

## Using Voices Against Violence with Adults

### ■ TEACHERS AND OTHER SCHOOL STAFF

*Voices Against Violence* aims to help teachers and other school staff better understand student bystanders' points of view. This understanding is critical for developing effective ways to reward positive bystander actions and for addressing barriers to such actions. You can use the questions for students at the end of each story to elicit the perspectives of adults as well. Their views are important, because adults are often bystanders themselves, as well as people that youth turn to for support. Thus, you can use the stories to trigger discussions about what school staff think youth can and should do in various bystander situations **and** what they themselves can and should do.

### AUDIENCES

If possible, *Voices Against Violence* should be viewed and discussed not only by teachers who might use the video in their classrooms, but also by other school staff: administrators, safety officers, classroom aides, cafeteria and recess monitors, clerical staff, bus drivers, librarians, nurses, school board members, and many others. Their diverse experiences as bystanders, student confidants, and security advisors can provide valuable input for developing locally informed policies and procedures.

#### VENUES FOR USING VOICES AGAINST VIOLENCE WITH SCHOOL STAFF

- Screen the video at a teachers' meeting to encourage its use with students.
- Use the stories as part of a formal in-service training on bullying prevention, discussing the issues raised and ways to address them.
- Show the video at a staff meeting to begin a discussion of the bystander's role in violence prevention and the need to develop and enforce school policies and procedures.
- After using the video with students, show it to school staff, describing students' responses and suggestions.

Administrative involvement is key to ensuring that follow-up activities – including development of policies and procedures – have the backing and resources needed for implementation. Input from staff whose positions put them on the front line of student violence – witnessing fights or hearing about what might happen – is necessary to ensure buy-in from those who are charged with carrying out policies and procedures day to day. School-safety and legal personnel, including police assigned to schools, bring juvenile justice and law enforcement perspectives that also need to be taken into account.

### NOTE TAKER

Whether you hold meetings with staff who have similar positions (e.g., all teachers) or different positions (e.g., administrators, teachers, and clerical staff) will depend on the size of your school and

opportunities for bringing people together. Regardless of the group composition, the sharing of information is critical for moving from discussion to action. To facilitate this sharing, consider appointing a note taker or recorder who prepares summaries of what was discussed, highlighting similarities and differences of opinion, situations and barriers identified, and suggestions for promoting and rewarding positive bystander actions.

### **GROUND RULES**

It is important to establish ground rules for these discussions so that staff can be candid without worrying about repercussions. For example, you should encourage staff to discuss times when they did not act as they feel they should have. This is not the time for reprimanding them for past behavior, but for looking to the future. Confidentiality is important for those participating in such meetings, as well for any staff, students, or families who might have been involved in the situations that are discussed. You can ensure confidentiality by asking participants not to use names and instructing the note taker not to use names or other identifying information. Of course, if a major incident is being discussed, the names of those who took part may be widely known. However, it is still important to focus on identifying the issues that the incident raised and how people responded so that the school can use these facts to inform future action.

### **URGENT SITUATIONS**

The discussion might reveal an ongoing or potential problem that requires immediate attention. In this case, as the group leader, you are responsible for sharing the information with the appropriate administrator and other staff so action can be taken.

### **TIPS FOR DISCUSSIONS WITH SCHOOL STAFF**

- Choose the school staff who will be involved and prepare ground rules for the discussion. Ground rules are especially important if the group is a heterogeneous one that includes administrators, teachers, support staff, and safety and security officers.
- Decide how much time is available: Do you have time for only one session, or can you hold multiple sessions?
- Adjust the learning objectives to the available time and the audience.
- Decide whether you will show the whole video or only selected stories.
- Review the questions you will ask to lead a focused discussion.
- Be sure to leave time for summarizing key points and next steps

### **OPENING THE SESSIONS**

No matter how you decide to use the video, you should provide your audience with a brief introduction to the topic of bystanders and the goal(s) of the discussion. Although it is important to tailor your comments to fit the audience and setting, information provided in the *Introducing Voices Against Violence* (page 5) can be adapted for school staff. You may also use the introductory exercise in Appendix A.

## BYSTANDER FACTS

- In a nationwide survey, two-thirds of youths said groups of students at their school intimidate others. However, only 16 percent said other students intercede when intimidation takes place.<sup>1</sup>
- Twenty percent of students report that they have heard a student talk about shooting someone at school, and 19 percent had second-hand knowledge about a potential school shooting. Only 54 percent said that they would tell an adult.<sup>2</sup>
- In three-quarters of fatal school shootings, shooters told others of their plans or engaged in behavior indicative of potential violence.<sup>3</sup>
- Middle school principals are more likely than elementary and high school principals to cite physical conflicts as one of their most serious discipline problems.<sup>4</sup>
- Younger students (i.e., 12- to 15-year-olds) were more likely than older students to experience violent victimization – primarily simple assault – in the presence of a third party. Third-party presence during victimization was most likely to occur at school.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Knowledge Networks. (2002). *Social Control, Verbal Abuse, and Violence among Teenagers*. Washington, D.C.: The Empower Program.

<sup>2</sup>Gaughan, E, Cerio, JD, and Myers, RA. (2001). *Lethal Violence in Schools: A National Study*. Final Report. Alfred, NY: Alfred University.

<sup>3</sup>Vossekuil, B, Fein, R, Reddy, M, Borum, R, and Modeleski, W. (2002). *Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States*. U. S. Department of Education.

<sup>4</sup>U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (1998). *Violence and Discipline Problems in Public Schools: 1996-97*. Washington, DC: DOE.

<sup>5</sup>Planty, M. (2002). *Third-party involvement in violent crime, 1993-1999*. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. NCJ 189100.

## SCHOOL STAFF DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BY STORY

Many of the questions suggested for use with students (see pages 10-15) can be used or easily adapted for school staff. You can also begin discussions by asking the questions that the narrator poses at the end of each story. Most of them focus on what students should do, what they currently do, why they may not be acting in pro-social ways, and what adults might do to support student bystanders. This section provides additional questions that are especially relevant for school staff. They focus on what adult bystanders should do, what adults currently do, and what policies, procedures, and supports are needed to help school staff be more proactive bystanders. You can also find suggestions here for next steps school staff can take to help bystanders “do the right thing.”

### Nikki’s Story

This story raises a number of issues that are important to discuss, such as the actions of teachers and other school staff, as well as the school policies and procedures that could be effective in dealing with situations such as this one. You might ask the following questions:

- 1. What are staff in this school, like the librarian and the cafeteria worker, expected to do when they are bystanders in a similar situations? What are they not supposed to do?*
- 2. What kinds of situations do we want students to tell us about? What should they handle on their own? When should staff get involved? When and what kinds of adult involvement might help? What kinds of actions might exacerbate the situation?*
- 3. Do students know when they should come to us, or what will happen if they do? What are their concerns about getting help? How can we address those concerns?*

### **Closing and Next Steps**

There are many ways to end discussion of this story, and much depends on the issues raised by your group. For instance, if your school does not have a formal system for reporting potential violence – one that school staff understand and can describe and follow and which students feel confident employing – a useful next step might be to have the group talk about how to develop such a reporting system. Whether or not a formal reporting system is in place, you should ask the group to talk about ways school staff can encourage students to come to them with information about violent or potentially violent situations. Confidentiality is of prime concern to students. It is very important to acknowledge and address the belief held by many students – that they cannot be assured of confidentiality when sharing information with school staff.

### **Alex's Story**

Given the potential seriousness of the threatened gun violence in this story, critical questions to ask include the following:

- 1. If Alex were a student at this school, what do you think he would do after Jake showed him the gun? Why?*
- 2. How would staff at this school want Alex to act? What would keep him from acting this way? What can we do to help students in similar situations act responsibly?*
- 3. If Alex came to one of us, how should that person respond?*
- 4. What could have been done earlier to prevent this type of situation from developing?*

### **Closing and Next Steps**

This story raises two important matters that may lead school staff to consider strengthening or changing school policies and procedures for dealing with violence. The first issue is potentially lethal violence. You might want to ask your group the following questions:

- 1. Does this school currently have policies and procedures for how staff should handle such situations?*
- 2. If so, are most staff familiar with what they should – and should not – do?*

If staff do not agree about how they should respond, these questions are important ones to ask:

- 3. Do policies and procedures address how staff should deal with rumors or things they hear or see?*
- 4. Do the policies and procedures address the confidentiality and safety of students or staff who report a threat or weapon carrying?*

*5. Do staff in various positions know how to identify the warning signs of potential violence and when, where, and how they should report such signs?*

If the answer to any of these questions is no, there is likely a need for staff education and perhaps the refinement of the school's policies and procedures.

This story raises another question: What can be done to help students like Jake before they engage in violence? In every school, there are students who are teased, bullied, or feel alienated from the school community. In most cases, such students do not pose any threat to school safety. However, teasing and bullying negatively affect school climate, whether or not weapon-related violence results. Consider posing these questions:

*6. What steps do staff currently take to prevent bullying and other negative student interactions?*

*7. Should more be done? If so, what?*

See Appendix B for a range of resources for addressing school bullying and other forms of violence.

### **Anna's Story**

Some of the other stories depict physical aggression. The conflict in this story revolves around girls being mean to a new student. This behavior has been termed *relational aggression*. Boys are three to four times more likely than girls to use physical aggression; girls tend to practice more subtle and covert forms of bullying. Though girls' bullying can be harder to detect, it is still harmful for all involved – bullies, victims, and bystanders.

Sonia's efforts to isolate Maya socially required the support of her clique. A clique of girls – who are sometimes active and sometimes passive bystanders – can greatly influence such bullying behavior. To discourage relational aggression by cliques, find ways to foster a social environment in which girls feel empowered to take positive steps to reduce bullying and other forms of victimization. Create safe places for girls to voice their own experiences with and concerns about being ostracized or bullied. Promote activities in which girls identify and counter negative stereotypes and media portrayals of how they are supposed to act; such experiences may help girls build more supportive relationships with one another. Viewers might not think of the behaviors shown in this story as violence, and may disagree about whether and when adult intervention would be helpful. Questions for staff to address should include the following:

*1. How common are such behaviors in this school? What kinds of relational aggression do you see and hear about?*

*2. Should adults get involved? What should they do? Will they help or hurt the situation?*

*3. Would you want a student in Anna's predicament to confide in you? What would you do if she did so?*

### **Closing and Next Steps**

If school staff report that such situations are common, they may need to learn more about ways to address harassment, bullying, and other forms of relational aggression. Aggression and violence among girls have received increased attention from researchers and there are a number of gender-specific programs available to address this concern. See Appendix B for resources.

## CREATING AND SUSTAINING CHANGES IN SCHOOL CLIMATE

To promote changes in school policy and climate that support positive bystander actions to prevent violence, it is important to enlist the involvement of school leaders as well staff at all levels. Obtain the support of the school principal and other leaders whose engagement is critical for promoting change and committing time and resources. To build and sustain change, the delicate balance between top-down and bottom-up involvement must be handled carefully. Top-down action is necessary to set general directions for the school and communicate expectations. Bottom-up efforts are essential to fully engage teachers and other school staff in planning for change. In addition, you should bring parents into the process, as well as other key members of the school community, including the police.

### ■ PARENTS

Much of the research on family involvement in schools advocates providing parents with information in multiple ways. You can use a range of channels to reach as many parents as possible, informing them of your school's efforts to address the role of bystanders in school violence prevention and inviting parents' involvement. You can share this information at parent-teacher conferences, through a parent newsletter, at PTA meetings, via a letter from the principal, and as part of a bystander violence prevention kick-off event to which parents are invited. The goal of these strategies is to increase parental awareness of bullying and/ or violence problems at both the national and local levels, the importance of bystander involvement, and the need for parental involvement in the school's efforts. You should show some or all of ***Voices Against Violence*** to introduce and discuss the role of bystanders in violence prevention and the contributions parents can make to supporting students.

To encourage children to respond pro-socially when they are bystanders to violence, parents must talk with their children about what is going on in school. It is important for parents to validate their children's feelings – whether fear, anger, sadness, or any other emotion – and to explain that their children have made the right choice by talking with their parents about an incident or impending incident. Parents can perform the following important roles:

- Help their child be specific about what he or she knows (e.g., who, what, when, where).
- Find out what actions their child has taken and what happened.
- Coach their child in possible ways to respond when they are bystanders.

Parents can also encourage their children to seek help from others, including school staff. However, this is unlikely to happen unless parents see the school as their ally. Parents must feel comfortable not only encouraging their children to come forward with information, but also doing the following things:

- Sharing their children's concerns and specific information about bullying and other violent or potentially violent incidents with appropriate school personnel
- Working with school staff to ensure that their children are protected from possible retaliation and that appropriate action will be taken if retaliation occurs

- Reaching agreement with school staff on how parents will work with the school and their children to deal with future bullying/violent incidents

Students usually have at least one adult at their school whom they trust and can go to with problems. It is important for parents to know who that adult is for their children and to make contact with him or her as well. However, many incidents occur at times and in places (e.g., playground, lunchroom, field trips, bus lines, gym) when it is not possible for a student to talk to a specific teacher or other school staff.

Parents themselves need to know about school policies and procedures that are in place to support student bystanders. For parents to feel this level of comfort with their children's school, the school must promote true parental involvement, make sure that parents have input into and knowledge about policies and procedures, and ensure that parents know what schools expect of students and their families.

There are many ways to use **Voices Against Violence** with parents. These include showing the video at a meeting of the parent-teacher association, parent advisory committee, or school board, or arranging a special event. Although valuable input can be obtained this way, such meetings often draw relatively small numbers of parents. Therefore, you might also consider engaging parents through a student homework assignment, as described on page 4. This method has the advantage of promoting parent-child discussions about expectations around and ways to deal with being a bystander.

#### **TIPS FOR USING VOICES AGAINST VIOLENCE WITH PARENTS**

- Identify the best times and places the video can be shown to groups of parents.
- Publicize the event and send invitations, as appropriate.
- Fit the learning objectives to the time, setting, and audience.
- Decide whether you will show the whole video or selected stories.
- Review the questions you will ask to lead a focused discussion.
- Be prepared to answer questions parents might have about school violence prevention policies and procedures regarding reporting, confidentiality, harassment/ bullying, codes of conduct, etc.
- Plan introductory comments, highlighting why parent involvement is important, using the points made above and in the introductory script or the activity in Appendix A.
- Establish ground rules, reminding participants not to identify or focus on specific individuals or confidential situations.

## LEADING DISCUSSIONS WITH PARENTS

The stories provide numerous examples of how parents can – or might not – become involved, both as bystanders to potential violence and as supports for their children. Involving parents can clarify expectations about how students, parents, and school staff should respond to various situations and, equally important, can help identify and address gaps in existing procedures and channels of communication.

Whether you decide to show the whole video or only selected stories, you can ask the following questions:

- 1. How would you want your son or daughter to act in a similar situation, that is, if he or she were a bystander like Nikki, Alex, or Anna?*
- 2. If your son or daughter asked for your help, what would you say or do? What advice would you give? What would you be concerned about? Would you want to talk with anyone at school about it? If so, would you know with whom to talk? Are there reasons you wouldn't want to talk with someone at school? Would you talk with other parents?*
- 3. In which situations do you think the school staff should get involved? What do you expect teachers and other staff to do in such situations?*
- 4. Are there other kinds of violent or potentially violent situations we as a school community should be addressing?*

Even within families, mothers and fathers may not agree about the best ways to address different types of violence and potential violence. Parental concerns about having their children get involved, and possibly experience retribution, might be paramount, especially when there is a threat of serious violence. Also, parents disagree with each other – or do not agree with school staff – about whether adult intervention is called for and, if so, what kind is best. This may be particularly true with regard to more common forms of violence. For example, if parents assume that “boys just fight” or “girls are just mean to one another,” they may not think it appropriate for adults to get involved. Indeed, they may want their son or daughter to handle the situations themselves. The **Voices Against Violence** stories provide a safe way to begin talking about these differences. Obtaining this input from parents is an essential step in formulating policies and procedures that will work when difficult situations arise.

## PARENT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BY STORY

In addition to these general questions, you may want to ask additional ones related to some of the specifics of each story. If there is time, consider asking the questions in the next sections.

### **Nikki's Story**

Nikki's sister is concerned that getting her mother involved may only worry her mother, complicate the situation, or make it worse. Ask:

- 1. How would you address Kelly's concern?*
- 2. Do you think that parents would want to be involved in this type of situation? How could they be helpful? How could the school be helpful?*

### **Alex's Story**

Because of the potential lethality of the threatened violence, advance planning is appropriate. Students, parents, and school staff should know what they are expected to do in this type of situation. Ask:

- 1. Have you talked with your son or daughter about what they should do if they hear rumors or get information about a potentially serious threat? Do they know what type of threat is serious? Is it clear what you and they should do?*
- 2. Have you seen or heard about students being bullied, teased, or excluded? Is there a point at which parents or schools should be involved?*

### **Anna's Story**

Almost everyone can relate to being the new kid in school or being singled out and teased for another reason. Ask:

- 1. Has your son or daughter been a bystander in a situation like this? Has he or she expressed concern to you? Have you given your child advice regarding how to act or what to do when a student is being bullied?*
- 2. What else do you think teachers and other school staff can do to prevent or reduce this type of bullying behavior among female students?*

### **Closing and Next Steps**

It is important to tell parents how the information they provide will be used to inform what happens next. A summary of key points made in your session(s) should be sent home, perhaps in a parent newsletter. You can also encourage parents to get involved in the following ways:

- Parent volunteers can develop and/or review school policies and procedures, or address gaps that have been identified.
- Using the resource information provided in Appendix B, parents and staff can work together to identify relevant programs. These may include more comprehensive approaches to violence prevention, as well as bullying prevention, conflict resolution, and peer mediation programs.
- A committee of students, parents, and staff may be formed to address issues of school climate that contribute to violence. The committee might also reach out to other community members who are bystanders to violence, or who can help students make responsible decisions about whether, when, and how to take action.