

CREATING SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS THAT DETER ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIORS IN YOUTH

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School violence has become of paramount concern in recent years, leaving many schools unprepared to deal with the varied problems students bring to the classroom. Conditions within the school can be readily identified that predict and contribute to problematic behavior. The success of preventive and intervention programs for youth violence hinges upon recognizing and modifying aspects of school climate, teacher/school personnel interactions with students, and school structure. Several of these aspects are identified in this article and suggestions for improving the educational environment to prevent the development of antisocial behaviors in youth are offered. © 2002 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

In the wake of nationally publicized school shootings, school safety has become of primary concern to parents, schools, and society at large (Gallop Poll Analysis, 2001). Rising national attention has coincided with, and in some cases stimulated, a growing body of research focusing on the origins, prevalence, and consequences of antisocial behavior among school-age youth (Dishion & Patterson, 1999; Loeber & Farrington, 2000; Patterson, Forgatch, Yoerger, & Stoolmiller, 1998). Research on the developmental pathways to antisocial behavior has identified a variety of ecological contributors such as family (Eddy, Leve, & Fogot, 2001; Bank, Forgatch, Patterson, & Fetrow, 1993; Patterson, 1982), peers (Dishion, Eddy, Haas, Li, & Spracklen, 1997), and community (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Walker, Severson, Feil, Stiller, & Golly, 1998). Several promising prevention and intervention programs have been developed based on this literature (for review, see Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 2001). Successful programs tend to be multifaceted ecological models aimed at multiple domains, changing institutions and environments as well as individuals.

Although most prevention and intervention programs occur in schools, little research has investigated school environments as a developmental pathway to antisocial behavior. Existing theories and research tend to focus on risk factors that children bring to the classroom (e.g., peer and family relationships; Dishion et al., 1997; Patterson et al., 1992). Overlooked is how classrooms and other school environments exacerbate preexisting risk factors. Understanding school contributions to antisocial behavior may yield new insights about strategies to modify and reduce such behavior. The present article uses a developmental framework for integrating theory and research about school climate attributes, specific teacher behaviors, school monitoring practices, and academic tracking policies that intensify antisocial behaviors.

ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR IN THE SCHOOLS

Each year, children appear on the steps of schools showing signs of poverty, abuse, and neglect completely unprepared for and unfamiliar with the demands of the schooling process. Exposure to risk factors such as poverty, abuse, neglect, and lack of school readiness provides the potential for the development of antisocial behavior patterns (Patterson et al., 1992; Walker et al., 1998). These behaviors manifest themselves in the form of defiance of adults, restlessness and

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overactivity, aggression, disruptive class behaviors, lack of self-regulation, and poor school readiness (Walker et al., 1998). Children exhibiting these behaviors are often identified as having one of three diagnoses that currently comprise the disruptive or externalizing behavior disorders of childhood: oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), conduct disorder (CD), and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (DSM-IV; American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Children diagnosed with ADHD exhibit elevated levels of inattention and hyperactivity-impulsivity. ODD is characterized by a consistent pattern of defiant and disruptive behavior. Although children diagnosed with ADHD can be disruptive, they generally lack the negative quality that is the primary feature of ODD. CD includes all of the features of ODD but is a more severe and persistent diagnosis. The primary diagnostic criteria for CD include aggression toward people and animals, destruction of property, deceitfulness or theft, and school or home rule violations. Short-term outcomes for children who exhibit antisocial behaviors include truancy, teacher and peer rejection, low academic achievement, numerous school discipline contacts, fighting, association with deviant peers, and the attendance of a larger number of elementary schools (Walker, Zeller, Close, Webber, & Gresham, 1999). Outcomes like these in turn lead to potential school failure and school dropout. Youth who fail to complete school commit a significant majority of the crimes in society (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1995). Hence, further long-term outcomes often include delinquency, gang membership, adult criminality, drug and alcohol use, incarceration, and in some cases, violent acts (Patterson et al., 1992).

A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE ON ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR

Development of the antisocial, oppositional, and aggressive interaction patterns that characterize children who develop conduct disorder can be observed in the context of interactions with parents before school entry (Patterson et al., 1992; Reid, 1993). Children who are aggressive and noncompliant in the home at age 3 continue to have similar problems when entering school (Reid, 1993). Early onset of behavior problems is a powerful predictor of the frequency and severity of behavior problems in adolescence (Loeber, 1990). Many of these children have chronic discipline problems, and by middle school may begin to commit arrestable offenses (Walker, 1998). Such children are considered to have life-course-persistent antisocial behavior and will likely manifest it through their career in school if left unattended (Moffitt, 1993). In the absence of effective interventions, this group of young people represents the most serious threat to schools and society.

Conditions in the home have been found to predict early-onset and chronic antisocial behavior. Patterson and colleagues (1992, 1998) have offered an interactional perspective that views early-onset and chronic antisocial behavior as the outcome of coercive and inappropriate parenting practices. According to this theory, antisocial behavior patterns in children are most likely to arise in the early years of life when parents use harsh, punitive, and inconsistent parenting practices instead of clear, firm, but warm responses when children exhibit unacceptable behavior. What develops is a pattern of coercive behaviors from both parent and child. This pattern of coercive behavior stems from parenting practices in which parents back down from requests and adhere to the child's escalating demands. In turn, the parent uses harsh and abusive discipline practices when the child escalates to severe misbehavior. The parent's punishment is reinforced when the child temporarily capitulates, fueling mutual training for bad behavior on the child's part and a harsh or unresponsive style by the parent. A chain of events develops: (1) the parent ignores or "attacks" the child with angry or aggressive actions, (2) the child counterattacks with anger or aggression, (3) in response the parent stops attacking and shifts to a placating stance, and finally (4) the child returns to positive behavior. This chain of events reinforces the negative behavior exhibited by the child and in turn increases such behaviors in the future (Eddy et al., 2001; Patterson et al., 1992).

Patterson and colleagues (1992; Eddy et al., 2001) highlighted the reciprocal interaction of parental behavior and child behavior. These behaviors are not fixed, and alternate behavior patterns are possible for the same parents and child. A child's prognosis is not solely based on family interactions. The world outside the family, particularly the school environment and peer group, plays a powerful role in translating the child's personality traits and predispositions into behavior (Garbarino, 1999).

Patterson's coercion theory implies that aggressive behavior develops early in life for children exposed to this coercive cycle and expands as they grow older into areas outside of their family life. In this view, aggressive behavior is seen as a part of a broader matrix. The first few years of life help to condition the child for future aggressive behaviors. As the chain of the coercion between parent and child is repeated, aggression becomes a means to avoid or control aversive events. Over time, the characteristics of the parent/child interaction—coercive behavior, escalation of anger, reactivity, and negative affect—shape the child's working models of relationships. The child's working model expects punishment, conflict, and rejection in relationships, meeting the world with mistrust. This relationship transfers to school and peer relations where the child is met with rejection from peers and is identified as a behavior problem by teachers, thus confirming the child's working model.

SCHOOL CONTRIBUTIONS

Although Patterson's theory of coercion begins with the family relationship, from an ecological perspective it is clear that the implications of this theory stretch beyond the home. For instance, teachers may contribute to the progression of escalating child misbehavior by participating in coercive interactions with their students. The emergence of child conduct problems in school may be fostered by coercive family relationships, but classroom characteristics may help maintain these behaviors.

The aggressive, antisocial interactions exhibited by students with behavior problems are learned and maintained in a manner similar to other behaviors (Fitzsimmons, 1998). Teachers who have children with behavior problems in their classroom may find that coercive behaviors tend to control the social interactions they have with those students, making dealing with these students difficult and unpleasant (Shores, Jack, Gunter, Ellis, DeBriere, & Wehby, 1993). Observations suggest that teacher reinforcement for positive behavior is infrequent and reprimands given to problematic students are often noncontingent upon student behavior (Bierman, Coie, Dodge, Greenberg, Lochman, & McMahon, 1992). Teachers who often spend time focusing on negative behaviors more than positive behaviors in class may maintain and even increase aggressive behaviors in troubled youth. The severity of disciplinary reactions inflicted by teachers and school authorities to adolescents is highly related to the student's level of rebellion in school and self-reported delinquency, such that schools characterized by low achievement and high levels of antisocial behaviors tend to rely on suspensions and expulsion as the preferred response (Le Blanc, Vallieres, & McDuff, 1992; McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Similar to coercive childrearing in the home, coercive school practices may unintentionally reinforce student antisocial behaviors. School personnel have the power either to reproduce coercive family relationships in the classroom, sustaining the child's working model, or to create a structured and supportive environment that elicits prosocial behaviors from the student. Perhaps the biggest implication of this interactional approach to the development of antisocial behaviors is the need to shift from an overemphasis on individual characteristics to a greater emphasis on the characteristics of the environments that shape individuals. These include school climate, academic failure, peer relations, and adult supervision.

School Climate

Considering how the environment contributes to children's behaviors, it becomes evident that schools can either inhibit or foster the development of antisocial behavior. Researchers in the area of school climate consider how the "personality" of the school may contribute to the antisocial behaviors in youth. The term school climate is a broad concept that encompasses factors such as communication patterns, norms about what is appropriate or how things are to be done, role relationships and role perceptions, patterns of influence and accommodation, and rewards and sanctions (McEvoy & Welker, 2000; Tobin & Sprague, 2000; Welsh, Stokes, & Greene, 2000).

Schools have their own characteristic personalities, just as individuals do. Research has shown that effective schools exert positive influences on students despite conditions in the home, social status, gender, race, or ethnicity (McEvoy & Welker, 2000). In schools with the worst discipline problems, rules are typically unclear, unfair, or inconsistently enforced; responses to student behavior are ambiguous or indirect (e.g., lowered grades in response to misconduct); teachers and administrators do not know the rules or disagree on the rules; teachers ignore misconduct; and students do not believe in the legitimacy of the rules (Welsh et al., 2000). Conversely, school polices associated with lower levels of disorder include systematic school discipline procedures that decrease the arbitrariness of rule enforcement and decrease student frustration; pleasant working conditions and good teacher-child relationships; and a structured reward system for appropriate behavior (Rutter et al., 1997; Sprick, Howard, Wise, Marcum, & Haykin, 1998; Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, & Hagan, 1998).

School climates known to foster delinquency tend to have low expectations for achievement, ineffective administration, and lack of commitment to building student efficacy in learning. These schools produce both higher levels of academic failure and higher levels of antisocial behavior (Le Blanc et al., 1992; McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Youth who experience repeated failures in academics and extracurricular activities may develop a tarnished self-image that is likely to reduce their commitment to student roles, lessen motivation to perform well academically, and increase alienation from school (Heimer & Matsueda, 1997). The warning signs of a school climate that promotes the occurrence of serious behaviors such as delinquency, academic failure, and school dropout can be linked to school discipline referrals and lack of school attachment in youth (Blanc et al., 1992; Heimer & Matsueda, 1997; Sprague, Walker, Stieber, Simonsen, & Nishioka, 2001; Tobin & Sprague, 2000; Walker & Sylwester, 1991).

School administrators, teachers, and other school personnel help establish a school's climate. In particular, the tone set by school administrators can profoundly impact the school environment, as evidenced in a recent report by Rutter and colleagues (1997). During a longitudinal study of antisocial youth, the principals of three problem schools in the study were replaced. After this change of administration, children in these schools showed a dramatic decrease in absenteeism and an increase in scholastic attainment. These findings support the powerful role of school administrators in altering student outcomes. A school climate that fosters delinquency cannot be overlooked when considering effective interventions for at-risk youth.

Academic Failure and Antisocial Behavior

Poor academic performance co-occurs with or is predictive of antisocial behavior (Maguin & Loeber, 1996). Maguin and Loeber offer the following findings: (1) Poor academic performance is related to onset, frequency, persistence, and seriousness of delinquent offending in both boys and girls; moreover, poor academic performance predicts delinquency independent of socioeconomic status. (2) Cognitive deficits and attention problems are common correlates of both academic

performance and delinquency. (3) Interventions that improve academic performance co-occur with a reduction in the prevalence of delinquency.

The causal direction between academic failure and antisocial behavior has yet to be determined. However, research supports the conclusion that the greater the academic quality of the school, the lower the level of school crime and violence (McEvoy & Welker, 2000), and higher academic performance is associated with refraining from offending (Maguin & Loeber, 1996). This supports the notion that interventions aimed at improving academic performance among students will decrease antisocial behavior and delinquency in these youth. A theory that explains how academic success decreases antisocial behavior is needed.

By integrating educational findings regarding school success with psychological theories, Connell & Wellborn (1991) outlined a causal model for understanding the contributions of contextual and psychological variables in determining student academic success. Connell's model describes the sequential process by which teacher and parent behaviors influence student motivation and achievement. Several studies support Connell's model. For instance, Skinner and Belmont (1993) found that teacher behaviors such as provisions for structure and involvement influenced students' perceived competence in school, which then impacted the students' engagement and school performance. Another study tested a path model for understanding the academic engagement of African American students, finding that teacher involvement acted directly on student engagement (Tucker et al., in press). Low-income minority students faced with a lack of teacher involvement may disengage early on from learning. This early disengagement may initiate a troubling downward cycle in which the disaffected student likely lessens teacher involvement, which can further undermine student engagement and student academic performance.

Any preexisting risk factors (i.e., family stressors, poverty, neglect, and abuse) for academic failure and antisocial behavior are compounded by poor classroom management, lack of teacher involvement, and ineffective teaching, putting these students at even greater risk. Interventions directed at providing positive, caring, consistent classroom/school climates and effective instruction may be the life vest that keeps at-risk students from sinking into the downward trajectory of academic failure, antisocial behavior, school rebellion, and school dropout.

Peer Relationships

Academic failure brings with it the wrath of school alienation and loss of self-esteem. Uncommitted and alienated students are likely to be viewed negatively by teachers and other students, which can further increase alienation (Heimer & Matsueda, 1997). These youth become prime targets for selection into peer groups of other alienated and antisocial students (Dishion et al., 1997; Dishion, Patterson, Stoolmiller, & Skinner, 1991; Walker & Sylwester, 1991). As schools push away these alienated youth, they find peer groups with values that support delinquent antisocial acts.

School may provide the first exposure to significant members of nonrelated age mates and the conditions for establishing the peer culture. Peers have a significant influence on a child's behavior beginning as early as contact is made. Children will quite naturally select social settings that produce maximal social reinforcement. The microanalysis of preschool interactions revealed that peers provide very rich schedules of positive reinforcement for coercive behavior, with 80% of coercive behavior producing successful outcomes (Dishion, French, & Patterson, 1995). With such a high rate of positive reinforcement, the preschoolers exhibiting coercive behaviors will likely continue or increase the use of these behaviors in the future.

School can provide maximal opportunities for contact with deviant peers, especially in schools that use tracking. Because of the frequent co-occurrence of academic difficulties and antisocial youth, schools that track students based on academic abilities may find themselves grouping anti-

social peers, providing opportunity for delinquent peer grouping. The antisocial boys in one study (Dishion, Patterson, & Kavanagh, 1992) reported meeting half of their close friends in the school setting. It is during the intermediate grades that at-risk students tend to develop deviant peer groups (Dishion et al., 1992). Once a member of such a deviant peer group, these youth have an almost 70% chance of a first felony arrest within 2 years (Walker & Sylwester, 1991). Research indicates that tracking is associated with official and self-reported delinquency, school misbehavior, early dropout, and lack of bonding to the school (Le Blanc et al., 1992).

The culmination of academic failure and rejection by peers and teachers due to the consequences of antisocial behaviors leads to the migration of these youth to one another. Dishion and colleagues (1991) found that being less liked by peers, having lower academic skills, and engaging in antisocial behavior at age 10 years were reliably correlated with association with antisocial peers at age 12 years. This involvement with antisocial peers is related to escalations in individual problem behaviors. For youth with a history of antisocial behaviors in childhood, escalation in problem behavior means increasing the frequency and seriousness of their behaviors, including acts of violence (Dishion et al., 1997; Moffitt, 1993).

Monitoring/Adult Supervision

Although schools may provide the source for deviant peer connections, another important factor plays a role in deviant peer involvement—monitoring. Poor parent monitoring is a significant antecedent to deviant peer involvement (Dishion et al., 1991). From an ecological perspective, adult supervision involves the community and school as well as the parents. Communities with a significant number of adolescents having regular access to unsupervised experiences and minimal adult involvement are at a high risk for a variety of problem behaviors, including violence (Dishion et al., 1997). Likewise, schools that provide poor monitoring of students and minimal adult involvement may influence the development of deviant peer relationships and increase the potential for escalating conduct problems in antisocial youth.

Poor monitoring in the schools can spawn from lack of concern or lack of involvement of school personnel and from the mismanagement of the school's physical environment. Reported school crime occurs most frequently in places where supervision is weakest: hallways, restrooms, locker rooms, stairs, and near unmonitored entrances and exits (Welsh et al., 2000). Schools need to be aware of this necessary responsibility. Simply conducting random locker searches, using metal detectors, or hiring more security guards may not be enough without an effective building plan for monitoring.

School environments that are poorly monitored may cause students to feel unsafe, creating a perception of school disorder. As student fears increase, confidence in school administration and/or adults diminishes, and informal social controls against violence weaken (Welsh et al., 2000). Resulting behaviors that may occur include choosing to carry weapons to school, putting on a tough front, or retaliation against perceived transgressors (Lockwood, 1997). In a national survey conducted by the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (1999), 20% of high school students reported carrying a weapon (e.g., gun, knife, club) to school and 5% of students reported feeling it unsafe to attend school at least once in the 30 days preceding the survey. Schools that effectively monitor common areas will provide a sense of school order that will decrease the likelihood of violence on school grounds, hence increasing the likelihood that students feel it is safe to attend school.

IMPLICATIONS

Viewing antisocial behaviors from a developmental and ecological perspective has important implications for school psychologists. Given their training in understanding psychological pro-

cesses such as risk, resilience, and strategies to promote school safety, school psychologists are uniquely situated to influence schoolwide policies and practices suggested by this review. School psychologists often consult with teachers and thus are in a strong position to encourage positive changes in classroom milieu. Specifically, they can assess factors that contribute to problem behaviors and develop classroom-based behavior support plans. School psychologists can also train teachers to deliver effective classroom management strategies and provide them with ongoing support and consultation. Additionally, they can promote healthier school ecologies by developing and implementing schoolwide interventions and supports. Using their consultation and group facilitation skills, school psychologists have the necessary attributes to take a leadership role in the development of safe, nurturing schools.

Teacher Training

Implementing the knowledge of specific teacher practices that can enhance students' classroom achievement may in the long run decrease antisocial behavior in youth. These practices include monitoring of the entire class continuously, conducting multiple activities without breaking classroom flow, moving activities at a good pace, and providing work at a developmentally appropriate level of difficulty (Guerra, Attar, & Weissberg, 1997). Also, teachers can decrease classroom misbehavior by establishing clear rules for behavior, giving clear directions, and maintaining consistent expectations. Other easy but underused techniques for increasing student compliance and academic achievement include praising students for on-task behavior and good performance and handling student misconduct in the least-disruptive manner possible (Sprick et al., 1998). Additionally, teachers might be trained to deliver group contingencies through practical classroom management strategies such as the Good Behavior Game (Barrish, Saunders, & Wolf, 1969).

Teachers who limit interactions with students, providing little praise for on-task and good performance, are not only missing an excellent opportunity to increase compliance and academic achievement, they are also sending a message to students that they are not valued. Recent research indicates that teachers of low-income minority children tend to minimize interactions with students and provide less contingent praise (Guerra et al., 1997). This can be especially harmful to children who are already undervalued by society and who receive little contingent praise or have few positive interactions at home.

Another clear point of intervention for students at risk for developing antisocial behaviors is the use of effective instruction. Le Blanc and colleagues (1992) theorized that academic incompetence relates to offending through lack of success in school and lack of commitment to education. Academic incompetence thus encourages poor school performance that, in turn, affects the level of commitment to education. If this is the case, effective instruction may be a key component in preventing the development of antisocial behaviors in youth. One teaching model stands out as an effective method for teaching disadvantaged students and students at risk for academic failure—the Direct Instruction Model. In a nationwide evaluation that compared 13 different teaching strategies when used with economically disadvantaged kindergarten through third-grade children, the Direct Instruction Model produced the greatest gains in academic (primarily reading and math) and social skills (primarily self-esteem) (Becker & Carnine, 1980). One might conclude that self-esteem increased because the students met with success in academics, allowing them the sense of accomplishment and identity as a good student.

School Ecology

Individual student interventions are a necessary but insufficient response to violence and disruption in our schools (Todd, Horner, Sugai, & Sprague, 1999). Programs that focus indepen-

dently on the child are not as effective as those that simultaneously “educate” the child and instill positive changes across both the school and home environments. The success of such programs is enhanced by focusing not only on the child’s behavior, but also on the teacher’s and family’s behavior, the relationship between the home and school, and the needs of schools and neighborhoods to support healthy norms and competent behavior (Greenberg et al., 2001).

For school-aged children, the school ecology should be a central focus of intervention (Greenberg et al., 2001). An alternative to the student-by-student approach of intervention is the development of a schoolwide behavioral support system. Schoolwide systems of behavioral support define, teach, and reward expected behaviors, develop peer support systems, and implement clear and consistent consequences for inappropriate behavior (Sprick, Sprick, & Garrison, 1992). A schoolwide system also emphasizes the development of a positive school climate, practical policies, well-defined physical spaces, and monitoring systems that will reduce conditions that will trigger problem behaviors among students (Taylor-Green et al., 1997). Such a system allows school administrators, teachers, and other school personnel to tailor a behavioral support program to the specific needs of the school. Other factors to consider in creating nurturing and inviting school environments include the personal characteristics of students and staff (ethnic/cultural diversity, life experiences, and staff expertise), the organizational and interpersonal processes that occur in and around the school (parental involvement and community support), and the general atmosphere or spirit of the school (academic expectations and support and recognition) (Morrison, Furlong, & Morrison, 1994). An effective schoolwide system encompasses all of the issues addressed in this article (e.g., school climate, monitoring, peer relations, student-teacher interactions, and teaching and rewarding positive behavior), thus reducing the likelihood of antisocial behavior by students.

Research

Research is a necessary component to the process of building effective interventions. Future research is needed in understanding teacher-student interactions so that we might educate our future teachers, enabling them with the skills necessary to assist the students in their classrooms to success. Specifically, research is needed to explicate the precipitants, patterns, and consequences of coercive interactions in the classroom. Such findings will aid in the development of appropriate programs to remediate students’ negative social interaction patterns (Shores et al., 1993).

Research is also needed to clarify the link between academic failure and behavior problems. For instance, the causal direction of the relationship between academic failure and behavior problems needs to be determined and information is needed on how school strategies can effectively decrease the likelihood of either. In addition, more information is needed regarding the impact of Direct Instruction in altering behavior problems. For instance, aside from increasing academic competence, does Direct Instruction decrease teacher-student coercive interactions and/or reduce opportunities for student misbehavior due to pace and timing?

Further research in the areas of classroom behavior management, how teachers and administrators can efficiently develop practical strategies for addressing behavioral deficits (Taylor-Green et al., 1997), and how to address the challenges of those students with chronic behavior problems (Walker, Colvin, & Ramsy, 1995) is necessary. Also, looking at ways to provide school administrators with the resources and training to conduct research within their own school building is an important step. This would allow schools to identify specific problems (e.g., tracking discipline referrals to find areas of greatest concern), allowing them to streamline efforts to correct found problems. With the growing number of students who enter our schools with behavioral challenges, schools and communities find themselves searching for effective interventions to provide a safe environment in which students can learn.

Perhaps most important, research is needed to increase the use of strategies we already know to be effective. As Wehby and colleagues (Wehby, Symons, Canale, & Go, 1998) noted, best practices for classroom management are almost nonexistent in classrooms for children with emotional and behavioral disorders. Some authors have argued it is an issue of acceptability (Gresham, 1991; Wickstrom, Jones, LaFleur, & Witt, 1998). Others have suggested that a key reason teachers do not deliver known effective strategies is because of punishment effects, that is, the aversive nature of any interactions with difficult students (Shores et al., 1993; Wehby et al., 1998). For teachers already enmeshed in coercive interactions with students, it is unlikely that simple instruction in classroom management techniques will alter their behaviors. Additionally, many teachers find a lack of support from administration when attempting to alter their classroom environment and implement effective classroom management strategies, making the task more difficult. Many teachers also lack knowledge about how direct and indirect contingencies affect day-to-day patterns of teacher behavior (Wehby et al., 1998). Ongoing support and consultation about coercive patterns and successful experiences with the application of support plans will increase teacher knowledge and mastery of effective classroom interventions.

CONCLUSION

Schools are places in which concentrated efforts to build the values and skills necessary for young people to enter into society can generate productive adults. The success of these efforts may depend upon providing a positive school climate that fosters supportive and affective bonds with children. With an emphasis on the importance of human relationships, schools can help to diminish some of the stressors on the children and adults who care for them. By understanding the importance and generality of their work, educators can focus on positive student interaction that, in turn, will foster academic achievement and academic success. Each generation of students will demand consistent efforts to build meaningful relationships and to capture the energy and commitment for success in school and beyond.

When we hear harrowing stories of school violence, our immediate response is often to demonize the children who commit such acts, or their parents. Solutions that arise from this mindset are usually shortsighted and uncreative. To solve difficult problems such as those presented by school violence, we need a sophisticated understanding of the multiple influences that contribute to child aggression.

By considering key factors within schools that promote child well-being, our initial feelings of helplessness may be replaced by feelings of empowerment. Just as schools can be part of the path to violence, they can also provide a path toward positive growth and development. Finding ways to capitalize on the powerful influence that schools have in the lives of children will certainly be part of the more creative solutions.

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