

# MODULE #1: Youth Violence

## Objectives:

- To create a working definition of youth violence.
- To inform students about the risk factors that lead to youth violence.
- To teach students about ways to avoid youth violence.
- To teach students about the importance of goal-setting.

## Context



*According to the National Center for Victims of Crime, resilience is “the power to cope with adversity and adapt to challenges or change. It is a process of drawing on beliefs, behaviors, skills, and attitudes to move beyond stress, trauma, or tragedy. Although naturally stronger in some personalities, it can also be learned. Resilient people have a range of strengths such as optimism, self-knowledge, personal meaning, and the ability to foster relationships and care for themselves and others. By mobilizing these powers, youth confront life’s obstacles and emerge with greater wisdom, flexibility, and strength”.<sup>1</sup> There are different methods for building resilience, including community involvement, participation in extra-curricular activities, communication with parents, and establishing friendships with adult role models.*

## Handouts & Resources Needed:

Handout 1.2: Risk Factors

Handout 1.2A: Protective Factors

Handout 1.2B: Three Stories

Handout 1.2C: Goal Setting

Pens/pencils

Sheet of paper – one for each participant

Journals – one per students

## Activity #1: Icebreaker-Introductions (10 min)

### Procedure:

- Welcome the class and explain to them that they will be starting out with an icebreaker exercise.
- Say that this icebreaker exercise is going to be one that introduces everyone to the class. The point is for everyone to get to know each other. This will make the environment throughout the program more comfortable.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on this topic visit: [http://www.ncvc.org/ncvc/main.aspx?dbID=DB\\_FactSheets135](http://www.ncvc.org/ncvc/main.aspx?dbID=DB_FactSheets135)

- Ask the students to pair up with another student. In their pairs, ask each student to tell their partner their name, age, favorite movie, and favorite book.
- After some time, have the pairs come to the front of the room and introduce their partners to the class.

Activity #2: Guided Discussion: What is Youth Violence? (30 min)

Procedure:

- Icebreaker
- Explain to the class how a guided discussion works. Say that the facilitator will lead the discussion by engaging the class with challenging questions. The facilitator is meant to help guide, not lecture. In order to maximize what is learned, it is best if everyone in the class participates.
- Ask the class to create a definition of youth violence based upon their best guess. In their mind what are the major factors/sources that contribute to the great amount of violence in schools. From these answers, have them break into groups of 4 or 5 and brainstorm strategies that can help mitigate the problem. If they cannot come up with any, give suggestions, such as after school programs, dress code, formation of year book club, etc. Have them discuss whether these ideas would work for their community.
- Explain to the class the importance of being aware of the risk factors that cause a youth to take part in violent activities. Pass out the handout with the list of risk factors (Handout 1.2). Emphasize the way the list is broken into three categories: Individual, Family, and Community. Have three students discuss in their groups the three lists. Start a discussion about the prevalence of these factors in their community.
- Pass out Handout 1.2A: Protective Factors. Explain to the class that these lists comprise the things that deter a youth from taking part in youth violence. They help counteract the risk factors that were previously discussed. Have students read the lists and discuss them. Tell the class that by having these factors, they would be less likely to fall into the temptation of committing acts of violence.
- Pass out Handout 1.2B: Three stories. This handout is about three youths whose lives took a wrong turn. Have volunteers from each group read a story out loud. At the end of each story, discuss what the youth in each story did wrong and what he/she could have done to avoid the problem.

### Activity #3: Guided Exercise: Goal Setting (30 min)

#### Procedure:

- Icebreaker
- Discuss the importance of a youth having realistic goals to accomplish. Mention that a major part of a child's decision to resort to undertaking violent youth activities is their lack of goals in life. Youth with concrete scholastic and future goals are less likely to be tempted into youth violence. This is because they have something to focus on and will not wish to jeopardize fulfilling a goal.
- Provide Handout 1.2C and ask everyone to write his or her biggest goal to achieve in life. Have volunteers share their answers.
- Once people have shared, have the class discuss how they can go about achieving their goal. Emphasize that achieving goals takes focus and distractions in youth violence prevent youth from achieving what they want to do.
  - Facilitator make sure to draw the realistic line – take the example of the youth who wants to play pro soccer. Make it clear that it is possible for dreams to come true if one desires something hard enough. But also make the point that making it to the professional level is also very hard. That is a way to place a good amount of importance in school. Talk about scholarships to college if he/she can play well and get good grades.
- Have them draw out short-term and long-term goals.
- For the students in the class who are unsure about their goal, have them write down what their main interests and hobbies are. From what they wrote down, talk about what they enjoy the most about these activities. Ask them to think of a goal that relates to these activities.
- Tell the students that the point of this activity is to show them that the distractions of youth violence can prevent them from achieving their goals in life. It can cause them to sacrifice doing what they love.

### Activity #4: Debriefing (5 min)

#### Procedure:

- Summarize the main points of the seminar.
- Ask the class if they have any questions.
- Ask various students to name one important thing that they learned in the seminar.

## **Risk Factors**

Risk factors increase the likelihood that a youth will become violent. However, risk factors are not direct causes of youth violence. When a youth has these characteristics, they are more likely involved in youth violence:

### **Individual Risk Factors**

- History of violent activities
- Learning disability
- History of early aggression
- Involvement with drugs, alcohol, or tobacco
- Poor school performance
- Poor behavioral control
- High emotional distress
- Antisocial beliefs and attitudes
- Violence and conflict in family

### **Family Risk Factors**

- Very harsh parental discipline
- No parental discipline
- Low parental involvement
- Parental use of drugs/alcohol
- Parental committed a crime
- Poor supervision of children

### **Friend/School Risk Factors**

- Association with bad behavior
- Involvement in gangs
- Social rejection by peers
- Lack of involvement in school activities
- Poor school performance/attendance
- Low commitment to school
- Fails classes in school

## **Protective Factors**

Protective factors protect young people from risks of becoming violent. These factors occur in many places in the youth's life. However, identifying and understanding protective factors are just as important as knowing the risk factors:

### **Individual Protective Factors**

- Avoids bad behavior
- High IQ and good grades
- Good social skills
- Religiosity

### **Family Protective Factors**

- Close to caring family or adults outside of the family
- Can talk about problems with parents
- Parents expect high school performance
- Parents and youth do activities together regularly
- Presence of parent during at least one of the following: when wake up, when arriving home from school, at dinner, and when going to bed
- Involvement in social activities

### **Peer/School Protective Factors**

- Commitment to school
- Involvement in social activities

## Three Stories

- Guy carries knife to school
- Guy steals car and hits a pedestrian – severely hurting her
- Girls fight in school

### Story 1:

It was more than Rey could take in one day. Chris had been bullying him since the start of the school year. Rey was shy where as Chris was the school bully, always seeking attention and the respect of his fellow peers. Chris saw Rey's quite nature as vulnerability, easily enabling him to take advantage of Rey. He was always ashamed of his weakness and felt as if he had nobody to turn to. Finally, Rey felt as if he needed to find a quick solution, proving to himself and everyone else that he was not weak. In his desperation, Rey bought a pocket knife and carried it with him to school, hoping that Chris would confront him. Just like he wished, Rey was approached by Chris in the cafeteria during lunch. Without warning, Rey pulled out the knife and stuck it in front of Chris's face. The school administration was not going to take any chances, immediately calling the police to the school. Rey was arrested for possession of a deadly weapon.

The court system was not friendly to Rey. Even though this was his first major offense, Juvenile Judges do not take lightly the crime of possessing a deadly weapon, especially on school property. Rey went through the Juvenile Justice process with very little help or counseling. Instead of the system analyzing the situation to determine what factors drove Rey to perform his bad behavior, the judge decided on severe punishment, thinking that this would be the easiest solution. Unfortunately, like most cases, Rey's experience in the Juvenile Justice system caused him more harm than good. He has since been convicted of other crimes and is currently serving time in the State Prison.

### Story 2:

Growing up in a low income neighborhood, Luis was surrounded by violence. From a young age, he learned the necessity of being able to protect himself. He was a tough kid and was well known in his neighborhood for his boxing abilities. Luis had received little guidance throughout his life. For this reason, when he was old enough, he sought the membership of a gang. In order to prove his loyalty, the gang asked him to complete a task. Luis's mission was to steal a car.

Luis did not know how to break into a car and hot wire the ignition, so he had to get creative. He noticed that a local pizza delivery boy always leaves his keys in

## Handout 1.2B

his car when he goes up to the door to deliver to his customer. Luis camped out in front of the pizza parlor and followed the boy to his next delivery. When he got out to go to the door, Luis sprinted to the car, shut the door, and sped off. In his haste, he failed to see an elderly woman crossing the road in the intersection in front of him. As he turned his head to see if the delivery boy was chasing him, his car hit the woman, breaking her legs and giving her a severe concussion. The woman was rushed to the hospital while Luis was arrested on the scene.

At 17 years old, Luis was tried and convicted as an adult. While serving his term, Luis was forced to share a cell with an older inmate. The inmate took every opportunity to harass Luis, physically and verbally abusing him. By the time Luis's jail time was over, he had been a victim of sexual assault, being raped on a numerous of occasions. Because of his poor decision to join a gang, Luis now has a lifetime of unpleasant memories and scars.

### **Story 3:**

There are many reasons for teenage girls to fight. During those ages, girls enjoy spreading rumors about each other, using this form of communication as a way of creating superiority over others. This was the case in the feud between Cristina and Luisa. These two girls had developed an extreme dislike for each other during their freshman year of high school. They often exchanged verbal attacks with one another, insulting the other's weight, intelligence, and other characteristics. Though they were caught up in this feud, both excelled in the classroom and showed strong potential to attend college. One day, however, Cristina and Luisa entered into a verbal battle that ended physically. Luisa said something that caused Cristina to attack her in the hall. The two began intensely fighting while the whole school watched. Eventually, Cristina was able to dominate Luisa, hitting her with an endless amount of punches. Cristina hit Luisa until Luisa lay unconscious on the floor. Once the school's administration found out what Cristina did, they called the police to take her away.

The Juvenile Justice system did not take pity on Cristina because she was a girl. They viewed her actions as a terrible act of uncontrollable anger. The court ordered Cristina to serve a sentence of one year for assault. They rejected the idea that girls will experience certain hardships with one another at that age and should not be subjected to such harsh punishment. The court's ruling hurt Cristina's record, preventing her from achieving her goal of getting into college.

Handout 1.3C:

### **Goal Setting**

Please write your biggest goal to achieve in life. Also draw out your short-term and long-term goals (use an additional sheet of paper is necessary). Remember, achieving goals required focus; thus, distractions in youth violence prevent youth from achieving what they want to do.

Short-term goals are smaller goals that create the path toward the ultimate goal. Short-term goals make the task of achieving the long-term goal more attainable. Long-term goals are the ultimate goals that someone wishes to achieve in life.

**My biggest goal in life is:**

**My short-term goal is:**

**My long-term goal is:**



