

The University of Houston Clear Lake, Institute for Family and Community Development will hold a national conference, "Children and Violence: Intervention and Prevention Programs for Youth, School and Media Violence," on November 10-12, 1994, at the Sheraton Astrodome Hotel in Houston, Texas.

The conference will include workshops, panels, interest groups, special topical meetings and keynotes on five major tracks: education, criminal and juvenile justice, health, community advocacy and media. The conference programs are designed for a wide interdisciplinary group — professionals from health, mental health, schools, law enforcement, child advocacy, injury prevention and control, public health, nursing, corrections and media.

The conference is co-sponsored by a large number of national organizations, including the National School Safety Center. For further information and registration, contact Professional and Continuing Education Office, University of Houston Clear Lake, 2700 Bay Area Blvd., Box 354, Houston, TX 70045, 713/283-3030 or 713/283-3039 (fax).

Leave no child behind

According to a report from the Children's Defense Fund, a child or teen-ager is killed by gunfire every two hours in this country and an estimated 30 children are wounded by guns each day. *The State of America's Children Yearbook 1994* called for increased regulation of nonsporting firearms as one means to halt the widespread epidemic of child violence.

Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund, placed youth violence in the United States in this perspective: "The crisis of children having children has turned into the tragedy of children killing children as our young mimic the adult conduct they see in their home, community, national, and cultural life."

The report attributed escalating rates of violence to years of inattention to numerous interrelated factors: family income at the poverty level; large numbers of pregnant women and small children who lack even the most rudimentary, preventive health care; a steady increase in reported cases of child abuse and neglect; an insufficient number of child care and early childhood development programs, especially for low-income parents; homelessness or substandard housing, which contribute significantly to disruptions in education, family life and emotional well-being; inadequate nutrition leading to poor health and diminished cognitive development; and rising teen-age birth rates and inadequate youth development programs.

To confront the encompassing violence, poverty and neglect facing this nation's children, the report encourages each American to:

- commit to a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start and a Safe Start for every child in this country;
- urge all elected officials to ensure the health, physical, economic and educational security of all children;
- work for legislation regulating manufacture, sale and possession of nonsporting firearms and ammunition;
- implement safety plans that protect children in school, going to and from school, and in their neighborhoods;
- promote public education campaigns regarding both the danger of guns and alternatives to violence for conflict resolution;
- provide safe alternatives to being on the streets;
- create opportunities through youth jobs and training;
- implement programs for parent education, family support, and teen pregnancy prevention;
- fight racial discrimination and hate crimes; and
- restore parental, individual and community responsibility for children.

The report is available from the Children's Defense Fund, 25 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001, 202/628-8787.

Campus crimes: calling them what they are

No legal definition exists for bullying, a term used to refer to a variety of aggressive behaviors. Bullying is a euphemism for activities committed by youths that, if committed by adults, would be considered criminal. Thus, administrators need to know what activities are criminal in nature and distinguish between those activities and childish behaviors that are simply a part of growing up.

The purpose of this legal update is to define crimes¹ that are commonly committed on campus. With this information, administrators can deal with the behaviors for what they are, instead of dismissing them as “bullying” or just “boys being boys.” The assumption is that crimes should be handled as crimes.

Administrators frequently confuse assault or battery with fighting. Fighting implies mutuality. A battery is defined as “the unlawful application of force to the person of another.” The application of force does not have to be great; it can be a push or a shove. The slightest touching can also be considered a battery.

An assault is an attempted battery — when a person intends to commit a battery and takes a substantial step toward committing it. For example, if one student throws a book at another and misses, he has not committed a battery, but he has committed an assault. The victim does not have to experience apprehension for the action to be considered an assault. In fact, a person can be assaulted without even knowing it.

In some states, the actual ability to commit the battery is required. For instance, a person cannot commit an assault by throwing a rock at someone who is a mile away. This is an impossible feat. Some jurisdictions, however, accept apprehension as a basis for an assault. An assault occurs when a person specifically intends to cause the victim to be apprehensive and commits an act of substantial threat of force that actually creates this apprehension. Actual ability to cause the harm is not required. For example, a student points a toy gun at a teacher. The gun cannot physically cause harm, but actual apprehension is experienced by the teacher. The teacher has been assaulted.

Assault and battery are two tools that bullies use. Adults who experience such aggression can go to the police to get action or take the person to civil court and sue. So why do administrators often overlook this behavior when it involves children? Assaults and batteries should not go unpunished because they eventually lead to fights.

False imprisonment is “the unlawful detention or confinement of another.” The key to the concept is submission to authority. This is a common practice in hazing. One group of high school students referred to a practice of “slotting” incoming freshmen — stuffing the students in a slot (such as a locker or trash can) and making them stay there for a certain period of time. This particular example involves assault, battery *and* false imprisonment.

Theft and robbery also occur frequently on school campuses. Theft is a common term for larceny or stealing. Robbery is taking someone else’s property from the person or his or her immediate presence through the use of force or fear. An example of theft is when a student breaks into a locker and takes another student’s lunch. If a student takes another’s lunch by force or uses fear to make the other student hand it over, this is robbery. A robbery does not have to include the use of a weapon; force or fear is enough.

Extortion, commonly referred to as blackmail, is somewhat different than robbery. Extortion involves the threat of future harm. It is not limited to the threat of physical violence; it could be, for example, the threat of ruining a person’s reputation. Extortion includes the obtaining of property by the use of the threat, but it also includes the communication of the threat even if no property is actually handed over.

Another common crime committed by bullies is malicious mischief. This crime is the intentional destruction of or substantial damage to another person’s property, such as shredding a book.

A further group of crimes is categorized as “criminal attempts.” In these cases, the attempts themselves are crimes and include two basic elements: the specific intent to commit an act which, if successful, would be a crime and a perpetrating act done pursuant to the intent.

Each school should have a partnership relationship with local law enforcement that includes an understanding of what crimes the police will be called to handle. Administrators should be able to distinguish unacceptable behavior from criminal behavior. Only then can appropriate steps be taken.

Endnote

1. The definitions in this article are taken from *Black’s Law Dictionary*. St. Paul: West Publishing Co., 1990, and F. Lagard Smith, *The Criminal Law Color Book*, rev. ed. Gardena, California: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982.

McNair students pledge to be fight-free

After experiencing a significant increase in student fighting, the McNair Elementary School of Hazelwood, Missouri, decided to put up a fight of its own. The resolve to eliminate fighting fostered the development of a pilot campaign modeled after McNair's drug-free programs. In addition to making the school drug-free, the program would endeavor to make the school fight-free as well.

At McNair, students are now rewarded for not fighting with certificates, ribbons, banners for their classroom doors and a school flag. If students are caught fighting, they cannot wear their ribbons, and the classroom banners and the school flag are taken down for a day as well.

The approach works, as witnessed by the astounding drop in violence at McNair Elementary School — from 55 fights per year before the program began to only three fights the year after. McNair experienced a stretch of six fight-free months during the school year following implementation, a stunning accomplishment.

The Fight-Free Schools Program has been successful at a number of other schools in St. Louis. It has grown from an enrollment of 520 students at McNair Elementary to 20,000 students in the St. Louis County area. As word of the success of the Fight-Free Schools Program spreads, educators from all over the Midwest are calling to find out more. Desperate to reverse the steadily increasing level of violence among their students, school personnel are turning to the fight-free concept for relief.

The fight-free program has been developed in such a way that it can be easily adapted to any school setting. The program allows each school the flexibility to customize to their particular needs; however, core principles guide all fight-free programs.

For instance, the fight-free program uses positive visual and verbal reinforcement to encourage students not to fight. Follow-up plans are instituted to defuse potential problems that may occur between students. To create fight-free expectations from the students, every morning the principal makes announcements over the public address system congratulating the school for having "x" number of fight-free

students. A special fight-free flag, customized by each school, is flown each day that the entire school does not have a fight. Every classroom also has its own trophy-size "We're a fight-free classroom" ribbon.

If a student is involved in hitting, shoving, or kicking another student, classroom ribbons of those students are taken down that day. If there is an actual fight, with two people hitting each other, the school's fight-free flag is taken down by the students involved in the fight.

Throughout the school year, the principal, along with a local police officer, conducts positive behavior workshops for the entire school. During the workshop, students are given the opportunity to draw pictures with titles such as, "What does a safe playground look and sound like?" and "What does a good school look and sound like?" This drawing exercise allows young people to develop a vision of good behavior. The students also practice prevention techniques, such as walking away from a confrontation and counting to 10 until they calm down. In addition to the workshops, "Write, Not Fight" forms are distributed throughout the year so that students can jot down reasons why they are frustrated or angry with a certain person.

Students are also encouraged to contact a teacher when they have a potentially confrontational situation. This teaches children that there is a constructive process to follow to resolve a dispute. The fight-free lesson is one that can carry over into adulthood. For instance, responsible adults seek legal assistance from the police or the courts to resolve disputes, rather than using violence.

Instead of simply punishing students who misbehave, the Fight-Free Schools Program gives them an initiative, or reward, for *not* fighting. Students are motivated to stay fight-free by the positive recognition of their nonviolent status. Each school is allowed to customize this aspect of the program. The McNair students were so excited about their program that the sixth-grade cheerleaders developed a fight-free cheer. Another school has a fight-free mascot.

The Fight-Free Schools Program not only allows students to become more responsible for their own behavior, it also helps schools reach the goal of providing a positive education climate, which will ultimately enhance academic achievement. The long-term benefits of the program are both academic and social. As students rise to fight-free expectations in an educational setting, they grow up to become adults who are better able to articulate problems and mediate conflicts in a nonviolent manner — qualities that will have an extraordinary impact on tomorrow's society.

Submitted by Dr. Margaret Dolan, Principal, McNair Elementary School, 585 Coachway Lane, Hazelwood, MO, 63042.

Violence prevention: looking beyond individual rights

It goes without saying. Youth violence, both in and out of school, is a problem in our society. Numerous and interrelated causes exist for its prevalence: changes in family structure, lack of supervision and discipline, unequal opportunities, poverty, the proliferation of drugs and weapons, violence in the media, changing demographics.

Once considered safe places, schools everywhere are also facing the societal crisis of youth crime and violence. That is not to say, however, that the epidemic is going unheeded. Many promising strategies have emerged from school districts around the country: conflict management and resolution programs, crime prevention networks, dress code policies, weapon detection programs, school climate programs, safe school plans, media literacy programs, peer mediation, character education, law-related education, curricula that teach nonviolence and success skills.

The list continues: programs for drug-free, gun-free, gang-free and fight-free schools; multicultural education; crime prevention through environmental design; high-tech security devices; programs that provide youth with alternatives to gang membership and opportunities for jobs and

community service.

Each of these strategies represents a potentially great idea, an attempt to address, at a local level, just one aspect of the monumental problem of violence facing America's youth. That is how each strategy should be viewed — not as the proverbial silver bullet, but more appropriately, as only one arrow in a whole quiver of strategies aimed at reducing or preventing youth violence in local communities.

Unfortunately, when any one of these strategies is examined separately from the rest, apparent weaknesses are magnified. In the name of individual rights, great ideas are spurned. Parents demand that concern for classroom discipline or student safety be set aside because dress codes may suppress individual expression. Activists ask, "How will this program address the root causes of violence?" when, in reality, the root causes cannot be addressed by a single strategy or a single institution.

It is often easier to criticize than to take responsibility for being part of the solution. It is easier to focus on why an idea will not work than to ask, "What can I do to help overcome the obstacles?" It is also easy to dwell on root causes and not take any action at all.

Meanwhile, intervention is badly needed. Perhaps we should take a lesson from the medical community. What if the many medications that alleviate the symptoms of illness were not available because research was limited only to devising the cure? We would indeed suffer more.

It is time to take a look at the bigger picture. Americans need an ability to understand how holding on to individual rights may be more destructive than choosing to accept minor constraints on individual liberty. Working from a position of rights limits the list of available remedies to satisfy the problem. It also stifles freedom to explore new ideas.

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