What Factors Foster Resiliency Against Violence?

What Does It Mean to Be "Resilient" Against Violence?
Resiliency factors are traits that support the healthy development of individuals, families, schools, and communities, and build capacity for positive relationships and interactions. Protective and supportive factors occur at the individual, family, school, and community levels.

It is important for school violence prevention experts to recognize individual, family, and community assets and capacity to resist violence. Violence prevention strategies that build and support these capacities will not only help to prevent school violence, but also foster healthy child and adolescent development and build community strengths in the long term.

How Does the Social Context in which Students Live Impact Their Level of Resiliency?
It is important to understand that students are shaped by the broader social context in which they live; their individual behavior results not only from their developmental level, but from their experiences of their families, neighborhoods, and schools.[1] Practitioners who understand how these influences help to build resiliency in young people are more likely to be able to successfully intervening to reduce and prevent school violence and improve the lives of young people.

What Factors Increase Resiliency Against Violence?

Individual Factors
- **Caring Relationships:** Research shows that developing relationships with caring adults protects 'at-risk' youth against becoming involved in violence.[2]
  - **Connection to Family:** The recent National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health[3] found that young people's sense of connection to their parents and other family members was the most consistently protective factor across all the health outcomes. Teens with parents who are physically present in the home ae less likely to engage in violent behavior.[3]
  - **Sense of Connection to School:** Students who feel they are a part of their school and are treated fairly by teachers are more emotionally healthy and less inclined towards drug and alcohol abuse, suicidal thoughts and attempts, and involvement in violence.[4,4]
- **High Expectations:** Students whose parents express high expectations for their performance in school performance are less likely to engage in violent behavior.[4] Providing youth with such messages helps to build their sense of self esteem and self-efficacy.

School and Community Factors
- **Opportunities to Participate and Contribute:** Involving students in decisions about school policies and programs is key to helping create a school climate of inclusion, respect, and safety.[5] Research has found that when students are offered opportunities to acquire skills and engage in social activities, their problem solving, communication, and analytical skills improve. In addition, they demonstrate enhanced leadership and autonomous decision-making and are more likely to reach academic goals such as graduating from school. Such factors are all protective against involvement in violent activities.[6]

- ▪ ***Participation in Community Networks:*** Participation in community networks, neighborhood associations, religious and school organizations helps students to develop in strong formal and informal ties with adults. It also increases their sense of connection and self-efficacy.

How Can Practitioners Foster Resiliency in Students, Schools, and Communities?

The following list of selected resiliency-building activities is intended to offer practitioners an understanding of a range of activities to support the healthy development of students, schools, and families. Important criteria for activities to foster resiliency include making sure that they are developmentally appropriate, culturally relevant, non-stigmatizing, and accessible to all youth.[7]

Suggested activities include:
- ▪ Peer support activities,
- ▪ Structured after-school programs,
- ▪ Service-learning,
- ▪ Cross-Age mentoring,
- ▪ Work/training apprenticeships,
- ▪ Art, music, dance, and other creative activities, and
- ▪ Sports and other recreational/outdoor experiences

Resources

Benard, Bonnie. Resilience Research: A Foundation for Youth Development. Summer 1996. New Designs for Youth Development. pp 4-10.

The *California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS)-* a comprehensive youth health and risk behavior data collection support system for school districts- contains a Resiliency Module and is a concrete example of how resiliency concepts can be applied in the schools. For more information, see: http://www.wested.org/hks/resilience.htm

Search Institute- Search Institute is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to advance a developmental asset framework for young children and adolescents. For more information:

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