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FROM ZERO TO 100 IN LESS THAN 60 SECONDS

BY SHERRI McLAUGHLIN



The acts of violence and the consistent feeling of tension have left me to wonder why our country has become so angry. It perplexes me that students can go from smiling and happy in one breath and screaming shouts of threats in the next breath. Anger seems to go from zero to 100 in less than 60 seconds.

Factors that may contribute to school violence include: social media, bullying, dating violence, gang violence, hate crimes, prejudice, racism, home environment, depression, stress and anxiety, media effects, lack of guidance, lack of counseling, and weapons. Many students do not feel safe in their schools. Schools are taking a variety of measures to improve school safety. These measures include the use of metal detectors, the presence of school liaison officers, policies of rules and regulations regarding student conduct and dress codes, anti-bullying instruction and prevention, profiling potentially violent students, counseling, and mediation.

The Rand Corporation examined the literature regarding these programs that are being implemented into the schools and found that only a handful have been evaluated. With this being the case, how do schools determine what programs to use and how do they know if the program is effective?

At present, schools are charged with evaluating violence prevention programs and their school policies to determine what is necessary in their school buildings to deter violent behavior. It is not always possible to predict behavior that will lead to violence. However, educators, parents, and sometimes students can recognize early warning signs.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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Most children who become violent toward themselves or others feel rejected and psychologically victimized. In most cases, children exhibit aggressive behavior early in life and, if not provided support, will continue to a progressive developmental pattern toward severe aggression or violence. Early warning signs can serve as an aid to identify and refer children who might need help. These warning signs are not intended to be used as a measure against a child, but as a reference to use as a possible indicator that a child may need a support system.

Early warning signs include:

- A history of discipline problems
- Uncontrollable anger
- Social withdrawal
- A history of violence or aggressive behavior
- Intolerance of others
- Racist or prejudiced attitudes
- Excessive feelings of rejection
- Being a victim of violence
- Low school interest
- Poor academic performance
- Verbal, non-verbal, or written expressions of violence
- Patterns of impulsive behaviors
- Bullying behaviors
- Excessive feelings of isolation and loneliness
- Feelings of being persecuted
- Inappropriate access to firearms
- Drug and/or alcohol use and abuse
- Gang affiliation
- Serious threats of violence



Imminent warning signs are usually evident to more than one person and can indicate that danger is highly possible.

No single warning sign can predict that a student will become violent or dangerous. However, imminent warning signs are usually evident to more than one person and can indicate that danger is highly possible. The safety of the

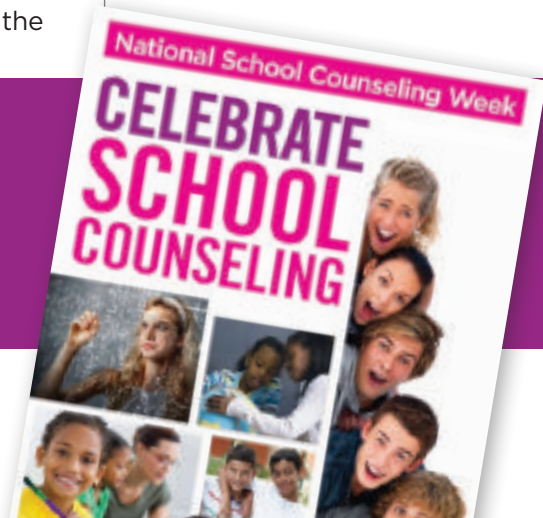
student and others must come first. Action must be taken immediately if a student displays imminent warning signs, such as:

- Severe destruction of property
- Severe rage for minor reasons
- Threats of lethal violence
- A detailed plan to carry out threats of violence
- Serious physical fighting
- Self-injurious behaviors
- Threats of suicide
- Possession of weapons

The goal is to stop school violence. Prevention and educational programs are essential to the goal. School counselors are a key component to work not only with the victims, but also with the perpetrator of violence. Community outreach programs and support are also necessary. We need to change our culture. Our society has become a victim of instant gratification and therefore people feel entitled. If our demands are not met at the time of request, we become agitated to the point of anger and acting out. Emotional preparedness needs to be as much a part of our curriculum as college and career readiness. Meditation, relaxation, coping skills, and emotional intelligence are all essential elements in reducing and helping to eliminate violence across the board. ■■■

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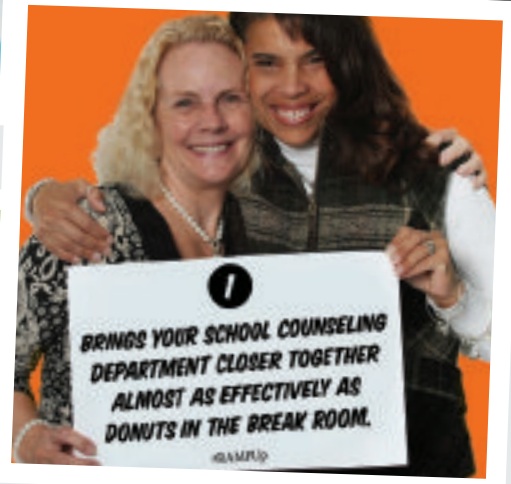
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WHEN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, CHILDREN AND SCHOOLS COLLIDE

BY KENNETH W. ELLIOTT, CHERYL L. LIDIA, AND JUDITH K. ELLIOTT

Millions of children in the United States witness violence in their homes. Domestic violence impacts families, schools, and entire communities on multiple levels. As a group, children are the most vulnerable and suffer long-term consequences from witnessing the violence. “Witnessing” may include direct observations of an incident, hearing violence from another location in the house, seeing the resulting physical trauma, being used as a shield during episodes, or being forced/manipulated to participate in the violence. These children are referred to as “children of domestic violence.” The greater awareness of this issue has resulted in a paradigm shift for schools from “what if” to “when” to expect the collision between domestic violence and schools.

During ASCA’s 2015 National Conference, we conducted a survey at the Childhood Observers of Domestic Violence workshop and discovered that:

- 94% of practicing school counselors had intervened with children of domestic violence
- 77% had assisted a parent or staff member involved with domestic violence
- 26% of school counselors received some training in domestic violence during graduate school

Administrators and counselors need to be better prepared to respond to children of domestic violence. This article addresses specific intervention strategies and the main barriers school counselors face when intervening.



PRINCIPAL/COUNSELOR COLLABORATION

The time to prepare for any school-related crisis is not in the midst of the crisis. Principals and school counselors who have shared their own professional training and personal views (and biases) with one another regarding children of domestic violence will have greater success when confronted with the crisis. A best practice includes a clear, shared understanding of reporting guidelines, intervention strategies, and resources. Schedule these meetings before the start of each school year.

MULTIGENERATIONAL EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

It is clear that the damaging effects of domestic violence can continue through each generation. What may seem familiar or normal for families caught in the cycle of domestic violence may appear as an obvious concern to staff. Be mindful and cautious when using such terms as “victim,” “batterer,” and “denial,” and adjust to the terminology used by the student or family member. It is extremely important

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to remember that both the perpetrator and the parent victim will often minimize and deny the harmful effects on the adult victim. This is especially true when it comes to implied harm to children of domestic violence. Both perpetrators and victims often convince themselves that their children have averted any perceivable harm from exposure to the violence. We encourage you to augment staff development with trainings in the multigenerational effects of domestic violence.

SYSTEMIC RESPONSES FROM THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

In cases of reporting child physical or sexual abuse, school staff, as a group, still underreport. Certainly underreporting in cases of children of domestic violence occurs due to a lack of visible injuries. This systemic response (or lack thereof) is a direct result of staff members' own family and personal histories, which can belie levels of education and training. As school leaders, our best practice would be to remain mindful and true to the ethics of our profession. The National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Association of Secondary School Principals, and American School Counselor Association all have ethical guidelines that identify the well-being of the individual student as a primary responsibility.

SYSTEMIC RESPONSES FROM CHILD WELFARE

As school counselors and administrators, our reporting of suspected emotional abuse in children of domestic violence and our advocacy efforts may be hindered by the very institutions created to protect children. Just as our own educated and trained school staff may experience minimization and denial when dealing with children of domestic violence, child welfare staff can also have personal experiences that influence decision making. Ed-



Both perpetrators and victims often convince themselves that their children have averted any perceivable harm from exposure to the violence.

ucate yourself on specific domestic violence laws in your state and any specific citations regarding children of domestic violence. It also behooves school counselors and administrators to follow the investigating agencies' chain of command when you feel a decision is contraindicated for a child's well-being. Documentation and follow-up on the status of investigations are also good practices.

INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

The below suggested strategies provide a guide to follow. Adapt your own clinical theoretical approach to these steps with caution, as victims may respond differently than most students walking into your office. We would never presume to tell you which theory to select; our hope is that the theory you use follows ethical principles of beneficence and malfeasance. For discussion purposes, the theories used by the coauthor (KE) during similar interventions include a combination of solution-focused and systemic theories. The steps in-

clude: effective principal/counselor teamwork, joining, understanding behavior, attending to the process, and aftercare/follow-up.

Effective Principal/School Counselor Teamwork

It is a best practice to include the principal when any referral to child protective services has been made. Different districts have differing reporting policies; become familiar with local guidelines. Domestic violence is always complicated and children of domestic violence do not all respond the same. Having the support and trust of the principal is invaluable. Knowing that he or she supports you if implied or direct threats come your way as a result of advocating for a traumatized child is fundamental. A systems approach allows for meaningful communications with administration while maintaining flexibility and understanding from other players on the team.

Joining

Joining with the child or even members from the dysfunctional family is critical to help establish change for the child. The process of joining is central to a solution-focused approach and demonstrates to the child (or family) that we understand their worldview and we will work efficiently in finding options. Several techniques can fast-forward information gathering, which can be critical in domestic violence situations.

- **Scaling Questions:** "On a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being the most frightened the violence has made you and 10 meaning that you are not concerned for safety at all, where are you this morning?"
- **Miracle Question:** "Suppose we were to wave a magic wand, and there was a miracle and the problem was solved...How would you know? What would be different?"

■ **Normalizing the Problem:** (to be used in such cases as the child's adaptive behaviors—not to ever normalize the violence in the home!) “I hear you are upset that you haven't been able to finish homework at home when they fight. Well, I am amazed that you decided to keep safe and keep the lights off in your room. Your safety is what is most important.”

■ **Reframing or Compliments:** “You say you think you are going ‘crazy’ because of the violence between your parents, yet I am very impressed that you are still able to get yourself up in the morning and get to school each day.”

Joining is also a systems approach and conveys to the child (or members of the family) that we

are on their side, we will work with them, and we are sensitive to their problems. Joining does not equate to acceptance of the violence either overtly or covertly. Please understand that domestic violence can lead to life-threatening situations and to ignore such behavior can increase the risks. For younger children, fast-forward information gathering might include:

■ **Drawing/Coloring:** children draw their own version of a genogram while they explain the picture. It quickly provides a snapshot of the various members of the household and their roles or adaptations during the violence. This is child focused and not a formal assessment.

■ **Family Rules:** asking about a child's overt and covert family rules can help provide a quick

snapshot of how the family functions within the context of violence. Be mindful of any mention of rules regarding family secrets.

Understanding Behavior

Most children have developed coping mechanisms for surviving the violence, albeit some coping skills may be maladaptive. Solution-focused counselors understand that the child (or adult victim) knows what is best for them. This strengths-based model recognizes the resiliency and creativity the child has developed in adapting to the violence. Recognizing and building upon the child's proven solutions, the counselor praises efforts, yet collaboratively works

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with the student in replacing any maladaptive coping techniques with healthier ones. Systems theory enables the counselor to communicate with administration and teachers about the importance of understanding self-defeating behaviors observed in the school setting. This provides greater insight when decisions need to be made.

Attending to the Process

When an administrator or counselor believes that a child of domestic violence is being harmed emotionally, an appropriate referral should be made. Depending on the case, law enforcement, child protective services, or both may be involved.

Consult with one another and consider any outside consultation before deciding to first contact the parents. With the overwhelming evidence supporting the minimization or denial of the damaging effects on children, we do not want to place the child in greater harm's way.

Aftercare/Follow-up

Even when outside agencies have been involved, the child often returns to the same school, sometimes under the care of the parents, another family member, or foster care. No matter the outcome, a systemic awareness and continued communication with the guardians is important. Providing stability and

follow-up is critical, not only for the child but for systemic change for the entire family.

Although addressing the complexities of intervening with children of domestic violence can appear daunting, we believe that it is an indispensable task accorded all school counselors and administrators. ■■■

Kenneth Elliott, Ph.D., LMFT, CCDVC, is a school counselor and Cheryl Lidia, M.Ed., is a school administrator, both at Choctaw Elementary School in Choctaw, OK. Contact them at kelliott@cnpsschools.org and clidia@cnpsschools.org. Judith Elliott, MSW, LCSW, ACSW, is a clinical social worker. For further information, see ASCA School Counselor, Sept./Oct. 2011 issue.

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TEENS AND DATING VIOLENCE

What to watch for and steps school counselors can take when working with teens who are experiencing dating violence.

BY DIANE M. STUTEY AND STACEY DIAZ

Approximately one in four females experiences some type of violence in an intimate relationship during the course of her lifetime. The peak risk for partner violence occurs during the transitional period from the teenage years to adulthood. This means that many of our students may experience dating violence during high school, in the year or two after graduation, or as early as middle school. Much of the research on teen dating violence has examined the heteronormative male/female partnership, but we as school counselors have a responsibility to recognize and work preventatively with *all* students to address the causes, prevalence, and parameters of this issue.

Although there is no set formula to determine what makes a teenager more susceptible to experience or perpetuate violence in a relationship, school counselors can take some precursors into consideration. Studies have shown that children who have experienced child abuse or witnessed domestic violence in the home are more susceptible to repeating these violent roles in a dating relationship. Researchers have found a link between children with abusive sibling relationships (see article on page 18) and potential violence in a dating relationship. Evidence has also shown that children and adolescents who have more frequent exposure to violence in the media may be more susceptible to violence in a dating relationship.

School counselors can work with students of all ages to talk about what constitutes a healthy relationship versus a relationship where violence might be present. As we work with students on recognizing signs of aggression or bullying, we can extend this a step further



and apply these same guidelines to how one should be treated in a romantic relationship. The *Teen Relationship Equality Wheel* and the *Teen Power and Control Wheel* are excellent tools to share with students. These wheels can help school counselors discuss with students how to differentiate between healthy partnerships and violent relationships.

The healthy side of the wheel presents qualities that would establish equal power and control in a dating relationship, such as shared responsibility, independence and autonomy, and trust and support. Often students mistake jealousy by a partner for love. A student might say something like, "I know my boyfriend really loves me because he won't let me talk to any other guys and he is always checking my phone. I think it's cute that he's so jealous." Although not all jealousy will lead to violence in a relationship, teenagers need to understand that in a healthy partnership, based on equal power and control, you should be able to remain independent and

maintain friendships with others of both the opposite and same sex. Teenagers also have the right to privacy in a romantic relationship and should not feel pressured to share their texts, e-mails, and passcodes with their partner. It is important to work with all students to understand their behaviors that may be contributing to either harm or equality in a dating relationship.

The other side of the wheel examines areas of teen power and control. School counselors can use this to help teenagers identify and discuss areas of physical, emotional, and sexual violence in a dating relationship. Most students are probably aware of, and can identify, examples of sexual or physical abuse (e.g., coercion of sex, hitting, kicking) that would be problematic in a dating relationship. However, teenagers may be unaware of many other incidents of power and control that can exist in a dating relationship and are also considered to be violent, many of an emotional or psychological nature.

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Working with students to examine these less identified forms of violence in a dating relationship could lead to increased awareness, prevention, and opportunities for school counselors to assess and intervene with students. Categories that school counselors can address with students include peer pressure, isolation, and minimizing or denying blame. When it comes to peer pressure within a dating relationship, it is important to help students understand that it is not okay for a dating partner to threaten to expose secrets or information, especially as a form of retaliation. For example, a student tells you, "I can't break up with my boyfriend because he told me that if I do, he will show everyone the texts and e-mails I sent him about a family secret." In this case, the student is experiencing peer pressure but may also be looking at violent

behaviors that would be considered threats and possible intimidation. It is important to work with both students in this scenario. The victim needs psychoeducation and interventions on ways to address violent behaviors, while the perpetrator needs psychoeducation and interventions on ways to stop perpetuating power and control in a dating relationship.

As previously mentioned, jealousy is a topic that often comes up when working with students in dating relationships. When a partner limits the amount of contact their significant other has with others, demands to know where they are, and resorts to following them or reading their e-mails in an attempt to control their interactions with others, this is considered a violent behavior known as isolation or exclusion. If one partner is following the other, this

might also be considered stalking; often this will also happen after a break-up. As school counselors, we can help define these behaviors for students and help them assess if they are experiencing or perpetuating these types of acts that are an attempt to exert power or control over their partner.

Another emotionally abusive behavior in teen dating relationships is minimizing or denying blame. We often see this type of psychological maltreatment in an abusive relationship as the perpetrator attempts to reduce responsibility for actions and creates a situation where the victim blames herself or himself. For example, you may have a student referred to your office because the teacher is concerned about the way he is interacting with his partner. The student might say something like, "My girlfriend is such a drama

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queen; I'm just teasing her and she takes that as insult and blows it completely out of proportion." Of course, comments or disagreements might be taken out of context, but defending one's actions when a partner is feeling mistreated could be a sign of minimizing behaviors in the relationship. The other thing that we might hear is a student placing the blame on the victim when they are the one behaving violently—"He caused me to get upset and that's why I threw my backpack at him." As school counselors, we can utilize the Teen Relationship Equality and Power and Control wheels to provide awareness for students about healthy versus violent behaviors in a relationship.

In addition to building students' awareness about teen dating violence, it is also important for school counselors to work pre-

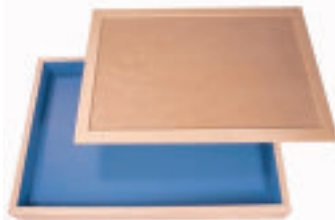
ventatively and provide interventions when necessary. Evidence-based practices are another tool to reduce violence in teen dating relationships. Several programs can help with the prevention, identification, and treatment of teen dating violence. *Expect Respect* provides school counselors with a comprehensive prevention program for use at the K-12 levels. This program supports youth in raising their expectations about equality and respect in their relationships, healing from past traumatic events, and promoting youth leadership in violence prevention. *Shifting Boundaries*, for the middle school level, provides school counselors with a multi-level prevention curriculum that uses an environmental approach to help identify multiple strategies to support youth. Another program, *Choose Respect*, was an initiative by the

Center for Disease Control for use at the middle school level. This curriculum consists of lesson plans aimed at educating students about healthy social skills to promote and encourage healthy relationships. *Safe Dates* is a program for use in the 6th through 12th grades. It consists of nine sessions and focuses on providing students with skills and resources to help themselves or friends in abusive dating relationships. All of these programs can be easily accessed and implemented at schools by school counselors to address the topic of teen dating violence. ■

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K-12 STUDENTS WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS

Students with incarcerated parents face stigma, shame, and isolation. School counselors can help them break the cycle of imprisonment and achieve academic success.

BY JENN CARSON

With nearly one in every 100 American adults in prison, the United States is the nation with the highest rate of incarceration in the world. This mass incarceration does not just impact prisoners themselves; it also impacts their families and communities. According to a recent report in USA Today, one in every 14 Americans will experience parental incarceration before they reach 18. I became one of these children at the age of nine when my father began a life sentence in prison. At that point in my young life, I began to wonder and fear if I, too, would grow up to become an inmate. Because of this uncertainty and embarrassment, I was consumed with keeping my parent's incarceration a secret from the world. And like the majority of children with parents in prison, I felt the resultant stigma, shame, and isolation.

Thirteen years after the arrest of my father, I became an educator. For the next 15 years in my work as a teacher and school counselor in K-12 schools, I would encounter several hundred students with incarcerated parents. Every one of these children had stories about the pre-arrest chaos, the arrest itself, the trial, and the eventual separation once the parent was taken into custody. They also told me about the lies they felt they had to create to explain their parent's absence from the home. Each time I encountered a prisoner's child, he or she told me of common feelings of shame, anger, and loss. I also observed an impact on social, emotional, and academic progress due to this complex parental separation. And yet, among these same children, I also observed an



To see the stigma surrounding parental incarceration, one need look no further than the supermarket check-out aisle.

increased resourcefulness, creativity, and resiliency.

With such a large K-12 student population impacted by incarceration, it is inconceivable that we know so little about children of prisoners. One must ask why this group of secondary-crime victims remains largely unobserved by society. First, contrary to popular belief, these children are not in foster care. In fact, nearly all children of prisoners are residing with a parent, step-parent, grandparent, or another relative. When the father is incarcerated, these children continue to live with their mother. When it is the mother

who is incarcerated, the children typically live with a grandparent or relative caregiver. A second operational factor within the family is that many children of prisoners actually do not know that their parent is in prison. The child has been told that the absent parent is working or attending college out of state. Or, if they do about the incarceration, they have been taught a code of silence regarding their parent's incarceration. The result is a hidden population of children experiencing shame, isolation, and guilt.

To see the stigma surrounding parental incarceration, one need look no further than the supermarket check-out aisle. When the parent of a celebrity or other public figure is incarcerated, it frequently becomes tabloid fodder. In the last decade, one headline about a country singer's father read, "Dad on the Run," concerning a parole violation. Another article about a television actress from a teen drama featured the description, "Prison Past: Born

in Jail.” And a third magazine cover displayed a reality star, declaring, “Visiting Mom in Jail: Her 5-Year Old Thinks She’s at Work,” accompanied by a photograph of the young daughter. Each of these articles, by default, assigned the crimes of the parent to a child with no criminal record. This unfairly reinforces the time-worn clichés: “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree,” “A chip off the old block,” and “Like father, like son.” This societal message of shame reinforces the common practice of families concealing familial incarceration.

Parental incarceration is often hidden even within the family itself. Children of prisoners are frequently deceived about one or more aspects of their parent’s incarceration. These kids are habitually misled about the location of their parent, the expected length of their parent’s absence, the reason for their parent’s departure from the family, or even the very identity of their parent. Other children are told that their parent was imprisoned for running a red light or doing “nothing.” This and other forms of deception about parental incarceration can cause confusion, fear, anxiety, mistrust, and complex grief for the child. This deliberately crafted deception, however well-intentioned, also contributes to a lack of public awareness. In essence, shame hides the plight of millions of K-12 students.

What is especially traumatic for the children of incarcerated parents, however, is the arrest itself. I can personally attest to this based on my work with children of prisoners. The first parent arrest that I dealt with as a school counselor was of a special-needs kindergarten student I will call Chris. Chris was sent to my

office after telling his classmates about a ninja battle in his living room. In my office, he drew a picture depicting the ninja incident. As I saw the increased detail, I realized that Chris was documenting a true account of police entering his home dressed in S.W.A.T. gear to arrest his father. This experience is not at all unusual for children of prisoners. The Center for Incarcerated Parents notes that one in five children of prisoners will witness the arrest of their parent. In these situations of a parental arrest, responsive professional school counseling can be an effective tool to support students’ emotional needs that may disrupt their social, academic, and behavioral progress at school.

The sudden and involuntary loss of a parent because of incarceration creates an ambiguous loss for children. The Department of Health and Human Services notes that the impact of parental incarceration varies depending on (a) the age of the child when separated from the parent, (b) length of separation, (c) health of the family, (d) disruption due to the incarceration itself, (e) child’s familiarity with their new caregiver, (f) strength of the parent-child relationship, (g) parent’s crime and length of sentence, (h) family and community support and the stigma that may exist within the family and community surrounding the parent’s crime, and (i) frequency of contact with the parent who is serving a sentence. Children of prisoners, as a result, generally suffer from poor academic performance, depression, and poor self-esteem. Children separated from their imprisoned parent also experience disrupted attachment in inter-relationships as well as social behaviors.

Because of laws requiring compulsory education, almost all children of prisoners attend school. This makes our preschool to 12th grade schools an excellent place to provide interventions to children of prisoners. Several studies have shown that children of prisoners are more likely to drop out of high school and end up in correctional settings themselves. These children are in desperate need of assistance. Tragically, however, few of these students or their caregivers will voluntarily disclose their needs, nor will they seek needed services because of the internal shame and societal stigma that children of prisoners often unfairly receive.

As school counselors, we need to be proactive with this population. We can partner with outreach organizations like the Girl Scout’s “Beyond Bars” and utilize research-based materials like “Sesame Street’s Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration.” We should also support this high-needs student population via effective and accountable delivery of referral procedures, responsive services, and guidance curriculum and stakeholder collaboration. As professional school counselors, we can help students with incarcerated parents break the cycle of incarceration, achieve academic success, and become a chip off their own block. ■

Jenn Carson is an advocate for children of prisoners. She has shared her own journey from the daughter of a violent offender to an educator on the Oxygen Network, the Hallmark Channel, and in Marie Claire and People magazines. Contact her at [linkedin.com/in/jennlynnecarson](https://www.linkedin.com/in/jennlynnecarson) or jenncarson@yahoo.com.

BREAKING THE SILENCE AROUND SIBLING ABUSE

This common issue often goes undetected and causes grave harm to its victims. What steps can school counselors take?

BY DIANE M. STUTEY

School counselors are trained to assess and intervene if students are being sexually, physically, or emotionally abused or neglected. However, when school counselors receive training on child abuse they are often taught not to become investigators in determining what does or does not constitute abuse; rather, they are to report any suspicion of said abuse to the proper authorities, who will distinguish if abuse is occurring. Occasionally, discussion may arise about whether an action may be construed as abuse or discipline. Although this is often a difficult dilemma, whether the action began as discipline or not, if it results in physical, emotional, or sexual harm or neglect to the child, it must be reported.

We can draw a similar parallel when presented with the concept of sibling abuse versus sibling rivalry. If it is not the school counselor's responsibility to delineate between discipline and abuse when a child is being harmed by an adult, the same argument could be made for school counselors who suspect sibling abuse. School counselors should not be responsible for distinguishing between sibling abuse and sibling rivalry. Rather, if you suspect any abuse of a child, it should be reported.

The problem is that currently we have no federal laws and few state laws to protect children and adolescents from abuse by a sibling. This is concerning because sibling abuse occurs at an alarming rate, yet often goes undetected and unresolved. Many perceive violence between siblings to be a normal rite of passage and will often refer to this as normal sibling rivalry. However, researchers have discov-



ered that children who experience sibling abuse suffer grave consequences over time. With all forms of family violence, a cultural silence often exists. So even students who might recognize that they are being abused by a sibling may not seek help for fear of breaking family bonds.

School counselors can implement several steps to break the cultural silence around sibling abuse in their work and responsibility to keep children safe. The first step is to educate themselves about the topic of sibling abuse. Several authors and researchers have studied the topic of sibling abuse and provide good resources for school counselors, including John Caffaro, Jonathan Caspi, and Vernon Wiehe. These authors state that more than half of children and adolescents have experienced some type of sibling aggression in their lifetime. This is a topic we should be addressing with our students because

many in our schools will have either experienced, witnessed, or perpetuated aggression between siblings.

In my research and presentations on this topic, many people I have spoken with have never heard of the term sibling abuse before. The lack of awareness about sibling abuse will allow this phenomenon to continue without intervention. Sibling abuse can occur across the same domains of child abuse, including sexual, physical, and verbal. Abuse among siblings might also include property or pet abuse and relational aggression. Similar to the definition of bullying behavior, sibling abuse is viewed as a unilateral relationship where one child uses their power to control and harm the other. Researchers have found that severe abuse between siblings includes the use of a weapon and occurs with 3 to 6% of the population.

Once school counselors have learned more about this topic, it is important to share this informa-

tion with students, parents, and members of their school faculty. My colleague and I recently proposed a five-step model that school counselors can use to assess for and intervene with sibling abuse. This model consists of school counselors working with the student(s) and parents or guardians to: assess, conceptualize, plan, intervene, and evaluate for sibling aggression. This article and detailed information about each step can be found in Volume 18 of the *Professional School Counseling* journal.

The first step is for school counselors to assess for sibling abuse in

a similar manner to how we might assess for child abuse. For example, a student comes to your office with a black eye. You ask what happened and they reply, "Last night I was home alone with my brother and he hit me." If the child had said it was a parent that gave them the black eye, our assessment would likely end with a few more clarifying questions before we report this to child protective services (CPS) as abuse. However, with sibling abuse the assessment phase might be more in-depth. We may want to gather information about the age of the siblings, how often this sort

of thing happens, how the victim responds to the aggression, what the parents do to intervene, and if the child feels safe at home alone with the sibling.

Ultimately we are trying to conceptualize if what is happening is normal sibling rivalry or if this is sibling violence or abuse. Anytime a line is crossed into physical or sexual violence, this is problematic and not what would be considered normal sibling rivalry. Furthermore, similar to what we know about child abuse and bullying, sibling

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abuse can also be of a psychological or relationally aggressive nature. The question then becomes: Is this reciprocal violence between siblings or does one sibling clearly have more strength and power and is perpetuating abuse toward a targeted sibling? To fully conceptualize what is happening in the home, the school counselor must work with the parents throughout this process (as long as there is not suspicion of parental abuse).

With child abuse, school counselors are often trained to call CPS anonymously without notifying parents that a report has been made. However, with sibling abuse, it is important to determine if parents are able and willing to act on behalf of all of their children to

provide the supervision and guidance necessary to stop abuse and violence among siblings. Parents may be unaware that the behaviors between their children are violent or abusive. Therefore, it is important to work with them and create a plan to ensure the safety and supervision of the student(s). This student may be the sibling victim, perpetrator, or you may be working with both in some cases.

If it is established that parents are willing to create a plan, school counselors can assist them in selecting appropriate interventions. Perhaps the student mentioned above also shared with you, "Every time my mom leaves to go the grocery store, my brother pushes me outside and locks the door.

Sometimes he does this in the winter when it's freezing and I have no coat, and once I was even barefoot." When you ask the student if he has shared this with his parents, he tells you he has not for fear that "telling will only make it worse." Once the parents have this information, they can intervene to ensure safety. If they are unable to take one or both of the children with them while running errands, they may need to hire a certified babysitter or other professional to be at home and supervise the children. Although this is a simple intervention that may fix that particular situation, in many cases, the sibling offender may need ongoing interventions that could involve therapy outside of the school setting.

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Providing ongoing evaluation is important, in particular for the safety of the sibling victim. School counselors can continue to check in with the student to determine if he or she feels safe in the home. If the parents have put proper safeguards in place, the student might report, "My brother is still a pain and he bugs me a lot but he has stopped hitting me and my parents make sure we aren't home alone together anymore." However, if the student was to report, "The plan worked for a couple of weeks, but now my parents don't seem to care. They have started leaving me home alone again with him and told me if he starts hitting me to just hit him back. They also said to stop telling people outside of the

family about our problems because we could all get in big trouble. But I'm scared of my brother; last week he pulled a knife on me." In this case, it is clear that there is imminent danger and a weapon is also now involved. Although no federal and few state laws protect children from sibling abuse, parents can be reported to CPS for parental neglect if they fail to provide proper supervision for their children.

A final consideration for school counselors, and all of us in the mental health field working with children and adolescents, is advocacy for policies and laws to protect children from sibling abuse. In one research study I conducted, participants expressed their frustration when trying to report sibling

abuse. When they reported to CPS they were told to report to the local authorities. However, when they reported to local authorities, they were instructed to contact the parents. It is clear that there is a need to work collaboratively and establish proper guidelines and protocol for school counselors to follow to protect children from sibling abuse. A further step may be to advocate for state and federal laws that would support these policies for reporting sibling abuse. ■

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STUDENT THREAT ASSESSMENT

BY CHERI LOVRE

Perhaps no single area of school safety is more critical than understanding how to put solid student threat assessment in place. And as a school counselor, that is probably the aspect of your work that brings chills to your spine most quickly. Rather than feeling on the spot because your school depends on you to make critical decisions about whether a student may pose a threat, you need to feel well supported in this area. Although many schools are doing a credible job of the first steps of student threat assessment when a student is referred, most still have room for improvement. Let's look at what a cutting-edge student threat assessment system might entail and your role within it.

A BRIEF HISTORY

By the end of the 1990s, the United States had become increasingly focused on school shootings. The FBI began putting out information based on its investigations, and over time, it became clear that school shooters couldn't be profiled. But even lacking hard scientific data, it was still imperative to come up with a system. Columbine provided the first real watershed moment for our county in this arena.

Pressure mounted for schools to be able to make predictions and prevent shootings. After seeing that profiling didn't work, many schools tried zero-tolerance policies, but that wasn't a solution, either. They were both one-dimensional approaches toward solving a multi-faceted problem. The pressure increased again, of course, with the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December 2012.

Although to outsiders these incidents seem random and unpredictable, this isn't entirely so, and we can do many things to prevent



them. Parents and communities look to the schools to provide the answers and create a water-tight safe school. Schools often turn to the school counselors and school psychologists to make that call—to determine whether a student will actually “go off.”

As a school counselor, you should never be solely responsible for assessing student threat. You should be a key player in a much larger group and much larger process for determining level of threat. The good news is that, although many schools lean heavily on school counselors or school psychologists to determine level of threat, there are examples of teams that allow you to give input without shouldering the burden of making a determination alone. In many instances, a small, school-based group (a Level I team) performing an initial threat assessment is sufficient. However, as a school counselor, you need to advocate for creation of a second team: a community-based, multi-agency, multi-disciplinary team to address those students rating higher on the scale or continuum of aggression.

KEY CONCEPTS

The first goal of all student threat assessment must be to protect the students and staff, which means differentiating whether a student is making a threat or posing a threat. Top-notch student threat assessment actually turns the “get that dangerous kid out of this school” concept on its head.

Students don't just snap. The process of a school shooting takes many steps. We know Columbine, Sandy Hook, Virginia Tech and most other school shootings were planned over months or even years. Perpetrators have to acquire the tools and usually take time to plan their entry and actions. School shooters don't just snap.

If we're going to really assess the threat, it is a much bigger picture than just a focus on the student. We need information about the student's family life, social variables in the student's life, and the student's school experience. How has a particular student historically managed frustration, anger, and threat? Aggression occurs on a continuum. Where has the student been on that continuum over time?

What kinds of elements of the student's life inhibit moving forward with a plan, and what might accelerate it? And because all of those elements contribute to the level of threat, we need to include community resources if we are to lower the threat, including services to the family and social supports.

A core component is learning and applying the difference in reactive aggression and targeted violence. Here is a great visual of the difference between the two. One is picturing the cat that is backed into a corner by the big mean dog, eyes wide, fur on end, claws out ready to strike (reactive aggression). The other is the sleek, slinking cat with its eye on the mouse in the field. Now the cat is focused, calculating, willing to quietly wait for the right

moment to pounce. With targeted aggression, the cat "owns" the situation. Although both kinds of aggression can lead to violence, targeted aggression is far more often implicated in school shootings. That doesn't mean there are necessarily individual people who are the target (although there can be); rather, the target is a particular school at a particular time.

A psychological assessment of a student gives information that is static in time and reveals information about only one aspect of the situation, the student's mindset. What we've learned from the work of those in the student threat assessment field is that good assessment entails evaluating and monitoring the student's whole life circumstances, not just the stu-

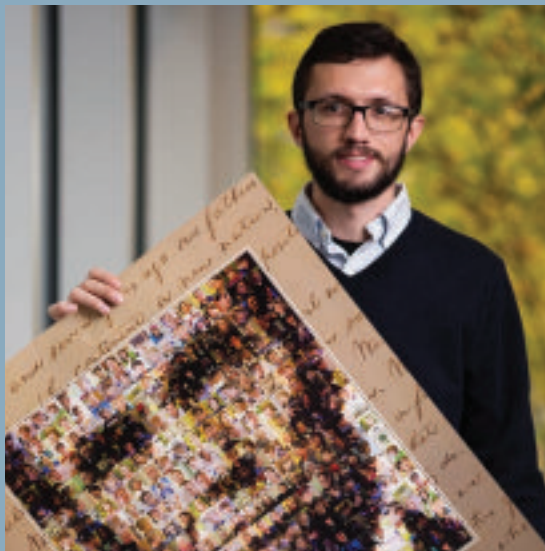
dent's mindset. Student evaluation is critical, but it isn't the answer.

MOVING TO LEVEL II

A Level II student threat assessment team (STAT) is a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary team that kicks in any time the Level I team believes there is credible threat that exceeds the school's ability to manage with certainty.

If a student makes it to Level II assessment, an evaluation is only the beginning. Changes in that student's life can make all the difference, so ongoing monitoring is crucial. This is what makes the weekly STAT meeting so important. A student may shelve the idea of a school attack if his life levels

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out, but it might be the first place he goes when his girlfriend later breaks up with him or mom brings a “new dad” into the home situation. This isn’t a black-and-white process or issue, and it has to be viewed in the greater context of the student’s entire life situation.

As noted earlier, a key component is figuring out whether a student is making a threat or actually poses a threat. If a student actually poses a threat, the STAT needs to continually monitor the student’s behaviors and indicators and be fluid in changing interventions as the student’s life circumstance changes. For a team to be good at this, it takes continual refining of skills and insights.

Although we tend to speak in terms of understanding the psychology of where the student is, the Level II team is looking at the broadest sense of the situation from the most points of reference you can gather. Rather than relying on just the psychological and one or two people’s perceptions, the team needs to know that the best indicators are the student’s behaviors. Is the student actively planning? Does the student have a specific target? Is the student quietly acquiring the tools and means?

The goal is to keep the student in school if doing so can safely be managed. In school, the team has influence over the student’s situation and can monitor the student. Great STATs help school districts put remarkable interventions in place and bring to the family all the support that the community can muster. Because one key aspect is taking stress off of the entire family, community agencies play a central role. Schools can’t mobilize the diversity of resources that a community-based team can.

Having a multi-agency team

One thing you can do to prevent school shootings is to look at what your district has in place, from K-12, for suicide prevention.

giving input on the decisions the school makes about managing the placement and interventions done for the student does not take away the school’s liability, but it certainly puts the school in the best possible light as having made decisions from the most enlightened place possible, using best practices and having involved the best and most resources along the way.

A key factor in all of this is knowing whether the student is suicidal. We have to recognize that, although many youth will quietly commit suicide in response to overwhelming school pressures and bullying, there are a few who will recognize they have nothing to lose by taking others out with them. Most have no plan of escape but plan to die in the mayhem. One thing you can do to prevent school shootings is to look at what your district has in place, from K-12, for suicide prevention.

The school counselor’s role is very much to be involved, as you commonly are, but also to support your school in moving toward a model that includes people from a range of agencies outside the school, including law enforcement, children’s mental health, a drug and alcohol specialist, local youth probation officers, and county boards of education.

In the end, the goal of all of this is a sense of ownership of the pro-

cess from the community rather than a community view that the school should make this happen. As a school counselor, consider taking these three steps:

1 Take the concept of a multi-agency, community-based team for Level II student threat assessment to your current team to look at how you might improve your current operational structure and organization.

2 Educate yourself on the differences in reactive and targeted aggression, and then begin to train staff in a few of the key concepts.

3 Push for weekly meetings of the Level II team so you get really good at this, and continue with ongoing monitoring of students rather than seeing threat assessment resting on information from one point in time or one point of view.

Finally, a note for those of you in rural areas. Large regions can organize one team serving the entire county or even several counties. You need to have the same people meeting weekly from law enforcement and other agencies. The team members need to get to know one another, hone their skills together and have a collective historical memory about each of the cases they review. ■

Cheri Lovre has been working in the field of prevention and crisis response for 35 years and has a long history with ASCA and school counselors. Her website, www.cmionline.org, offers a library of professional development units for online learning. This article was originally published in ASCA School Counselor, Vol. 51, No. 3.