

# School Safety Update

The Newsletter of the National School Safety Center

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## Critical incident stress debriefing: Supporting those who provide support

The Sanford Model of Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) was developed in 1994 with school staffs in mind. The model was developed by psychiatric nurse Nancy Sanford, a member of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) School Mental Health staff. This method of school critical incident stress debriefing has been widely used with thousands of school employees in Los Angeles after the Northridge Earthquake in 1994 and among school staffs in the aftermath of the tragic bombing of the Alfred Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995, as well as after many other school tragedies in the recent past.

The Sanford Model of Debriefing can help older adolescents and adults sort out their thoughts and feelings regarding a specific event, including the self-identification of what they need to feel safe to more fully resume their respective roles and responsibilities. The model is based on four questions posed by a facilitator, who should be a mental health professional. It is a public health intervention, best described as a guided discussion that helps individuals exposed to a traumatic event sort through their thoughts and feelings.

While this form of debriefing is not therapy, it has therapeutic benefits such as: reducing social isolation; increasing understanding of self and others; creating empathic bonds among colleagues; and providing important health and mental health information.

To begin the process, the school staff is divided into small groups of 4 to 6 individuals, turning their chairs toward each other in a circle. In each small group, one person is chosen to respond first when the each question is asked. The groups are provided with a brief description of the model and the rules.

The model is composed of four questions: a fact question, a thought ques-

tion, a feeling question, and an assessment question.

The leader designates a small amount of time for individuals in the group to respond to each question, allowing one, two or three minutes per person depending upon the nature of the question.

### Rules of the Sanford Model

Participants must adhere to the rules of the model as follows:

- Everything spoken and heard is confidential and not to be discussed outside of the room where the debriefing is being held.
- Each person has a turn answering the same question. S/he may respond until the facilitator calls "time." Then the next person in the group has a turn and responds until "time" is once again called. This continues in a clockwise direction until every person in the group has had a turn.
- Only one person may speak at a time.
- No comments, questions or cross talking are permitted among other members of the group while an individual is talking.
- During an individual's turn, if s/he does not use the entire time, the group sits in silence until that individual's time is up.
- The sole responsibility of each group member is to listen in a supportive manner to the individual speaking.
- Should the person speaking become emotional, support can be shown nonverbally, e.g., handing the person a tissue or placing one's hand on the person's shoulder.

### Asking the questions

When the first question is posed by the facilitator, each person is given the same amount of time to respond. For purposes of training or demonstration where group members do not have a crisis experience

in common, the first question is a fact question such as, "What is your name, your job title and your responsibility in the event of a crisis?" This question is usually given one minute per person.

The individual who was chosen by the group to go first would answer the question until the facilitator, timing the response for one minute, says, "Thank you, next person please." Each person in the group in a clockwise direction would be given one minute to answer the same question. Should an individual not use the full minute, the entire group will sit silently until that person's time is up.

The second question is a thought question. For purposes of training or demonstration, the question typically is: "When you heard about the shooting at Columbine High School, what was your first thought?"

The third question is a feeling question: "If you had to provide crisis intervention in the aftermath of a school shooting, what would be the hardest thing for you to deal with on a personal level?"

The final question is an assessment question. In training, the question is typically: "Based on what you've heard today, what information or training does your school or district need to develop a crisis intervention team?"

### Application in an actual crisis event

To gain the full benefit of this intervention, the rules must be followed faithfully. The Sanford Method was developed to be completed within one period of a school day or during the 45 minutes of a faculty meeting after school. If more time is available at a school site, more time can be allotted for each individual's response to a question.

If this debriefing model were utilized after an actual crisis event such as a school shooting, the questions would be specifically related to the incident. For

example:

- The Fact Question: "Introduce yourself, including your name and job responsibilities, and tell us where you were when the shooting occurred."
- The Thought Question: "What was your first thought when you realized what had happened?"
- The Feeling Question: "What was your worst feeling?"
- The Assessment Question: "What would help you to feel safer right now?"

In an actual crisis event, measures would be taken to increase security on the school campus, particularly if some of the security steps taken could match the assessment question responses.

After the debriefing, the mental health professional would summarize some of the common issues and shared reactions that were brought up during the session. This would be followed by a review of the normal range of physical, cognitive and emotional changes that occur in children and adults after a traumatic event.

### The range of typical responses

Traumatic events initiate a range of involuntary reactions among students and adults. A sense of fear and distrust of fellow students and the environment may lead to physical, cognitive and emotional changes that prevent students from re-engaging in the life of the school and the process of learning.

When fear and traumatic stress are evident, teachers report that students demonstrate lowered attention spans, decreased ability to cope with the normal demands of peer interaction and the

### PHYSICAL CHANGES

- Pupils Dilate
- Saliva Thickens
- Heart Rate Increases
- Stomach Motility is Inhibited
- Blood Flow Changes
- Cholesterol Levels Increase

### MENTAL (COGNITIVE) CHANGES

- Decreased Attention Span
- Decreased Ability to Analyze
- Decreased Computation Skills
- Difficulty with Memory
- Slowed Learning Speed
- Impaired Decision Making Skills
- Decreased Self-awareness

### EMOTIONAL CHANGES

- Feelings of Isolation
- Regression and Fear
- Decreased Intimacy
- Anger
- Denial
- Guilt
- Depression
- Return to Past Hurts and Traumas
- Lack of Enthusiasm and Interest

classroom, decreased computation skill, decreased ability to comprehend written material, and decreased awareness of his/her own behavior. Younger children show

signs of developmental regression, often losing competencies most recently acquired. Examples of regression include clinging behaviors, separation fears, wetting or soiling, and fears of the dark. These changes taken together with the distress, anxiety, and helplessness expressed after a violent incident, graphically illustrate the need for a school site crisis intervention response to provide support, understanding, and encouragement to all members of the school family.

As part of a public health education and intervention model, crisis intervention helps people to become educated about health risks, including the mental health risks of traumatic stress. This assists them to predict the kinds of changes and challenges they may confront and to prepare themselves and their children to meet them with in a calm, rational, and informed manner.

Crisis intervention workers need a sense of belonging and trust that is part of a team effort. Daily debriefing during a crisis event fosters the sharing and support necessary to continue the "giving" to others at the site. The opportunity to express one's thoughts and feelings about the event and the work permits each individual to acknowledge his/her personal experience. Positive support from group members sustains the constructive coping and work skills of crisis intervention workers at the scene. The Sanford model can provide a much needed source of strength and support.

*Prepared by Marleen Wong, Director, Mental Health Services/District Crisis Teams/Suicide Prevention, Los Angeles Unified School District.*

## School suspension mediation reporting positive results

Educators and parents often question the value of school suspensions after fights. Who supervises these youths when they are out of school with no adult supervision? Some adults believe that suspensions reward errant students with a "vacation" from responsibility. While suspension may send a message that behavior such as fights is unacceptable, it provides no avenue for resolving issues

that lead up to the fight.

The New Mexico Center for Dispute Resolution has developed a program to work with youths who are or who may be suspended. The School Suspension Mediation Program has been working with elementary, middle and high school students since 1991. While funding has been provided through the City of Santa Fe Children and Family Department, the

most important resources for the program come from the community: adult volunteers.

The primary goal of this program is to assist students who have had conflict with staff, teachers, and other students through productive and nonviolent ways. Since some school staff may be perceived by students as too involved, two adult im-

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partial mediators from the community are used to help solve the conflict. The Center trains the community volunteers to specifically handle cases involving school suspensions. The success of the program has been attributed to these adult mediators. Parents like the idea of using community volunteers to mediate these issues because they seem more neutral than school staff.

Students are referred to the program when they are suspended after a fight or when a threat has occurred. Prior to students returning from suspension, a meeting among the youths in conflict, both sets of parents and mediators is scheduled. The students participate in mediation and come to their own agreement, while parents resolve their own issues or gain new information about the incident. Once all parties have agreed to the resolution, the agreement is signed by parents as witnesses.

According to a recent report, "The Nature of True Power: A Look at Student Perceptions of Adult Mediated Suspensions at Three Santa Fe Middle

Schools," approximately 75 percent of the students participating in mediation accept their own role in causing the conflict and reach some kind of an agreement.

The following circumstances would generally be referred to the program:

- Pre-incident — when no violent interaction has occurred but it appears that a violent interaction is likely.
- Post-incident — after a violent interaction and as a condition for avoiding suspension. Involved students are given a choice to mediate or be suspended. If they choose to mediate and an agreement is reached that is non-violent in nature and is followed for a prescribed period of time, then no suspension is required.
- Post-suspension — after students are suspended. Students who have been involved in a violent interaction are allowed to return to school after they meet the requirement by the administration to mediate and reach an understanding of how to deal with their relationship in a nonviolent manner in

the future.

- Staff-Staff mediations — when there are issues between two or more teachers, staff members, or administrative personnel.
- Staff-Parent mediations — when disputes arise between parents and teachers, staff members, or administrative personnel.

While the most common mediation takes place between two or more students, an increasing number of Student-Teacher mediations are being referred. Such disputes usually involve rules, guidelines, classroom behavior, grades, or performance.

The New Mexico Center for Dispute Resolution School Suspension Mediation Program has been favorably received by school administrators and parents who report that the program is invaluable in addressing many of the complex and more violent situations involving students and/or staff. For more information, contact the New Mexico Center of Dispute Resolution, 800/249-6884.

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## When school is out: addressing children's after-school needs

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What do America's schoolchildren do when school is out? Are they safe? These questions have recently moved from the worry lists of parents to the national agenda. Terms like "after-school programs" and "out-of-school time" are appearing in speeches of presidential candidates and law enforcement officials and in articles in the popular press.

Society can see the gradual changes taking place in the way children spend their after-school time. Because more parents work outside the home and the dynamics of the family life are changing, fewer adults are home or nearby when their children are dismissed from school.

Today neighborhoods seem less safe. They are crisscrossed by traffic, plagued by street violence, and peopled by strangers. School shootings have heightened public concern about the many forms of trouble that teens and younger children may find after school. Such trouble may come in the form of alcohol or other drug

use, sexual activity, vandalism, gang membership, or on-line relationships with Internet-based hate groups. Americans are becoming increasingly concerned about what the nation's youngsters are doing — and not doing — when school lets out.

*The Future of Children*, a journal published by The David and Lucille Packard Foundation, recently addressed the topic of after-school programs in its Fall 1999 edition. The primary purpose of *The Future of Children* is to disseminate timely information about major issues related to children's well-being. This edition, subtitled "When School is Out," addresses the opportunities after-school programs can offer kids. After-school programs provide children with safe, supervised places to spend time, along with chances to learn new skills and develop resourcefulness, responsibility and reliability. With the rates of juvenile crime and experimentation with drugs and sex tripling during afternoon hours, this un-

supervised time is undeniably an issue that must be faced.

Increased availability of after-school programs for children can bring widespread benefits of improved behavior, work habits and performance for children, thus influencing their families and the communities in which they live.

Despite potential benefits, many hurdles impede the delivery of after-school programs to more children. According to *The Future of Children*, these obstacles include finding on-going operating funds, maintaining a qualified staff, securing appropriate operating space, and developing an accurate understanding of the likely program impacts on children and their families. To overcome such obstacles, *The Future of Children* is making efforts to document the supply and demand for more youth-serving programs and is evaluating the impact these programs have on children and their families. (For more information, visit <http://www.futureofchildren.org>.)

## Middle School Peace Institutes: Students become proactive for peace

It is March 25, 1998, and students are engaged in an intense discussion as their teacher shares some of the previous day's news about the tragedy at Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, AR. Two middle schoolers murdered four students and one teacher and wounded 15 others at their school. Students at the Peace Institutes at Northridge Middle School and Irving Middle School in Los Angeles, CA, reveal their thoughts about the incident. Some students are astounded that kids their own age could commit such a crime. Other students conclude that it was just two out of hundreds of students and that kids their age would not normally do such a thing. The students still believe that school is the safest place to be despite this tragedy.

In a similar discussion at a sister Peace Institute at Brinkley Middle School in Jackson, MS, students and teachers talk about the probability of a similar incident happening in their own school. Their discussion follows a more personal incident. Days earlier, a parent had fired a gun in the school's office upon learning of her son's suspension. The students raise the question concerning any impending fire drills. "Is someone going to go out and check the bushes before we leave the building?" one of the members asks. Their minds also think back to earlier that school year when a similar incident happened at Pearl High School in nearby Pearl, MS. (The Peace Institute students from Brinkley Middle School went to that school to offer paper cranes and a banner proclaiming their concerns and condolences to the Pearl High community.) As the discussion about Jonesboro continues, students suggest that their Peace Institute might be a way to prevent such things from happening at their school.

### The Peace Institutes

The Middle School Peace Institute has grown over the last four years to 10 Institutes in Los Angeles and a sister Institute in Jackson, MS. The mission of the Institute is to enable students to participate in an integrated and enriched educational program. The Institute offers stu-

dents the opportunity to become proactive in the peace process as they explore and research essential questions pertaining to requisite conditions for peace in the world, the community, the school, and in oneself. The use of the word "Institute" is intended to create a different mind set than the interdisciplinary team. Students and teachers become an organization within the school.

The Institutes have the following elements:

- Interdisciplinary teaching teams with 65 to 150 students, representing a wide range of ethnicity, ability levels, and age groups.
- Team organization with consistent management and instructional methodology.
- Ongoing development of an integrated curricular experience based on the year-long theme of Diversity and World Peace and tied closely to state and district standards.
- Extracurricular field trips.
- Use of computer technology for computer literacy and production of student projects.
- Use of art and music to express peace-related issues.
- Conflict resolution and cultural diversity training.
- Proactive roles for students in becoming peer conflict mediators.
- Various guest speakers.
- A presence in the school and in the local community for community action.

### Goals for Peace Institute Students

The goals of the Peace Institute help to frame the sense of "teamness" for the Institutes, and provide a framework upon which the organization is based. The objectives are:

1. **Teamwork and collaboration:** Students will work collaboratively and interdependently in a variety of authentic settings with people of diverse backgrounds within the school.
2. **Problem solving/critical thinking:** Presented with a conflict or issue, students, working either independently or collaboratively, will use appropri-

ate reasoning skills.

3. **Self-directed independent learning:** Students will acquire the means to work independently and gain knowledge for personal interest and academic growth.
4. **Communication/literacy skills:** Students will comfortably and effectively express opinions, deliver information and communicate ideas using oral, written, and artistic mediums.
5. **Research/study skills:** Using available research and technology, students will effectively organize information, make inferences and reach meaningful conclusions.
6. **Self-esteem/self-worth:** Through their achievements and participation as decision makers in the Institute, students will gain knowledge, acquire confidence, and develop their sense of importance and self-worth.
7. **Responsibility and interdependence:** Students will recognize the value of each member of our culturally diverse and international community, while demonstrating individual and group responsibility.
8. **Enthusiasm, desire, motivation, pride:** Students will have a positive attitude and will interact within the school and community as they become energetic proponents of world peace.

### Team organization and activities

Team roles include team leader, team manager, curriculum coach, and parent liaison. These roles allow team members to focus on aspects of team organization related to issues of leadership, student discipline, learning outcomes, and strategies for re-engaging parents and the community.

The team holds regular team assemblies, which involve other student service organizations or clubs on occasion. The team assemblies have three parts, which include a team building activity, a team business session (which may involve sharing information or holding a problem-solving discussion), and a curricular matter. The team meetings are held monthly unless there is special reason to

convene.

On assembly days, students and teachers wear their Peace Institute T-shirts, which are the same at all the participating schools. Individual school names are not displayed on the shirts so that when the students are involved in inter-school projects, the shirts embody one large Institute.

The purpose of the team assemblies is to unite the students and allow them to perceive themselves as an enterprise within the school. Regular team assemblies create a forum for guest speakers and for students' exhibitions. Team assemblies also create opportunities to mobilize the Institute whenever a crisis breaks, or when there is an important event.

When the Jonesboro incident happened, the Peace Institutes convened an emergency session to discuss the event, report some news, and then formulate a course of action. At a past Peace Institute assembly, a session was convened upon the assassination of Israeli Prime

Minister, Yitzhak Rabin. After viewing news footage and discussing the incident, the team went to work writing letters to a peace school in Israel, which had students of Israeli and Arab descent. The letter exchange began immediately, and students eagerly awaited return correspondence.

In another team assembly to honor Martin Luther King, the Northridge Middle School team, which is comprised of the schools' ESL student population, watched a documentary video on the Civil Rights movement. They wrote letters to the students in Jackson's Brinkley Middle School Peace Institute to ask questions about what they saw in the video. The rich historical past of Jackson yielded much to research for the Brinkley students, who then responded with their letters to the Northridge inquiries.

Each month all of the Peace Institutes publish newsletters that are sent across the district and across the country to the sister Institute in Jackson, MS. Students

in Jackson in turn send their newsletter to the Los Angeles Institutes. The newsletters contain stories written by the students telling of their experiences and some of their learning as participants in the Peace Institute.

The phenomenal group of Peace Institute teachers and students are demonstrating the capacity to be part of an antio violence influence at the middle school level and beyond. What the Peace Institute has provided for students is a way of looking at their world through the filter of cause and effect. In this experience offered to a heterogeneous group of students around a common theme of peace, students have the opportunity and accept the responsibility to become agents of peace. Peace Institute students represent many cultures, ethnicities, and abilities, and are symbolic of a mosaic of our nation.

*Submitted by Ronald Klemp, Ed.D., Advisor, Northridge Middle School Peace Institute Project, Northridge, CA., 818/885-8253, ext 37.*

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## Palm Beach County Schools: Providing proactive law enforcement for 20 years

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The School District Police Department of Palm Beach County (Florida) has been providing proactive law enforcement and training to Palm Beach County schools for more than 20 years. In 1978, the School Board of Palm Beach County recognized the need to establish a safe and secure environment for students, faculty, staff and property. Juvenile and school problems had traditionally been a low priority among outside police agencies. Therefore, in order to insure a long-term, consistent and earnest response to juvenile and school problems, the school board created the School Police Department and employed its own law enforcement officers to serve the schools.

Currently 86 school police officers are assigned to school sites and school district facilities/programs. School police officers work closely with the principal and staff of each school to maintain a secure learning environment and to foster a better understanding of the law enforcement function.

Last year the school district police officers were involved in numerous activi-

ties. For example, they:

- Counseled 54,269 students;
- Conducted 9,632 parent conferences;
- Attended 10,326 teacher/administrative conferences, including 30-day suspension hearings;
- Attended 1,738 faculty meetings;
- Attended and/or conducted 2,491 after-school functions;
- Conducted 11,679 investigations;
- Participated in 4,497 in-service training hours;
- Made 895 group presentations to approximately 32,200 attendees; and
- Supervised seven school field trips.

At the elementary school level, school police officers are assigned to clusters of three schools. In addition to being very active in classroom presentations, the officers assist in providing positive interventions for students and/or families in need of help from outside community agencies. By coordinating the receipt of needed services to youths and their families, the officers help divert the youths from a behavior path that would eventu-

ally cause problems during their school career.

Since 1978, the primary function of the School Police Department has been prevention with a secondary function of providing direct police action when the use of law enforcement becomes necessary. Prevention is the only long-term solution to crime. To this end, the School Police Department, with the support of the School Board of Palm Beach County, has implemented and/or had supervisory responsibility over many prevention programs that help provide safe educational environments.

### After-school programs

The Florida Legislature provided Safe Schools funding for the creation of after-school programs for middle school students. The School Police Department drafted a request for proposals for middle schools, assisted middle schools in developing their individual programs, and organized a resource fair for principals and school advisory committee members to meet with prospective program provid-

ers.

In 1995, 20 after-school programs were implemented in middle schools. Teachers, guidance counselors and administrators selected at-risk students to participate in the program. By the end of the year, the majority of these students showed improvement in school attendance, grades, and behavior. Program success is attributed to the three-part structure of the after-school program, which includes a tutorial component, a recreational component and a behavior modification component.

A 1997-98 evaluation showed that among those students who participated in the after-school programs:

- discipline referrals decreased 60 percent;
- average reading scores increased 45 percent; average math scores increased 59 percent; and
- students showed a 26 percent decline in angry behavior as measured by an anger survey.

This year, the district will be operating 28 after-school programs in middle schools. To make activity planning easy for school sites, more than 70 recreation activity modules have been developed for schools to use.

The Palm Beach County School District has also developed an after-school program for elementary schools. This year, 13 elementary schools are providing after-school programs to 50 students who were chosen based on their critically low academic performance and/or a higher than average number of discipline referrals for disruptive/aggressive behavior.

### **Aggressors, Victims and Bystanders**

The School Police Department has teamed up with the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office and the Palm Beach Gardens Police Department to pilot the implementation of the Aggressors, Victims and Bystanders violence prevention curriculum, which will be used in place of the DARE curriculum.

The Aggressors, Victims and Bystanders program was developed over a three-year period by Dr. Ronald Slaby of Harvard University and the Educational Development Center, with funding from

the Centers of Disease Control. This research-based curriculum is designed to help middle school students understand the nature of conflict and to observe what is going on before they jump into the middle of a fracas or fight. They will also learn to generate solutions to conflict that have positive outcomes for themselves and others.

Aggressors, Victims and Bystanders also teaches that the role of the bystander is pivotal in prevention problem situations from occurring or escalating. Dr. Slaby is helping the school district evaluate this program this year.

### **Surveillance cameras**

Over 600 boxes that house cameras have been installed on school district buses. The use of cameras has drastically reduced discipline problems on buses. Tapes showing discipline problems on the bus are forwarded to the school for administrative action. Bus drivers and school administrators overwhelmingly support this program. The cameras continue to be a successful deterrent.

During the 1997 school year, a pilot program was instituted placing video cameras in a high school and an elementary school.

The high school cameras are located in key hallways, courtyards, the student parking lot and the cafeteria. These cameras continuously watch and record, providing enhanced supervision of students. During the first year of implementation, the school experienced a decrease in violent incidents, automobile thefts, automobile burglaries and other property crimes.

The elementary school cameras are placed in key hallways and the perimeter of the school. Their main purpose is to enhance security around the perimeter of the campus to keep trespassers out. At night, these cameras operate in conjunction with the district's intrusion alarm system to give advance warning of potential burglars or vandals.

No burglaries have occurred since the cameras were installed.

Intrusion alarms are in all district schools and facilities (approximately 153 sites). There have been over 2,000 captures/arrests of intruders since the inception of this system.

### **Conflict resolution and mediation**

Conflict Resolution is a K-12 program designed to teach students how to understand conflict and how to deal with it creatively and constructively. The program teaches students how to de-escalate rather than to escalate conflict. In addition, the program helps students to:

- develop positive interpersonal skills;
- respect human differences;
- understand the dynamics of conflict;
- practice conflict resolution strategies;
- learn ways to handle frustration and anger; and
- explore conflict as a positive force for change.

The program is taught by classroom teachers and may be taught daily, weekly, or infused into existing curriculum. Materials have been provided to all schools. Last year, over 3,450 teachers, administrators and staff received conflict resolution training.

The establishment of mediation centers at individual school sites is a secondary focus of Conflict Resolution. Mediation resolves disputes with the help of a neutral third party. Each school can opt to present the mediation lessons to all students or to selected students who become mediators. Lessons include:

- active listening;
- paraphrasing;
- conflict clues;
- fighting fair; and
- the mediation process.

After completion of the lessons, mediation centers are established that are staffed by parents, other trained volunteers and student mediators. Students mediate the discipline referrals. Each school site determines the type of discipline referrals to be handled by the mediation centers as well as how the centers will be operated.

Over 675 peer mediators have been trained and have had a 93 percent success rate.

"Fighting Fair for Families" is a parenting program that is available free of charge to parents throughout the district. The two-session program is offered at schools and in the community in English, Spanish, and/or Creole. Compo-

nents of the program include:

- understanding conflict;
- rules for fighting fair,
- anger management;
- effective listening;
- using caring language; and
- mediation and negotiation.

Parents bring school-aged children to the second session so that they may practice the skills to be tried at home. Last year, 300-400 facilitators were trained to provide the program, and 179 families participated.

### Crisis response teams

Techniques for Effective Aggression Management (TEAM) training began for all secondary schools in September 1994. The next year, it was expanded to cover elementary schools as well. To date, over 1,100 schoolteachers and administrators have received the training, and it has been well received by both.

Trained teachers and administrators operate as in teams of four or five to respond to crises on campus. TEAM members are an integral part of the district's critical incident plans.

TEAM training provides tactical knowledge for handling many types of crises on campus. In addition, all response team members are trained in crisis prevention and intervention as well as Verbal Judo, a technique that uses verbal skills to de-escalate a situation or keep one from escalating.

### Detection dogs

The School Police Department currently has seven drug-detection dogs that regularly visit campuses to sniff for drugs. Most of these dogs are Labrador Retrievers. In addition, the district uses gun-detection dogs that are specially trained to sniff for gun powder and other related substances. The dogs have proven to be a valuable deterrent, discouraging students from bringing drugs and guns onto school property.

In 1995, a school board policy providing minimum mandatory sanctions for criminal acts on school district property and placing school police officers in uniform helped to reduce by 76 percent the number of firearm and weapon cases. Firearm and

weapon cases have remained low.

### Truancy interdiction

In 1991, the School Police Department shared the concept of the truancy interdiction program at the first retreat of the Palm Beach County Criminal Justice Commission. The program was adopted by the Commission as the No. 1 priority for the next year.

The school district and the West Palm Beach Police Department became partners to form the first Truancy Center in Palm Beach County. The partnership grew to include the police departments of Riviera Beach and Palm Beach Gardens and the Palm Beach County Youth Services Bureau and the Palm Beach County Children's Services Council.

In 1995, the partnership received an EPIC (Effective Partnerships in Communities) Award from the Florida Legislature's Commission on Juvenile Justice. In 1996, the Truancy Interdiction Program received international recognition from the International Association of Chiefs of Police as the best prevention program that year.

Truancy continues to be a top priority for the school district and law enforcement agencies in Palm Beach County. Four additional Truancy Centers have opened in:

- Delray Beach, operated by the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office;
- Belle Glade, operated by the Belle Glade Police Department;
- Palm Beach Gardens, operated by the Palm Beach Gardens Police Department; and
- Wellington, operated by the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office.

During 1999, over 3,100 truants were picked up by law enforcement in Palm Beach County. The program has a 5 percent recidivism rate. Support is now being sought from 38 municipalities, the County Commission, and the Palm Beach County School Board to share financially in the total cost of the program.

### Youth Court

Last year, the Youth Court Program in Palm Beach County provided early intervention to approximately 1,500 juveniles.

The Youth Court Program receives referrals from either police agencies that operate a juvenile first offender program or directly from the State Attorney's Office from cases filed in the court system by police agencies that do not have a juvenile first offender program.

Juveniles referred to Youth Court either attend a modified trial or an arbitration session. Trials and arbitration sessions occur at courthouse facilities throughout Palm Beach County.

Student attorneys, student bailiffs, student clerks, and student jurors conduct the Youth Court Trial. The only adult is the judge. Before the offender can be referred to the program, he or she must admit guilt. The purpose of the trial is to convince the jury that the offender is remorseful, has received appropriate sanctions and has learned a lesson. The youth is held totally accountable on the stand for his or her actions. If an offender successfully completes the program, the criminal record of the offender is erased.

The arbitration session brings the youth, his/her parent/guardian, and a Youth Court Defense Attorney to the courthouse to appear before a panel of three Youth Court Attorneys. The panel questions the defendant and then gives appropriate sanctions to fit the youth, the offense, and the circumstances. The youth are monitored for completion of all required sanctions.

The Youth Court Program is the epitome of interagency cooperation and partnership. Palm Beach County's Chief Circuit Court Judge, State Attorney, Public Defender, Chiefs of Police and Bar Association have all participated in the training and operation of the program.

The recidivism rate in 1999 for the Youth Court Program was 13.5 percent.

The School Police Department has been instrumental in all the aforementioned prevention programs and activities. Serving 150,000 students and 18,000 employees, the department recently was awarded a US Department of Justice COPS in Schools Grant to hire 16 additional school resource officers.

*Submitted by James P. Kelly, chief of the School Police Department of the School District of Palm Beach County in West Palm Beach, FL. (561/434-8435)*

## School crises: The "Year After"

Tragic schoolyard shootings have left images of terror and anguish that are indelibly imprinted on the collective heart and mind of America. In the immediate aftermath of such events, words of consolation are spoken, and teams of crisis counselors rush in to provide intervention and support. In a few days or weeks, the crisis counselors leave, and the event fades from public view. The farther the details recede from memory or when they are replaced by newer atrocities, the greater the expectation that teachers, students and families will "get over it."

The school's recovery begins when the initial daily media attention ends. The "Year After" a school shooting is a journey fraught with perils known only to schools who have lived through the advent of the first anniversary. From the day of the shooting, all events that follow in the school calendar are changed by tragedy: Classes, athletic events, holidays, dances, school-wide testing, senior activities, graduation, college admission. Relationships at school may become strained or fraught with conflict.

Factor into this fragile balance the societal reaction. Schools across the country have been changed by tragedies that have occurred at schools named "Columbine" and "Thurston." Large-scale tragedies become screens upon which individual feelings and larger issues are projected. Thousands of copycat threats, suicidal behaviors, and heightened school fears follow each occurrence. School shootings have become a behavioral template for troubled children and adolescents to act out a need for revenge and control because they have been rejected or outcast, angry and alone.

Adults and other young people may feel a sense of despair or express cynicism when it happens again. However, we are never immune to violence and cannot be immobilized by our shock at the revelation of yet another child killing a child.

What can we do together to stop the violence that is perpetrated by children at school? Two actions must be taken. The first is the resolve to provide a range of supportive services to children in their natural environments — in homes,

schools, churches and community gathering places. Such services involve informed adults who are connected to kids; educational programs that teach basic social skills (now recognized as part of the foundation required for learning), extra-curricular school groups and activities, after-school programs, and weekend activities supervised by caring adults.

The second action is to provide accessible, quality mental health services for troubled children and families. We must also actively work to change the negative attitudes we hold about seeking and receiving such services.

In the national report on mental health released in December 1999 by US Surgeon General David Satcher, two important messages were conveyed: Mental health is fundamental to health, and mental disorders are real health conditions. A review of current research supports two main findings: The efficacy of mental health treatments is well documented, and a range of treatments exists for most mental disorders.

The fact remains that many people do not seek help for themselves or their children because they lack knowledge regarding the availability of effective treatments or because they fear the powerful and pervasive stigma that is associated with acknowledging mental health problems.

Too many schools and too many children, teachers, and their families have suffered. At this time of somber anniversaries, let us stop to recognize the survivors of the "Year After." Together, let us honor the lives of those who were lost, acknowledge the terrible price the survivors have paid, and provide continuing care for those who have lived to remember.

In addition, every child and adult living in this country is obligated to take some constructive action to rebuild our schools and communities with relationships of mutual care and respect. This must surely be done if we are to end the violence and ensure that those who have died have not died in vain.

*Submitted by Marleen Wong, Director, Mental Health Services and District Crisis Teams, Los Angeles Unified School District.*

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