



Prevention Plus: Preventing Antisocial Behavior Among At Risk Youth

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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. Such assets and skills include social and self-management skills, academic proficiency, and improved relationships with family and school personnel.¹⁻⁴ This study reports a 2-year evaluation of a model known as Prevention Plus. Participants were at-risk students in an urban Utah middle school. To assess the effectiveness of the model, changes in the following areas were measured: academic achievement and teacher perceptions of antisocial behavior and social competence.

Methods

The Prevention Plus Program

Prevention Plus is a four-component model designed to decrease and prevent antisocial behaviors. The model, based on proven behavioral principles, focuses on teaching social skills to fluency using direct instruction and opportunistic teaching. In addition, the Prevention Plus program teaches students valuable self-management and academic skills.

The four components of the Prevention Plus program are:

1. clear communication of behavioral expectations and standards;
2. strengthening meaningful relationships with adults and increasing bonding with school, family, and other 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 school-wide and individually targeted interventions

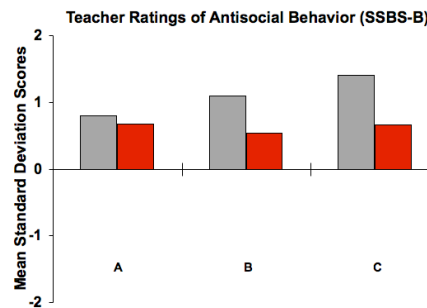
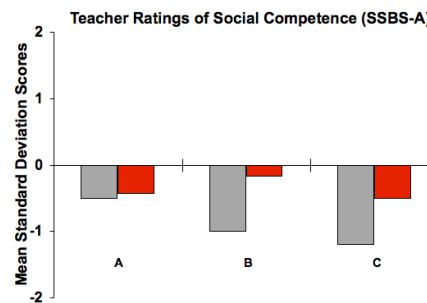
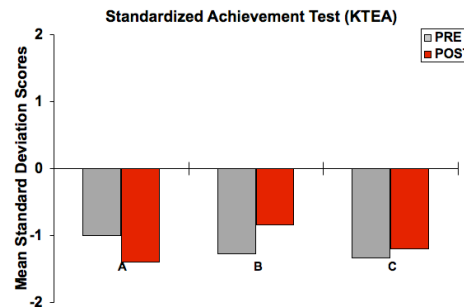
Participants

Participants in the Prevention Plus program were 172 students enrolled in sixth through ninth grades in an ethnically diverse urban Utah middle school plagued with high rates of criminal activity, gang membership, and low levels of academic achievement. These students were identified by school staff as being "at-risk." Participants were divided into three groups:

- Group A: no-treatment group
- Group B: treatment group with 1 year involvement
- Group C: treatment group with 2 years involvement

The three groups, while similar, can be considered to represent three levels of ascending severity. Group C consisted of students whose behaviors were regarded as most in need of intervention and were, therefore, served first. Students in Group B experienced Prevention Plus only during the second year.

Results



Note: Higher SSBS-B scores indicate more antisocial behavior

Prevention Plus students (Groups B & C) showed improvements in all four categories, while nonparticipating peers experienced essentially no change. Accumulated results of the study and the 2-year follow up demonstrated consistent and remarkable reductions in direct measures of violent and disruptive behavior across the entire school. Over the time the Prevention Plus program 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%

Discussion

Students who participated in Prevention Plus for portions of either 1 or 2 years experienced considerably more improvement in academic achievement and social competence, and more sustainable reductions in measures of antisocial behavior than did students who were also at risk but did not participate in Prevention Plus. These results were confirmed by the subjective evaluations of school personnel. Prevention Plus interventions with relatively small at-risk groups significantly reduced disruptive and violent behavior school-wide. This finding not only demonstrates the impact of interventions on the behavior of the target group, but it demonstrates how changes in behavior are reflected in school wide measures of concern. The Prevention Plus approach enhances the probability that crucial social and self-management skills will be developed to proficiency and their use will be generalized over time.

Endnotes

1. Gardner, S.E., & Resnick, H. (1996). Violence among youth: Origins and a framework for prevention. In R.L. Hampton, P. Jenkins, & T.P. Gullotta (Eds.) Preventing violence in america. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
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3. Schorr, L. (1998). *Within our reach: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage*. New York: Doubleday.
4. West, R.P., Young, K.R., Mitchem, K.J., & Caldrella, P. (1998). What's happening in Utah to help students at risk for antisocial behavior? *CPD News*, 21, 1-12.

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