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Prevention Plus: A Report of an Effective Approach to Prevent Antisocial Behavior

Research Results Indicate that High-Risk Youth Can Learn to Be Successful

Recent research has shown that the risk of youth developing patterns of various types of antisocial behavior, including the use of alcohol and other drugs, aggressive and violent behavior, and gang activity, can be lessened by developing certain protective assets or skills. These include social and self-management skills, academic proficiency including reading, and improved relationships with family members and school personnel (Gardner & Resnick, 1996; Hawkins & Catalano, 1992; Schorr, 1988; West, Young, Mitchem & Calderella, 1998). During a two-year study evaluating a model known as *Prevention Plus* and a subsequent two-year evaluation of an extension of that model, students who were judged to be at high risk for antisocial, even violent, behavior participated in specially-designed learning programs in two inner-city schools plagued with high rates of juvenile and criminal activity, gangs, and low levels of academic achievement (Koerner, 1998). One of the two schools, in fact, “posted the lowest average achievement test scores in the state, and one of the highest juvenile delinquency rates. Fifteen gangs vie for control over the low-income, high-crime turf surrounding the school. Houses with broken windows and ripped screen doors make irresistible targets for angry adolescents who vandalize and steal” (Koerner, 1998).

Prevention Plus: A Model for Violence Prevention based upon Principles of Effectiveness

During the four-year study, a four-component model was delivered in three levels of intensity. The four components were: (1) clear communication of behavioral expectations and standards; (2) strengthening meaningful relationships with significant role models and increasing bonding with school, family and other wholesome values-based institutions; (3) emphasis upon building academic, social, and self-management skills; and (4) recognition for appropriate behavior and efforts to meet standards. Strategies within each of the four components were delivered in varying degrees of intensity to (1) the entire school studentbody; (2) students exhibiting some indicators of risk; and (3) students exhibiting many risk factors and antisocial behaviors.

Data from the Prevention Plus Model Demonstrate Improvement in Academic Skills and Social Competence and Reductions in Measures of Antisocial Behavior

Comparisons were made on measures of risk for students in the high risk categories who participated in Prevention Plus with students who didn't. Prevention Plus students made two to five times more improvement in all areas when compared with other students (West et al., 1998). Analyses of the data revealed:

- Prevention Plus students made unexpectedly large gains in academic achievement (nearly one-half standard deviation greater than average improvement) while their non-participating peers actually worsened on standardized measures of achievement.
- Prevention Plus students recorded an average improvement of more than one standard deviation on teacher ratings of social competence while a control group of non-participating peers made no change.
- Teachers rated Prevention Plus students as having achieved significant reductions in antisocial behavior while non-participating peers experienced essentially no change on these standardized measures.
- Prevention Plus students noted significant improvements in their own behavior while no such improvements were noted by a control group on non-participating peers.

Furthermore, four years of data from this school demonstrated consistent and remarkable reductions in direct measures of violent and disruptive behavior over the time the Prevention Plus was in effect:

- Fights and suspensions were reduced by 69%.
- Safe school violations were reduced by 77%.
- Court referrals were reduced by 84%.
- Gang-related activities were reduced by 81%.

These results are unique among violence prevention efforts, both for their magnitude and for their consistency over a period lasting up to four years.

References

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