

School-based programs can help prevent violence

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The Bottom Line:

A systematic review of school-based violence prevention programs found evidence that these interventions do reduce aggression and violence. The results suggest that the interventions designed to improve relationship and social skills may be the best. The interventions were successful for both females and males in either primary or secondary school. There were errors in the way some of the studies were conducted, however, so further research is needed.

What problem is being addressed?

About 10% of all Canadian children exhibit anti-social behaviours, such as anger, aggression and violence. In addition, almost 1 in 3 school-aged children is affected by bullying, and 1 in 10 children and youth is victimized on a daily basis.

If left untreated, they can lead to increased rates of school dropout, juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, and poor peer relationships in adolescence.

What intervention is being tested?

Studies of school-based violence prevention programs were assessed. The goal was to see which types of programs were effective in reducing aggression, violence, bullying or conflict. The interventions were given to children in primary school or teens in secondary school, and included programs for males only as well as mixed groups. Some of the interventions focused on improving relationships and social skills, while others focused on teaching skills of non-response when provoked by others.

What is the *real scientific* evidence?

The authors reviewed a total of 56 studies involving 2,939 students. In 34 of the studies aggressive behavior was significantly reduced in students who received an intervention compared to those who did not. These positive results were similar for both primary and secondary students, as well as for both male-only groups and mixed groups. Results also showed that interventions designed to improve relationships and social skills may be more effective than those that teach skills of non-response.

The children who took part in seven of the studies were interviewed again one year after the intervention and their behavior changes remained, showing that it was successful in long term.

Further research is needed to confirm these results because there were problems with the way each study was conducted.

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The preceding is a summary of:

Mytton J, DiGuseppi C, Gough D, Taylor R, Logan S. *School-based secondary prevention programmes for preventing violence*. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2006, Issue 3, Art. No.: CD004606. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD004606.pub2.