Conflict Resolution and Violence Prevention:
From Misunderstanding to Understanding
Larry Cohen, MSW, Rachel Davis, MSW, and Manal Aboelata

At an interview for a position as a counselor in a school in which the students are threatened by a great deal of violence, I was asked how I would go about implementing a violence prevention program. As I started to answer, the interviewer looked puzzled. I realized I had to take a step backward to explain my perspective. I was answering her questions about violence prevention, but what she was truly asking about and understood was conflict resolution.
– Inner city counselor

The misunderstanding on the part of this interviewer is not uncommon. The general public and active professionals alike confuse the two as interchangeable with one another. In fact there are a great number of commonalities between the fields of violence prevention and conflict resolution. They share the goal of helping people envision violence and conflict as learned and that non-violent alternatives and solutions are not only preferable but also possible. This goal has been advanced through clear, demonstrable programs, which have captured people's imaginations across the U.S. Both conflict resolution and violence prevention efforts have grown astoundingly over the past decade, and both have achieved notable successes.

However, there are some clear differences in the frameworks that the two disciplines use to understand and reduce violence. Violence prevention is more limited in scope in that conflict resolution is concerned with issues beyond violence. Perhaps, with the exception of conflict resolution practitioners who are involved in the "peaceable school" approach, violence prevention efforts tend to take a more systemic approach to addressing violence. Overall, while violence prevention and conflict resolution are not interchangeable, they are complementary.

The tremendous growth of the conflict resolution field has made a direct contribution to violence prevention efforts by successfully promoting the idea that conflicts can be resolved without violence. And since conflict can and sometimes does lead to violence, conflict resolution effectively reduces some violence. Through pioneering programs such as *Community Boards*, based in San Francisco, and the *Resolving Conflict Creatively Program*, based in New York, people have changed the way society views violence in relation to conflict. Conflict resolution has changed the paradigm from fight or flight to the notion that non-violent alternatives for solving conflict are possible. In fact, it has made the non-violent approach even fashionable.

Purpose

The purpose of this article is to increase the understanding of the relationship between conflict resolution and violence prevention. The fields of violence prevention and conflict resolution play important, complementary roles in reducing violence, but have unique perspectives and approaches. Theoretical tools of one field can enhance the other's practice. This article's primary

purpose is to offer conflict resolution practitioners a solid understanding of violence prevention. It should be noted that there is a great deal of discrepancy from one practitioner to the next in delineating the scope of conflict resolution, so that any generalization made in this article is an approximation.

We hope that this article will enable practitioners to go *deeper* and understand the broader familial and societal changes needed to eliminate violence *before* incidents arise. Perhaps more importantly, examples of the successes of the two fields should encourage practitioners to forge further partnerships, and encourage both fields to broaden their purview and goals so as to better resolve some of the underlying issues that lead to conflicts and violence.

Why Now?

This edition comes at a particularly important time. In recent years, conflict resolution and violence prevention efforts have become visible in communities, schools, public institutions, private organizations, and universities across the country. The success of these programs in reducing conflict, preventing violence, and changing norms is increasingly recognized and has become a foundation for further efforts. Individuals volunteer as mediators in community and court mediation programs while youth intervene in conflicts between peers. Diverse members of the community come together to respond to violence through job creation and placement, education, and mentoring programs. Others study in universities, matriculating with graduate degrees in the field of conflict analysis and resolution. All hope to guide others through a process of engagement, which encourages nonviolent outcomes. With an increased emphasis on prevention, and the ever increasing growth and attention to school and community conflict resolution programs, the need, the opportunity, and the responsibility to maximize resources and outcomes has never been greater.

From Misunderstanding to Understanding

I recently watched a basketball game. A woman from the other side of the aisle walked in front of me to talk to the seven-year-old girl seated just below me. The girl had been screaming at the top of her lungs for the opposing team's player to miss his foul shot. The woman, I had noticed, looked a lot like the girl, and I thought she might be her aunt. When she leaned forward and put her fingers in her mouth and whistled, I thought she was teaching the girl how to make noise more effectively. Then, the man in front of me, who was apparently the girl's father, leaned back saying, "That woman just called my daughter a bitch!" I realized that the woman was a stranger to the girl and was angry with the girl for making so much noise.
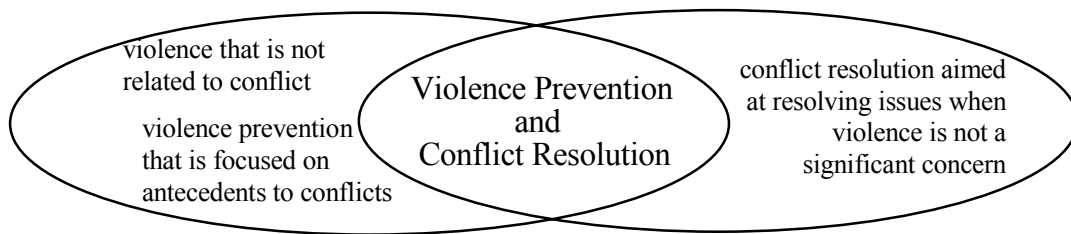
From a conflict resolution perspective, at this point one might ask what alternatives could be explored so that the families do not fight. In fact, the stadium employee who was summoned worked from a conflict resolution perspective. He talked quietly to the woman and her husband on the other side of the aisle. I was impressed at how he sat on the stairs so that he spoke non-threateningly from her level, rather than towering over her, and rather than creating a scene that might attract the attention of others and perhaps allow the situation to escalate further. I was also impressed that they had sent an employee who wasn't uniformed, only wearing an I.D., again to not make an already tense situation more than it was.

From a violence prevention perspective, I had a number of different questions: How much alcohol or other drugs had this woman consumed? How great was the risk of someone pulling out a handgun? Was this woman a parent — and if so, how did she talk to her own kids? How was she talked to as a child? I had already noticed, since we were on the front row of the upper deck, that there was a risk of someone tumbling to the deck below, a drop of about 35 feet, which could also be disconcerting to the persons they might land upon. Wasn't there a way, without affecting spectator visibility, to ensure that someone would not plummet 35 feet to the floor below? And finally, as a season ticket holder, I had to ask, why did that young girl always have to scream so loudly in such an irritating voice at every game?

Distinct differences in the theoretical assumptions of conflict resolution and violence prevention determine the variation in tools and methodologies applied by the two fields. Although there is clearly an overlap of interventions and perspectives in both fields, as a general statement, it can be said that violence prevention tends to be more systemic than conflict resolution, i.e., to look more broadly at the history and at the environment. From the perspective of a violence prevention practitioner, it seems that violence prevention efforts focus on more of the circumstances leading up to and surrounding the event, whereas conflict resolution tends to focus more on the event (the conflict) itself. When considering the episode, conflict resolution tends to focus primarily on finding alternatives for resolving the conflict and repairing the relationship, while violence prevention will emphasize not only the parties involved in the conflict but also the aspects of the surrounding environment, including influence of bystanders and availability of weapons, which will reduce or increase the potential for harm. (Of course, conflict resolution practitioners will consider issues such s the availability of weapons when directly related to the conflict, or when there may be future risk.)

Because violence prevention concentrates on broader environmental and societal factors, its breadth may appear greater than conflict resolution, but there are other ways in which the breadth of conflict resolution is greater. The conflict resolution purview includes varieties of conflict that have less likelihood of resulting in violence, e.g., many types of business and neighborhood disputes. It may be best to think of the two fields in terms of a Venn diagram, in which there are areas of intersection and distinct, unrelated areas. Their mutual interest then becomes how to *prevent violent conflict.*

Chart #1: Overlap between Violence Prevention and Conflict Resolution

violence that is not related to conflict

violence prevention that is focused on antecedents to conflicts

Violence Prevention and Conflict Resolution

conflict resolution aimed at resolving issues when violence is not a significant concern

Defining Our Terms

For the sake of this article it is useful to describe violence prevention and conflict resolution as 'fields' implying one central approach to each. Of course, it should be noted that different practitioners understand the terms quite differently. Statements about similarities or differences between the fields need to be understood as generalizations.

Conflict and Conflict Resolution

Here, conflict is defined as a situation between two or more parties who see their perspectives as incompatible. Conflict in itself is not negative since it can create change; rather, the response to conflict can be either negative or positive. Perspective, or points of view, can refer to the parties' positions, interests, values, or needs. Positions describe what people say they want. Their interests underlie the positions and describe why they want them.

As a tool, conflict resolution is well developed. It offers skills to individuals and enhances their ability to avoid conflict. Conflict resolution has not only made major contributions in terms of individual skill building, but also has clear applications in resolving disputes that precipitate in larger groups. Conflict resolution tends to view conflicts in terms of two distinct parties in opposition, and therefore prescribes a specific action plan for the parties in conflict. While conflict resolution is conceptualized by most people as an issue between two people, and it is that sense of conflict which is most relevant for this article, conflict resolution can be viewed on multiple levels:

- intra-personal level (a person tries to decide whether or not to do drugs)
- interpersonal level (two students argue over a rumor)
- inter-group level (gangs, ethnic conflict, management and labor)
- societal level (homelessness, racism, violence)
- international level (war between two or more countries)

Violence and Violence Prevention

The National Committee for Injury Prevention and Control offers a widely accepted definition of violence.[i] Violence is "the use of force with the intent to inflict injury or death upon oneself or another individual or group(s) and includes the threat of force to control another individual or group," and "aggressive human behavior involving the use of physical, psychological or emotional force with the intent to cause harm to oneself or others." This definition spans multiple fields and encompasses many types of violence including child abuse, battering, youth violence, homicide, assault, dating violence, and family violence. From a health perspective, preventing the result that may occur — the injury or death — is at times as great a concern as preventing the problem which leads up to it. Thus strategies from gunlocks to restraining orders aim to preclude morbidity or mortality.

In other words, violence is understood both as a symptom of greater issues and as a problem in and of itself. Preventing violence involves both addressing underlying causes and attempting to minimize, reduce, or eliminate injury.

Because the fields of violence prevention and conflict resolution have shared approaches and evolved significantly, any absolute statements comparing the fields require qualification.

However, the authors have chosen to outline some basic differences between the fields for the purpose of encouraging dialogue.

Violence prevention fundamentally differs from conflict resolution in eight ways:

1) Violence prevention concerns itself only with violence-related situations; there are numerous conflict issues unrelated to violence, and these clearly are not the purview of violence prevention.
2) Violence prevention emphasizes policy change as much as individual education, whereas conflict resolution tends to rely primarily on individual skill building and community education, improving interpersonal skills by enhancing communication, negotiation, and mediation skills. Of course, there are some conflict resolution practitioners who consider policy change vital.
3) Violence prevention seeks to alleviate risk factors as a way of reducing and eliminating violence before a violent situation occurs. (For example, a violence prevention effort that associates violence with poverty and lack of economic opportunities might work to create more economic opportunity for youth.) Conflict resolution strategies address risk factors such as history and context insofar as they appear to be important components in mediating a specific conflict.
4) Conflict resolution practitioners often seek to create a "level playing field" among negotiating parties, whereas violence prevention practitioners tend to consider inequities as endemic to the environment, therefore requiring broad-based change.
5) Violence prevention deals with the risk factors surrounding a conflict that may increase or decrease the likelihood of it becoming violent (e.g., violence may be more frequent when alcohol is present; consequently, a violence prevention initiative might work to reduce community alcohol availability). Conflict resolution neutrals can assist with appropriate referrals to deal with risk factors, if the parties request assistance.
6) Violence prevention usually focuses more on these risk factors than on resiliency, while conflict resolution activities foster resiliency.
7) Violence prevention advocates (practitioners) may accept that a conflict will occur and even be violent, but will focus on reducing the extent or lethality of the violence (e.g., strategies such as reducing guns in the environment, so that even if the violent act takes place, its consequences will be reduced.)
8) Just as there is conflict that is not related to violence, there is a great deal of violence that is not seen as conflict-based, per se. For example, issues of child abuse or sexual assault are primarily understood as the result of, or significantly affected by, power dynamics, requiring completely different strategies than conflict resolution.

These inherently different foci, as well as differences in terms of practice and approach, can best be understood by reviewing the evolution of these fields, as well as delineating the key principles and practices of violence prevention.

Evolution of the Fields

Conflict Resolution
Some practitioners find that conflict resolution has its roots in labor mediation that took place

between management and labor unions during contract negotiations. Others would trace it back to community mediation processes, or to cultures that used elders and other neutrals to assist in the resolution of conflicts. Since that time, processes such as negotiation and arbitration have emerged as tools to manage conflicts in organizations, communities, and schools. The concept of conflict resolution tends to refer to a particular set of skills and processes such as mediation, arbitration, and negotiation. From a more practical perspective, we use conflict resolution skills every day and learn them more or less as small children when we begin to negotiate staying out late or sharing toys with others. However, the discipline of conflict resolution has systematized a methodology for resolving conflict. Many individuals and groups have benefited from these types of skills-based enhancement programs. The skills tend to help in relationships with family members, loved ones, friends, and strangers.

While there have been dispute resolution efforts related to courts, neighborhoods, and other community venues, it is school-based conflict resolution that is typically seen as a violence prevention methodology by most conflict resolution coordinators. Conflict resolution is actualized in schools through mediation programs and curricula that emphasize effective problem solving.

Conflict resolution has expanded its purview as its popularity has grown. Graduate programs have emerged along with professionals who now concentrate on analyzing and resolving the deep underlying issues of conflict. Some processes, such as the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, can take many years to address the complexity of the conflict. Through intermediary steps, such as the Camp David accords, conflict resolution can play an important role by creating optimism that resolution is possible.

Violence Prevention

The movement towards a public health approach to violence prevention was largely initiated about 15 years ago by Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith. She transformed local community concern into widespread public exposure. As an emergency room physician in Boston, she became frustrated by cleaning the gun and knife wounds of so many young people. Comparing mortality rates in the U.S. to those in other industrialized nations, she reasoned that if violence had become learned as acceptable in this culture, then alternatives could also be learned. She developed the first significant violence prevention education curriculum in the U.S. Her curriculum was important not only for what it taught young people, but also because it served as a tool to educate Americans that the high prevalence of violence in the U.S., exhibited by homicide rates that exceed those in any other industrialized nation, was not inevitable. From this starting point, programs and curricula have been developed, coalitions formed, government and foundation investments increased, and political debates and media coverage raised to national prominence.

Recognizing the complex nature of violence and building from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration preventive work (nationally funded Justice Department prevention initiatives) of the early 1970s, and, notably, leadership from the women's movement, the public health approach to violence prevention began to grow. It offered a comprehensive and preventive lens with which to view violence.

The violence prevention movement is actually broader, both in concept and in participation, than the public health perspective. It acknowledges that the criminal justice system alone has not solved the problem, but requires supplementing by the theoretical frameworks of the educational system, social services, and public health to comprehensively address the complex terrain of violence. Violence prevention relies on the successes and strengths of multiple disciplines and is based on some fundamental public health tenets, including:

- **primary prevention** – efforts designed to prevent violence before it occurs
- **data-driven approaches –** quantitative and qualitative descriptions of the nature of problems as well as contributing risk and resiliency factors
- **collaboration** – multiple partners working together to produce change
- **population-based efforts** – community-wide or 'environmental' solutions

Many violence practitioners in the U.S. concur that emerging violence prevention efforts in this country are reducing deaths and injuries from violence. Over the past few years, national violence rates have begun to fall, particularly in areas where prevention has been practiced. Importantly, through the integration of a public health approach to violence prevention, the efforts of coalitions have produced striking results. One such coalition, PACT (Policy, Action, Collaboration, and Training), in Richmond, California (Contra Costa County) involved organizations concerned with preventing violence and building positive interaction in the community. Community-based organizations exchanged training on the strengths and perspectives of diverse cultures and ethnicities. They joined with youth and the school district to sponsor activities and worked with local businesses to enhance mentoring programs that funneled students into part-time and summer employment. These organizations participated in selecting a community-oriented police chief, and demanded increased funding for gang intervention and conflict resolution activities within the schools and the community in general. When statistics confirmed a dramatic reduction in the rates of violence in Richmond, most practitioners and residents concluded that it was the synergistic effect of multiple activities and the mobilization of the community that were responsible. The notion that community involvement results in positive change is shared across the United States. As communities begin to change, their momentum results in policy changes, both locally and nationally, that may have seemed impossible just a few years earlier.

Utilizing public health principles promotes broader, more lasting solutions to the violence problem. Such an orientation is essential because criminal justice interventions — deterrents and punishments — cannot fully address a problem that has all of the markings of an epidemic. Neither can individually oriented skill-building efforts.

A Preventive Strategy

When people think about prevention, whether the issue is smoking, obesity, or violence, the first notion that comes to mind is often education. From this perspective, conflict resolution and violence prevention are similar. Both fields frequently conduct interventions in school and often use individual skill-building curricula as important components of their approach. In fact, because so much violence arises from interpersonal conflict, conflict resolution curricula are often vital tools in violence prevention programs. For efforts to succeed, education is a necessary but insufficient component. The overall norms and expectations of our society, which

suggest that violence is a normal and acceptable outcome of/reaction to conflict, must change. Non-violent solutions must become the preferred ones. Violence cannot be seen as a necessary or acceptable option.

A prevention strategy must address norms because of their power to influence behavior. Anthropologists explain that norms are created and maintained by institutions like school, family, work, religion, and the media.[ii] Norms are learned as people interact, and internalize the messages that they receive from their surroundings. The interplay between an individual and his/her community suggests that norms can impact an individual's behavior as well as shape a community. If violence is typical and the media, family, community, or school reinforces this expectation, it is far more likely to occur with greater frequency and lethality. On the other hand, in a community that respects youth and demonstrates consistently high expectations, more positive outcomes can be expected.

There are three key principles to an effective violence prevention strategy:
1) Violence is complex, requiring a comprehensive approach.
2) Risk and resiliency factors, the individual and community characteristics that are central to preventing violence, must be addressed.
3) A thorough action plan is necessary to offer the broadest, longest lasting solutions to resolving violence.

1) Violence is complex, requiring a comprehensive approach

The Spectrum of Prevention

One systematic tool that encourages the development of a range of activities for a comprehensive approach is the *Spectrum of Prevention*.[iii] The *Spectrum* identifies six levels of intervention, which move beyond an educational approach to achieve broad prevention goals. These levels, delineated in the following table, are complementary and when used together produce a synergistic effect resulting in greater effectiveness than would be possible using a single level of the *Spectrum* in isolation.

Chart #2: The Spectrum of Prevention

1. Strengthening Individual Knowledge and Skills	Enhancing an individual's capability of preventing injury or crime
2. Promoting Community Education	Reaching groups of people with information and resources to promote health and safety
3. Educating Providers	Informing providers who will transmit skills and knowledge to others
4. Fostering Coalitions and Networks	Bringing together groups and individuals for broader goals and greater impact
5. Changing Organizational Practices	Adopting regulations and norms to improve health and safety and creating new models
6. Influencing Policy and Legislation	Developing strategies to change laws and policies to influence outcomes in health, education, and justice

Clearly the *Spectrum* could be adapted to apply to conflict resolution as well. With only minimal modifications on the right-hand side of the chart, the *Spectrum* is applicable to conflict resolution and would enhance its effectiveness. The field of conflict resolution has had good success with implementation at levels 1-3 of the *Spectrum*, and recently has begun to focus more attention on levels 4-6 to achieve further influence and growth. Conflict resolution practitioners promote changes in organizational practice and policy that advance their efforts. For example, they encourage schools to make use of conflict resolution practices to offer alternatives to suspension, and have demonstrated the value of updated grievance procedures in the workplace. These examples underscore the potential for conflict resolution to be more effective through use of the *Spectrum of Prevention* and target policy more consistently and systematically.

This model emphasizes the importance of fostering broad-based coalitions and networks.[iv] Violence crosses disciplines, and its prevention requires coordinated and committed collaboration between agencies, organizations, and departments that have different mandates and approaches. Areas for further promotion include partnerships between the private sector, government agencies, and the community, connecting regional coalitions, partnering communities to share assets, and addressing underlying issues that connect different types of violence, such as child abuse and domestic violence. While violence prevention tends to emphasize coalition building more than conflict resolution does, it is the skill base of conflict resolution that contributes so much to making these meetings work.

2) Risk and resiliency factors must be addressed

By attention to risk and resiliency factors, we can reduce the violence in a community. Risk factors are characteristics that indicate the relative likelihood of an individual or community being affected by, or perpetrating, violence. Resiliency factors provide protection for the individual or the community.

Risk Factors
Based on the work of national public health practitioners and researchers, nine different risk factors for violence are clustered below.[v] Three of these are macro-level factors: economics, oppression, and family mental health and functioning. The remaining six are community-level factors: guns, media, alcohol and other drugs, incarceration, witnessing acts of violence, and community deterioration. These risk factors are described in the following paragraphs.

Macro-level factors
Economics, oppression, and family mental health and functioning
Depressed economic conditions within a community and individual cases of unemployment and underemployment are associated with higher levels of violence. Oppression, which includes sexism, racism, and discrimination on the basis of age, ethnicity, class, and cultural background, results in feelings of inequality and powerlessness that underlie many types of violence. A lack of individual responsibility or an unsupportive home life including psychological or physical abuse can initiate or maintain a cycle of violence and can limit an individual's ability to resolve conflict without violence.

Community-level factors

Guns
Even if a reduction in the number of hostilities could not be accomplished, a mere reduction in the availability of guns and ammunition would decrease mortality and morbidity rates. While people tend to think of firearms in relation to homicide, firearms are associated with more suicides than homicides annually.[vi] Additionally, the rate for unintentional firearm-related deaths of children under 15 in the United States is nine times higher than in the 25 other industrialized countries combined.[vii]

Media
By 1992, twenty-five percent of shows in the prime-time line-up were considered "very violent," and many programs showed 40 or more violent acts per hour. Children's television is known for showing violent acts with greater frequency than any other type of programming. Such exposure implicitly encourages violent behavior, increases fearfulness (which can impel one to become involved in violence as a means of protection), leads to desensitization to violent images and acceptance of violence as normal, and increases desire for involvement in violent activities.[viii]

Alcohol and other drugs
Alcohol is the drug most closely associated with violent incidents. Some researchers estimate that it is implicated in 50-66% of all homicides,[ix] 20-36% of suicides,[x] and more than half of all cases of domestic violence.[xi] The scientific literature strongly suggests that alcohol, like other drugs, acts as a 'multiplier' of crime.

Incarceration
There are 1.5 million people in prison in the U.S.,[xii] making this the nation with the highest incarceration rate per capita in the Western world. Despite substantial growth in the prison population due to the war on drugs, the vast majority of those arrested for drug-related offenses is released without substantial treatment. The goal of rehabilitation has been largely abandoned. The huge expenditures for prison building are a major determinant of available resources for schools, health, and other government necessities. A recent RAND report indicated that although the California Three Strikes Initiative would have an impact in crime reduction, community programs would be a more effective and efficient use of money.[xiii]

Witnessing violence
Witnessing violence can desensitize an individual to violence, and create and build upon norms of violence. Under such conditions, subsequent violence is more likely to occur. A significant risk factor for becoming a batterer is having witnessed the battery of one's mother as a boy.[xiv,xv]

Community deterioration
As communities deteriorate, there are fewer opportunities, social services, and resources for community members. The deterioration gives a message to community members that there is no hope. In such communities, the sheer number of stressors may quickly exceed many people's coping abilities, in which case violence is more likely to occur.

Resiliency Factors

Resiliency or protective factors are traits or characteristics that protect an individual or community from violence**.** They are indicative of the health of a community. Many experts believe that the presence or absence of resiliency factors in an environment is strongly correlated to outcomes.[xvi] Resiliency factors encourage growth and may counter the negative effects of risk factors. Some theorists have grouped resiliency factors into three broad categories:

- caring and supportive relationships
- consistently high expectations
- opportunities for involvement, input, and impact

It is clear from resiliency studies that the community as well as the family plays a critical role. For example, the number of significant non-parental adult relationships a child has is a significant predictor of a successful transition to adulthood.

Bonnie Benard, who conducted resiliency training for the Federal Office for Safe and Drug Free Schools for nearly ten years, emphasizes that resiliency grows less out of *what* we do than *how* we do it.[xvii] As such, she suggests that shifting to a resiliency approach requires a fundamental change in the ways communities operate — respecting the notion that every interaction, no matter what the focus, represents the opportunity for participation and power of members of the community.[xviii]

John McKnight, a Michigan researcher noted for his community-oriented perspective, argues that communities need to have more control over the decisions that affect them rather than outsiders deciding what is in their best interest. In this sense, community members highlight and maximize the strengths of their own communities. For example, churches in the community are noted as potential sites for child care programs, grocery stores and firehouses are identified as safe havens where children can count on adult assistance, and businesses are recognized for their potential in job training. This process allows a community to envision how its strengths can make positive change.[xix]

Only recently have many violence prevention initiatives shown interest in resiliency. Conflict resolution, on the other hand, is an activity that fosters resiliency by its very nature, offering individuals a sense of mastery, self-control, options, and capacity to self-determine.

3) A comprehensive action plan is necessary

It is necessary to move beyond theory and analysis and take action. An action plan delineates the activities that will take place and by whom. It is based on a vision of what must happen to achieve specific goals. The Contra Costa County coalition summarized its objectives in an action plan that was placed on the ballot for a voter referendum. There were 25 elements to the plan, in the 6 categories of Safe Homes, Safe Neighborhoods, Safe Schools, Safe Workplaces, the Role of Government, and the Role of Policy. In a county of nearly 1 million people, nearly 80% voted yes. When given the opportunity, people generally will support comprehensive prevention efforts. Since that time the Action Plan has been replicated and modified in communities throughout the country.

Conclusion
Moving Towards a More Systematic Approach to Violence Prevention and Conflict Resolution

When systematic methodology, like the *Spectrum of Prevention*, is applied and an overall strategy developed, many of the shortcomings of current violence prevention and conflict resolution efforts will be avoided. Fragmented programs will become synergistic initiatives; a short-term need for outcomes will evolve to a recognition of the underlying need for long-term focus, efforts, change, and funding. Chart #3 delineates the kinds of directions necessary for a successful change in norms.

Chart #3: Moving to a Systematic Strategy

Current Status	More Systematic Approach
Absence of an overall strategy	➢ Creation of an overall strategy: linkages between the fields
Education seen as prevention	➢ Multifaceted activities: *Spectrum of Prevention*
Conflict resolution fosters resiliency; violence prevention tends to focus on risk factors	➢ Risk *and* resiliency factor emphasis
Singular approaches	➢ Comprehensive approach
Attention to issues as they arise	➢ Attention to norms

Non-violent options to conflict are critical. As FBI reports have long pointed out, most homicide victims die not as the result of criminal activity, but because of arguments among acquaintances.[xx] Conflict resolution already is effective in counteracting the development of attitudes, beliefs, and interventions that lead to violence. Further, the penetration of conflict resolution into diverse strata from community to business strengthens the norm that there are a variety of options in resolving conflicts. While conflict resolution is primarily conducted through program and interventions — in classrooms and in the community — a more expansive view of conflict resolution would allow its results to be even more significant.

Dr. George Albee reminds us that, "No mass disorder afflicting mankind is ever brought under control or eliminated by attempts at treating the individual."[xxi] With further cross-fertilization between conflict resolution and violence prevention approaches, the norm that violence is unacceptable will gain prominence and lives will be saved.

Incidence of Violence

When faced with data about the incidence of violence in the U.S., violence prevention and conflict resolution practitioners come to the same conclusions: that violence in the U.S. is a regular occurrence, and in certain communities it is extremely common. Even though homicide rates have dropped in the U.S. over the past three years, they remain excessively high, especially when compared to other industrialized nations. In this country, youth is often the group most associated with violence. However, youth are not the predominant perpetrators of violence; eighty-one percent of those arrested for violent crimes are adults.[xxii] Youth do have the highest victimization rates in the U.S. And of all age groups, twelve- to fifteen-year-olds are at the greatest risk of becoming victims of violent crime.[xxiii] While the focus is often placed on males, there is currently an increase in violence among girls. Females are still less likely to commit crimes than males, but there is a growth in juvenile crime rates among females.[xxiv]

Family violence is a widespread problem. Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women between the ages of 15 and 44,[xxv] and it is estimated that between two and four million women a year are battered.[xxvi] Though this type of violence cuts across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines, those with fewer resources and support mechanisms seem to be at higher risk[xxvii] and have fewer alternatives to escaping such violence. Child abuse levels are staggering. Child homicide is one of five leading causes of death for children ages 1-18.[xxviii] Every day, 8,493 children are reported abused or neglected in the U.S. and 3 die from abuse.[xxix] With regard to sexual assault, victims of rape are disproportionately children and adolescent girls; 60% of forcible rapes occur before the victim is 18 years old.[xxx]

One commonality of these different types of violence: most of the perpetrators and victims know each other. In fact, most violence is unplanned and starts as an argument over something 'small.'[xxxi]

Acknowledgments

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