How Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Practitioners Can Help Prevent School Violence

Why MCH Practitioners Should Get Involved in School Violence Prevention Efforts
Maternal and child health agencies are well positioned to advance violence prevention efforts in schools. They are interested in the health and safety of children and youth, and are already connected to state health departments, school health centers, and local service providers. In addition, MCH practitioners have an established role as prevention experts, and understand the complex nature of school violence. They can therefore play a crucial part in defining and moving comprehensive school violence prevention plans forward at the community or regional level.

This fact sheet will delineate the variety of ways in which MCH practitioners can get involved, and describe how they can use the Spectrum of Prevention to develop comprehensive violence prevention approaches. By integrating effective violence prevention efforts into school health education and prevention programs, MCH agencies can strengthen existing collaborations, build new networks, expand their professional capacity, and have a significant impact on ensuring the health, safety, and well being of students.

Definition of School Violence
For the purpose of these fact sheets, school violence is defined as any action committed on school property that intentionally results, or could result in injury to self, students, teachers, administrators, or other school personnel or visitors. Injury includes the effects of bullying, harassment, and intimidation of students, as well as physical harm. Many practitioners define school violence more broadly, taking into account violence that occurs while students are traveling to and from school. Others also include violence that occurs in students’ homes or communities. Since MCH work often involves dealing with violence that takes place outside of the school setting, it is important to realize that violence at home and in the community impacts student behavior in school.

Potential MCH Partners in School Violence Prevention Efforts
- School teachers and administrators
- School-based nurses and health educators
- Youth violence prevention program coordinators
- Injury prevention coordinators
- Substance abuse staff
- Students
- Parents/Community members
- Adolescent health coordinators
- Juvenile justice staff

Comprehensive Strategies to Address School Violence: The Spectrum of Prevention
Because the root causes of school violence are complex, strategies to address this problem must be multi-faceted and comprehensive. Prevention strategies should involve youth as well as professionals, and should incorporate knowledge from a variety of disciplines.

The Spectrum of Prevention is a framework for developing comprehensive, system-wide prevention initiatives. The Spectrum specifies six levels of action—beginning with the individual, and targeting successively broader arenas for change—such as community, organizational and policy/legislation (see Table 1, below). When used together, these complementary strategies are more effective than any single activity or initiative would be by itself. The Spectrum encourages...
practitioners to move beyond a focus on individual ‘skills building’ to address environmental and system level factors that affect behavior.

Table 1: Spectrum of Prevention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example Activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Strengthening Individual Knowledge and Skills</td>
<td>Enhancing an individual's capability of preventing injury or violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Promoting Community Education</td>
<td>Reaching groups of people with information and resources to promote health and safety</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Educating Providers</td>
<td>Training professionals who will transmit skills and knowledge to others</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Fostering Coalitions and Networks</td>
<td>Bringing together groups and individuals for broader goals and greater impact</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Changing Organizational Practices</td>
<td>Adopting regulations and norms to improve health and safety and creating new models</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Influencing Policy and Legislation</td>
<td>Developing strategies to change laws and policies to influence outcomes in health, education and justice</td>
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How MCH Practitioners Can Use the Spectrum to Prevent School Violence:

**Level 1: Strengthening Individual Knowledge and Skills**
- Facilitate discussions that foster a climate of respect, and allow students to dialogue with peers and school administrators about their concerns and strategize together to prevent violence in their school.
- Conduct conflict resolution and peer mediation workshops.
- Build students’ communication, negotiation, and social skills.
- Provide safe, confidential spaces where troubled students can share information and receive mental health counseling and other social services.
- Support student activities that promote appreciation and respect for differences.

**Level 2: Promoting Community Education**
- Facilitate community forums about factors that support healthy families and youth development; brainstorm violence prevention strategies.
- Promote community-school partnerships to provide youth with safe after-school recreational spaces and opportunities to earn money and develop other protective skills.
- Produce and disseminate educational materials with information and resources to reduce family, community, and school violence.
- Work to de-stigmatize and promote access to, and use of mental health services.

**Level 3: Educating Providers**
- Include sessions on school violence prevention, and related risk and resiliency factors at professional conferences, trainings, and workshops for school and other adolescent health practitioners.
- Assist schools with the development and evaluation of programs that address bullying, dating violence, suicide, hate crimes, and other issues relating to school violence.
Conduct, sponsor, and participate in trainings on secondary trauma to gain an understanding of intimate partner violence and develop skills for dealing with children who witness parental violence.

Educate other school-based providers about the laws relevant to teen dating violence, as well as the importance of mandatory reporting of violence and hate-related incidents that occur in the school environment.

Support efforts to train teachers, administrators, and other school staff in conflict recognition and resolution, and in appropriate methods of intervention in bullying, harassment, teasing and other hate-motivated situations.

**Level 4: Fostering Coalitions and Networks**

- Develop functional relationships with Child Protective Services, State Departments of Education and School Health Divisions to share data and expertise. Assist in the design of surveillance systems and in the data collection process.
- Work with schools and health centers, community-based organizations, youth, and faith-based institutions on multi-pronged strategies to address youth violence and promote health.
- Partner with judicial and mental health professionals in order to increase your knowledge about state law related to dating violence, keep abreast of available resources and successful strategies, and more adequately meet the mental health needs of students.

**Level 5: Changing Organizational Practices**

- Integrate information about teen dating violence, suicide, and other violence-related issues into existing MCH school-based activities, such as teen parenting programs.
- Integrate information about violence prevention into health education curricula, and link with other prevention efforts such as pregnancy, substance abuse, suicide, and dropout prevention.
- Use school-based health centers as a point of entry for school violence prevention activities. These centers could provide suicide and depression screening, counseling, or referrals, peer mediation, and conflict resolution training.
- Support school efforts to define and uphold school codes of conduct.
- Encourage schools to respond to and accurately report hate-motivated incidents.

**Level 6: Influencing Policy and Legislation**

- Promote and enforce school policies that support non-violence.
- Support policies to establish appropriate mental health services for youth.
- Develop school- and district-wide anti-bias and anti-bullying policies that include provisions to train school staff on interventions that promote a school climate of respect and tolerance.

For additional information about how to use the *Spectrum of Prevention* in violence prevention, contact Prevention Institute: Phone: (510) 444-PREV (7738); Fax: (510) 663-1280; E-mail: prevent@preventioninstitute.org; www.preventioninstitute.org

**Additional resources:**

- The *Eight Steps to Effective Coalition Building* is a guide that offers concrete steps for building effective partnerships among individuals, organizations, and government, and provides tips for making such collaborations work. This tool can be accessed at [www.preventioninstitute.org](http://www.preventioninstitute.org).
- The Children’s Safety Network provides resources and technical assistance to maternal and child health practitioners and others working to reduce intentional and unintentional injuries among children and adolescents. For more information, see [www.edc.org/HHD/CSN/](http://www.edc.org/HHD/CSN/)

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