

Chapter One: Exploring Violence

Objectives

1. Students will be able to define the concept and dimensions of violence.
2. Students will discuss the prevalence of violence in their own lives, their families, their neighborhood, town, state, country and the world.
3. Students will be able to generate a beginning list of causes of violence from a local to a global level.
4. Students will begin brainstorming strategies by which violence can be prevented or stopped.

Activity 1: Violence and Our Own Lives

Begin this discussion by telling students that as this apprenticeship in peacemaking starts, it is important to take a look at violence and its impact on our own lives.

Ask students to stand up if they fit any of the categories that you mention. (Once students stand, thank them and then ask everyone to sit down to listen to the next statement.)

“Please Stand If...”

- You have felt that it was not always safe in the neighborhood around your schools.
- You have made changes in your daily life (changing friends, avoiding certain parks and playgrounds and changing routes home) to avoid violence.
- Someone has threatened you personally in the past three years.
- Someone you know has stayed home from school because of fear of violence.
- Someone has threatened a family member or friend of yours in the past year.
- Someone has picked a fight with one of your family members or friends.
- Someone has picked a fight with you.
- Someone you know personally has been in a situation where a knife was used threateningly.
- Someone you know personally has been in a situation where a gun was used threateningly.

Discussion Questions

1. What did you notice from our pattern of standing up?
2. What does this tell you about our own lives?
3. How do you think teenagers in other parts of your country or other parts of the world would respond to these categories?

Share the following statistics on youth violence in the United States with the group:

- In 2003, 5,570 young people ages 10 to 24 were murdered—an average of 15 each day. Of these victims, 82% were killed with firearms (CDC 2006).
- Although high-profile school shootings have increased public concern for student safety, school-associated violent deaths account for less than 1% of homicides among school-aged children and youth (Anderson et al. 2001).
- In 2004, more than 750,000 young people ages 10 to 24 were treated in emergency departments for injuries sustained due to violence (CDC 2006).
- In a nationwide survey of high school students (CDC 2004):

- 33% reported being in a physical fight one or more times in the 12 months preceding the survey.
- 17% reported carrying a weapon (e.g., gun, knife, or club) on one or more of the 30 days preceding the survey.
- An estimated 30% of 6th to 10th graders in the United States were involved in bullying as a bully, a target of bullying, or both (Nansel et al. 2001).

Statistics from: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/yvfacts.htm>

Share with the students the following statistics from the World Health Organization's *World Report on Violence and Health Summary* from 2000:

Young People and Violence

Youth violence (involving people between the ages of 10 and 29 years) includes a range of aggressive acts from bullying and physical fighting, to more serious forms of assault and homicide. In all countries, young males are both the principal perpetrators and victims of homicide. In 2000, violence among young people left an estimated 199 000 youths dead – a rate of 9.2 per 100 000. The highest rates of youth homicide are found in Africa and Latin America and the lowest rates in Western Europe and parts of Asia and the Pacific (see Figure 4). With the notable exception of the United States, most countries with youth homicide rates above 10 per 100 000 are either developing countries or countries caught up in the turmoil of social and economic change. For every young person killed by violence, an estimated 20–40 receive injuries that require hospital treatment. In some countries, including Israel, New Zealand and Nicaragua, the ratio is even greater (8–10).

Some children exhibit problem behavior in early childhood that gradually escalates to more severe forms of aggression as they enter adolescence, and typically continues into adulthood (40–42). The majority of young people who engage in violent behavior, however, do so over more limited periods of time, during adolescence, having shown little or no evidence of problem behavior as children (43). Such “adolescence-limited offenders” are often looking for excitement (44) and their violent acts are often committed in the company of a group of friends. Young people also tend to be involved in a wide range of antisocial behavior, committing more non-violent offences than violent offences (45, 46). Among young people involved in violent and delinquent behavior, the presence of alcohol, drugs or weapons enhances the likelihood that injuries or deaths will be associated with violence. The factors contributing to youth violence cover all levels of the ecological model.

Involvement in violent or delinquent behavior before the age of 13 years is a significant individual factor (47, 48), along with impulsivity, aggressive attitudes or beliefs, and low educational achievement (34, 49). Experiencing harsh physical punishment or witnessing violence in the home, lack of supervision and monitoring by parents, and associating with delinquent peers are important relationship factors (33, 34, 50). On the community and societal levels, there is some evidence to suggest that exposure to media violence produces short-term increases in aggression, although the evidence is inconclusive with respect to the impact of the media on the more serious forms of violence (such as assault or homicide) and in the long term (43).

Research on other community and societal factors shows that youngsters who live in neighborhoods and communities with high levels of crime and poverty are at greater risk of violence (33, 51). Moreover, rates of youth violence rise in times of armed conflict and repression, and when the whole of society is caught up in social and political change

For the full WHO report, visit: http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report

Discussion Questions

1. What were your initial reactions to these statistics?
2. Was there anything that surprised you about these statistics? What?

3. How do you think these figures compare with your own neighborhood?
4. Do you think these statistics have risen or declined since 2000?
5. If, as the article suggests, poverty level is a factor of violence, why does violence still happen in developed countries or in areas of moderate to extreme wealth?

Activity 2: What is Violence?

Option A: Mind Map

Ask students either do this activity individually or in small groups. Ask the students to draw a circle in the middle of their piece of paper. Inside the circle, ask students to write the word “VIOLENCE.” Give the students one minute to brainstorm and write around the circle all of the words that come to mind when they think of the word “violence.”

Once students are finished with their mind maps, ask each individual or group to share all of the words they came up with.

Option B: Images of Violence

Instruct the students to draw what comes to mind when thinking of the word “violence.” Ask students to share their drawings and what they mean to them.

Discussion Questions

1. What did you discover when you created your mind maps and/or drawings?
2. What are some of the dimensions of violence?
3. What is the meaning or importance of violence to you in your life?
4. What did you notice about your drawings/words and those shared by classmates?
5. What is the meaning or importance of the images you created or the words you wrote?
6. What is included within the concept of violence?
7. How often are race, gender, and culture tied to acts of violence?

Activity 3: Where Does Violence Occur?

Have students examine a series of maps, starting with their own town. (The most helpful maps to have would be of your own community and of the world).

SHOW A MAP OF YOUR HOME TOWN

Ask students to think about their own personal experiences as well as what they see in the media when answering the following questions:

1. Where does violence exist in our own school, neighborhoods, communities, and city?
2. Is there an area that is more prone to violent activity? Why?
3. What problems do you think contribute most to violence in our city?
4. How many of you feel like you could do something to change the impact of violence in our city?
5. Are there any sections of our city that are peaceful? Where? Describe a peaceful area. Why do you think this area is peaceful?

SHOW A MAP OF YOUR COUNTRY

1. Where does violence exist in your country?
2. Is one area or state more violent than others?
3. What incidents of violence can you recall in your country (other than in your own town) in the last year?
4. Do you feel like you could do anything about the violence in your country?

5. Are there any peaceful areas in your country? Where? Describe a peaceful area. Why do you think this area is peaceful?

SHOW A MAP OF THE EARTH

1. Where is violence on our planet today?
2. Is it in only one section of our planet?
3. Do only poor countries have violence?
4. Has there always been violence on earth? Why?
5. Do you think you could do anything about violence on our planet? What?
6. Are there any peaceful countries on our planet?
7. Where? Describe a peaceful country. Why do you think this country is peaceful?

Discussion Questions

1. As we examined where violence occurs, what did you notice?
2. What generalizations did you make? Were they well founded or did you discover something different?
3. Do you think there is anything you can do about violence?
4. As you identified the places where violence occurs, what are your thoughts about why violence occurs?
5. Are there common or different threads as we moved from our neighborhood to the world?
6. How much do the causes of violence change when we move from our own school or neighborhood to an international conflict like the current one in Iraq?

Activity 4: What Causes Violence?

Read the two articles below which explore the ideas of violence as human nature.

Human Nature Isn't Inherently Violent **By Alfie Kohn**

Peace activists can tell when it's coming. Tipped off by a helpless shrug or a patronizing smile, they brace themselves to hear the phrase once again. "Sure, I'm in favor of stopping the arms race. But aren't you being idealistic? After all, aggression is just" - here it comes - "part of human nature."

Like the animals, -- "red in tooth and claw," as Tennyson put it - human beings are thought to be unavoidably violent creatures. Surveys of adults, undergraduates, and high school students have found that about 60 percent agree with this statement. "Human nature being what it is, there will always be war." It may be part of our society's folk wisdom, but it sets most of the expert's heads to shaking. Take the belief, popularized by Sigmund Freud and animal researcher Konrad Lorenz, that we have within us, naturally and spontaneously, a reservoir of aggressive energy. This force, which builds by itself, must be periodically drained off - by participating in competitive sports, for instance - lest we explode into violence.

It is an appealing model because it is easy to visualize. It is also false. John Paul Scott, professor emeritus at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio, has written: "All of our present data indicate that fighting behavior among higher mammals, including man, originates in external stimulation and that there is no evidence of spontaneous internal stimulation."

Clearly, many individuals - and whole cultures - manage quite well without behaving aggressively, and there is no evidence of the inexorable buildup of pressure this "hydraulic" model would predict.

The theory also predicts that venting aggressive energy should make us less aggressive - an effect known as "catharsis," which follows Aristotle's idea that we can be purged of unpleasant emotions by watching tragic

dramas. But one study after another has shown that we are likely to become more violent after watching or participating in such pastimes.

Although the hydraulic model has been discredited, the more general belief in an innate human propensity for violence has not been so easily shaken. Among the arguments one hears is these: Animals are aggressive and we cannot escape the legacy of our evolutionary ancestors; human history is dominated by takes of war and cruelty, and certain areas of the brain and particular hormones are linked to aggression, proving a biological basis for such behavior.

First, we should be cautious in drawing lessons from other species to explain our own behavior, given the mediating force of culture and our capacity for reflection.

But even animals are not as aggressive as some people think - unless the term "aggression" includes killing to eat. Organized group aggression is rare in other species, and the aggression that does exist is typically a function of the environment in which animals find themselves.

Scientists have discovered that altering animals' environment, or the way they are reared, can have a profound impact on the level of aggression found in virtually all species. Furthermore, animals cooperate both within and among species far more than many of us may assume on the basis of watching nature documentaries. When we turn to human history, we find an alarming number of aggressive behaviors, but we do not find reason to believe the problem is innate. Here are some of the points made by critics of biological determinism:

- Even if a given behavior is universal, we cannot automatically conclude that it is part of our biological nature. All known cultures may produce pottery, but that does not mean that there is a gene for pottery-making.
- Aggression is no where near universal. Many hunter-gatherer societies in particular are entirely peaceful. And the cultures that are "closer to nature" would be expected to be the most warlike if the proclivity for war were really part of that nature. Just the reverse seems to be true.
- While it is indisputable that wars have been fought, the fact that they seem to dominate our history may say more about how history is presented than about what actually happened.

Many people have claimed that human nature is aggressive after having lumped together a wide range of emotions and behavior under the label of aggression. While cannibalism, for example, is sometimes perceived as aggression, it might represent a religious ritual rather than an expression of hostility.

It is true that the presence of some hormones or the stimulation of certain sections of the brain has been experimentally linked with aggression. But after describing these mechanisms in some detail, K.E. Moyer, a physiologist at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh, emphasizes that "aggressive behavior is stimulus-bound. That is, even though the neural system specific to a particular kind of aggression is well activated, the behavior does not occur unless an appropriate target is available (and even then) it can be inhibited." Regardless of the evolutionary or neurological factors said to underlie aggression, "biological" simply does not mean "unavoidable." The fact that people voluntarily fast or remain celibate shows that even hunger and sex drives can be overridden.

All this concerns the matter of aggressiveness in general. The idea that war in particular is biologically determined is even more far-fetched.

To begin with, we tend to make generalizations about the whole species on the basis of our own experience. "People in a highly warlike society are likely to overestimate the propensity toward war in human nature," says Donald Greenberg, a sociologist at the University of Missouri.

The historical record, according to the Congressional Research Service, shows the United States is one of the most warlike societies on the planet, having intervened militarily around the world more than 150 times since

1850. Within such a society, not surprisingly, the intellectual traditions supporting the view that aggression is more a function of nature than nurture have found a ready audience. The mass media also play a significant role in perpetuating outdated views on violence, according to Jeffrey Goldstein, a psychologist at Temple University.

Because it is relatively easy to describe and makes for a snappier news story, reporters seem to prefer explanations of aggression that invoke biological necessity, he says. An international conference of experts concluded in 1986 that war is not an inevitable part of human nature. When one member tried to convince reporters that this finding was newsworthy, few news organizations in the United States were interested. One reporter told him, "Call us back when you find a gene for war."

Leonard Eron, a psychologist at the University of Illinois in Chicago, observes, "TV teaches people that aggressive behavior is normative, that the world around you is a jungle when it is actually not so." In fact, research at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communications has shown that the more television an individual watches, the more likely he or she is to believe that "most people would take advantage of you if they got the chance."

The belief that violence is unavoidable, while disturbing at first glance, actually holds a curious attraction for some people. It also allows individuals to excuse their own acts of aggression by suggesting that they have little choice. "In order to justify, accept, and live with war, we have created a psychology that makes it inevitable," says Dr. Bernard Lown, co-chairman of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, which received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985. "It is a rationalization for accepting war as a system of resolving human conflict."

To understand these explanations for the war-is-inevitable belief is to realize its consequences. Treating any behavior as inevitable sets up a self-fulfilling prophecy: By assuming we are bound to be aggressive, we are more likely to act that way and provide evidence for the assumption. People who believe that humans are naturally aggressive may also be unlikely to oppose particular wars.

The evidence suggests, then, that humans do have a choice with respect to aggression and war. To an extent, such destructiveness is due to the mistaken assumption that we are helpless to control an essentially violent nature. "We live in a time," says Lown, "when accepting this as inevitable is no longer possible without courting extinction."

From: Detroit Free Press, August 21, 1988

Discussion Questions:

1. What parts of this article took you by surprise, if any?
2. After reading this article, what is your opinion on whether or not violence is human nature?

Genetic Factors May Cause Criminal Behavior

Chi Chi Sileo

In the movie *The Bad Seed*, a mother reluctantly comes to realize that her angelic-looking little girl is a cold-blooded killer. That was fiction, of course--a story that built on the notion that someone could be "born bad"--and was overly simplistic as an explanation of evil. But new research is suggesting that that notion might be closer to truth than previously believed.

Scientists have begun to ask whether there is something biologically "wrong," or different, about people who become violent criminals. And they are disclosing intriguing answers. Moreover, they say, criminal behavior can be spotted at a very early age--even as young as 6 years old, the age of the girl in the movie.

Traditional Theories: Society Causes Crime

Theories about the causes of violent crime go all over the intellectual map, drawing from sociology, psychology, philosophy and religion. The question bedevils law enforcement workers, prison counselors, the criminal justice system and an increasingly frightened public. Is crime rooted in poverty, poor upbringing, exposure to "the underclass" or lack of exposure to moral teachings? Is evil, pure and simple, the "bad seed" come to life? And more disturbingly, is violence an innate drive, something held at bay by a fragile line separating most of us, perhaps only temporarily, from a violent few?

"It isn't all that hard to understand why some people use violence," says Robert Hare, a professor of psychology at the University of British Columbia and author of *Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of the Psychopaths Among Us*. "It's much more difficult to understand why we're so well-socialized not to." According to Hare, most violent criminals, particularly "cold-blooded" psychopaths, are just living examples of natural human behavior carried to a logical extreme. "Criminals have not acquired the norms of society," he says. "To them, criminal behavior just makes sense. They haven't made a conscious choice to be bad, they're just doing what comes naturally and what most benefits them. They are doing what we all would do if we didn't have social controls."

In 1986, an international group of social scientists and biologists meeting in Spain issued the historic Seville Statement on Violence, which emphatically declared that aggression is not an innate human drive. Heralded as an optimistic statement about humanity, especially for its implication that war is not a necessary evil, the Seville Statement also helped to give scientific authority to the society-as-cause theories that have held sway in studies of crime for the past few decades. These theories indict society itself for peoples' violent choices and pin the blame on everything from unemployment and poor schools to television violence and rap-music lyrics.

"The conventional thinking is alive and well," states Stanton Samenow, an Alexandria, Virginia, psychologist who works closely with different prison systems and has authored numerous books on crime. "It seems people are ready to blame everything but the federal deficit for crime--and that may be next."

Genetic Theories of Violence

Maybe not. A brave new field of genetic research is debunking those theories and unearthing evidence that the propensity for violence is, in fact, an elemental human trait--one of which some people just happen to have more. "Of course this is all very 'un-PC.' But to say that all criminals are made and not born is nonsensical," says Hare. "People are born with all kinds of different propensities: fear, timidity, cheerfulness, as well as different physical traits. Why should it be any different for this particular trait?"

"Violence is a normal human predisposition that exists to a higher degree in people who eventually become criminals," asserts psychologist Adrian Raine, whose groundbreaking studies are among the first to confirm what many criminologists long have suspected. Raine, an associate professor at the University of Southern California, recently completed a series of studies that show differences in genetic composition and brain functioning between criminals and non-criminals.

In one study, Raine used brain imaging to explore differences in the brains of violent offenders. Using a technique called positron emission tomography--which measures amounts of glucose metabolism produced when the brain is working--Raine found that violent offenders showed a marked dysfunction in the specific region of the brain that controls aggression.

"We know that violent offenders are impulsive, often don't think ahead," Raine notes, "and now we have a better understanding of why."

Crime Provides Stimulation to Criminals

In another study, Raine found that criminals have very low natural levels of physiological arousal measured by elements such as skin conductance (sweat), heart rate and electrical activity in the brain. Since low levels of arousal are uncomfortable, these people often look for external ways to get themselves "fired up." Some will look for stimulation in sex, drugs, fast driving and high-risk sports such as bungee jumping, for example; some will turn to crime.

"Crime is an arousal jag," Raine explains. "It's very interesting; we found that when we interviewed burglars, for instance, the word that kept coming up was 'exciting'--breaking into houses was a real thrill for them." That jibes with the experiences recounted by Jeffrey Smalldon, a forensic psychologist in Columbus, Ohio, who has worked with violent criminals. "We talk about crimes being 'motiveless' or 'senseless,'" he says, "but it just means that their motives are motives that don't make sense to us. What they net is not necessarily money, it's something more subtle and obscure. It's in the process, the predation, the cunning, the pulling it off. That's the high."

Raine's study looked at schoolchildren as well, since most indicators of criminal activity show up at very early ages. Many of these students had been branded "antisocial" by their teachers; however, even among that group of kids, the ones with naturally high arousal levels did not engage in criminal or violent behavior. "The protective factor here is high levels of arousal," Raine reported. Some of the teenagers had natural levels of arousal that were higher than those of normal, or not antisocial, teens, and that seemed to be the factor that kept them in line.

The real importance of Raine's studies is in the possibility of using this knowledge to nip crime in the bud. For example, Raine has been training people in biofeedback, an easy-to-learn technique that allows people to track and raise their arousal levels. Biofeedback is used medically with people who suffer from hypertension and can succeed in raising arousal levels in as few as 21 sessions. According to Raine, combining biofeedback training with educational programs would provide the best way to prevent at-risk adolescents from getting into trouble.

The study on brain imaging also has led to significant possibilities for intervention. Cognitive remediation, a type of therapy used to help stroke victims, the head-injured and others who have lost or damaged certain brain parts or functions, trains parts of the brain to take over the jobs performed by lost or weakened parts. Murderers have a marked lack of functioning, measured by glucose, in a very specific region of the brain, the region that controls aggressive behavior. Raine believes that cognitive remediation could be used to train other brain regions to take over those functions but adds that the research "is speculative at this point."

Environment Plays a Part

Still, he and other researchers are quick to point out that "biology is not destiny." These genetic studies indicate only a predisposition to violence, not a predestination to it. To become a violent criminal, they say, the genetic predisposition must be fostered by the right environment: This comes down to the family. Parental neglect, especially maternal neglect, is a key factor in destroying the ability to form attachments. And attachments--to family, to community, to outside goals--are what keep most people from becoming criminals. Maternal neglect, whether by accident or the mother's choice, includes physical or emotional abuse, improper nutrition and even premature birth--anything that upsets the natural bonding process. Physical abuse or harsh treatment are the primary factors that can confirm a predisposition to violence. "Aggression and harsh treatment at home works in two ways," says Ervin Staub, author of *The Roots of Evil*, a study of genocide. "First, it makes the child less trusting, more hostile. Secondly, it demonstrates that aggression is a tool, and you need skills to use a tool. So the child learns very well how to use violence. This isn't true in all cases, but enough to point to a definite trend." That conclusion is echoed by virtually every researcher in the field.

Most of these experts also note that the most common kind of violence children face is agonizingly close to home: corporal punishment. According to Philip Greven, author of *Spare the Child: The Religious Roots of Punishment and the Psychological Impact of Physical Abuse*, many studies show that children who are physically disciplined are far more likely to become criminals and use violence against others.

"Both aggression and altruism are cases of 'learning by doing,'" says Staub. "Children model the behavior they see and experience. If they are treated in a positive way, that's how they'll treat others. If they're treated harshly, that's how they'll behave."

That explanation, however, isn't universally observed. "My theory is that it isn't the environment that determines how people behave," counters Samenow, "it's how people choose to respond to that environment." Samenow, who scorns what he calls a blame-the-parents mentality, points out that often what appears to be harsh and neglectful behavior by parents is actually a perfectly understandable response to children who have parents at their wits' end.

"Of course, environment can affect behavior," Samenow writes in his book *Before It's Too Late: Why Some Kids Get into Trouble and What Parents Can Do About It*, "but the longer I have been involved in research and practice the more I have been compelled to recognize an even more important fact: The environment from which a person comes is less crucial than the choice the individual makes as he responds to that environment." Samenow, like Staub, is not convinced that there are genetic bases for violent behavior, but he argues that it doesn't matter anyway; criminals, he says, simply think differently than non-criminals do. They see the world and their place in it in ways almost unrecognizable to the rest of us. "That's true across crimes. And even if they made certain things legal, say drugs, some one with that pattern of thinking would just find another law to break." Samenow believes that crime can be prevented by a two-part plan: stepping in early, when patterns of antisocial behavior start cropping up, and using the kind of tough-minded, confrontational "therapy" he uses in prisons.

Opposition to Genetic Research

Samenow does not actively oppose genetic research; but there are those who do. The field is ripe for controversy, and not just in theory: The 1992 appointment of Frederick Goodwin to be director of the National Institute of Mental Health almost was derailed because of Goodwin's work in genetic bases of violent behavior which was called racist because it discussed violence among inner-city minorities. A conference that Goodwin had planned on violence in the inner cities was canceled.

"The real irony is that it's the inner cities who are being most hurt by violent crime," Raine notes, although he acknowledges that this type of research must be performed with a constant vigilance against abuse.

"When you talk about predispositions to undesirable behavior, you get into fears of genetic engineering, eugenics, genocide--everything associated with Nazism," says Raine. He understands allegations of racism but points out that every one of these studies has used whites as subjects precisely to avoid any taint of racial bias.

Ideological battles also are at stake. A majority of sociologists and criminologists still believe in society-is-all theories, and government crime-prevention programs reflect those beliefs. Raine predicts that by providing early care to at-risk mothers to reduce birth complications and maternal rejection, violent crime could be reduced by up to 22 percent. He acknowledges the ethical dilemma of targeting certain people for intervention but argues that this kind of specific intervention would be far more effective than current one-size-fits-all programs that address crime after it occurs rather than preventing it from happening.

The Criminally Predisposed Can Change Their Ways

"No one wants to hear this," says Smalldon, "but we can predict violent tendencies at a very early age. And that's when we should be stepping in, before these children go right over the edge. Of course, this is very

controversial and highly charged, like we're saying that the 'bad seed' is a fact. But it isn't like that. The little girl in *The Bad Seed* was out-and-out evil; we know that we can intervene and people really can change their ways."

Raine, Hare and other researchers stress that criminal behavior is not purely a result of genetic makeup; rather, it's the lethal combination of a violent predisposition and childhood disruption that appear as constants among violent offenders.

The hope these researchers share is that ideological and political controversies won't put a stop to their work. They point out that far from expressing a "you're doomed" philosophy, these findings point to a future filled with hope. "We can change biology," Raine says. "We can change violence and crime." Rather than rail at these new studies, he notes, people should embrace the opportunity to replace the failed theories of the past with new and different ones that might just offer a better way out.

"When we close the door on biological research," he says, "we open the doors to a far greater tragedy."

Sileo, Chi Chi. *Current Controversies: Crime*. Paul A. Winters. Greenhaven Press 1998. Viewpoint

Discussion Questions

1. What parts of this article took you by surprise, if any?
2. After reading this article, what is your opinion on whether or not violence is human nature?

Activity 5: Main Reasons for Violence

Ask students to get into small groups or individually make a list of ten of the main reasons that they think we have violence in our world. After each group agrees on ten, have them choose the first, second and third most important factors. Discuss the students' top choices with the group.

The Search Institute in the United States has identified six causes of violence.

- loss of connectedness
- lack of family support and control
- erosion of values
- alcohol and other drugs
- problems in school
- violence in the media.

Are any of these causes mentioned in the class's list of ten? Discuss the similarities and differences between the class's list of ten main reasons violence occurs in the world and the Search Institute's list of six reasons violence occurs in the world.

Put each of the six main reasons for violence on a separate large sheet of paper. Have each student choose what they think is the single root cause of violence and stand next to their choice.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did you choose what you did as the root cause of violence?
2. Where were there any causes from the Search Institute that were not chosen as a root cause of violence? Why?

Activity 6: Media Images of Violence

Ask students to bring in articles, pictures and even short video clips from the news or other media that portray problems of violence in our community and world.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you see in the picture or what is the article about?
2. What do you think is going on in the minds of the people in this picture or article?

3. Ask students to pretend it is five minutes before the scene in the event photograph or video occurred. Have each group answer the following questions: What is happening? What are people doing? What are they saying?
4. Is there anything that you could do in the five minutes before the scene to change what happens in this picture?
5. What causes of violence seem to be predominant in this picture or article?

Activity 7: Library Research

Have students research violence at the library. Have them report their findings to the group.

Activity 8: Internet Connection

If your group has Internet access, have students research violence on the Internet. Have them report their findings to the group.

Activity 10: Choices

Dr. William Glasser is a psychiatrist who believes that all human behavior is motivated by a desire to meet basic needs and that people are born with no choice but to feel bad when their needs are not met. He also believes that people choose their actions to meet their needs.

Glasser believes that the five basic human needs are:

- Survival--safety and reproduction, food, clothing, shelter (for self and family)
- Belonging and love--feeling valued, appreciated, and knowing you are a member of a close group of people.
- Power--this means having a way to get what you want. It can be caring or selfish. It can mean having power over yourself and also wanting power over others to dominate them.
- Freedom--being able to make choices that give you some control over your life
- Fun--enjoying activities and life in general.

Explore the following scenarios:

A person steals a car even though they know that if they get caught, they will probably go to jail

How could the theft have helped meet the need for survival?

How could the theft have helped meet the need for belonging and love?

How could the theft have helped meet the need for power?

How could the theft have helped meet the need for freedom?

How could the theft have helped meet the need for having fun?

A young person joins a gang

How could joining the gang have helped meet the need for survival, belonging and love, power, freedom, and fun?

Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree with Glasser's five basic human needs? Why or why not?
2. What would you add to this list, if anything?
3. Is there anything you would take away from this list? What and why?
4. What do you think is the result if people don't feel that their basic needs are being met?
5. What do you think is the result if people do feel that their basic needs are being met?
6. Does this tell us anything about the possible roots of violence? What?

Activity 9: Action on Violence

As a group, come up with a definition of violence based on the explorations from this chapter. Brainstorm ways to address the violence in your homes, school, community, and the world.