

SCHOOL-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION

A practical handbook



**World Health
Organization**

School-based violence prevention: a practical handbook

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Preface

Each year up to 1 billion children experience some form of physical, sexual or psychological violence or neglect. Being a victim of violence in childhood has lifelong impacts on education, health, and well-being. Exposure to violence can lead to educational underachievement due to cognitive, emotional, and social problems. Because children who are exposed to violence are more likely to smoke, misuse alcohol and drugs, and engage in high-risk sexual behaviour, they are also more likely to endure a range of illnesses later in life. These include depression, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer and HIV.

Given this reality, preventing violence against children is squarely on the international development agenda. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 5.1 calls for the elimination of all forms of violence against girls, and SDG target 16.2 calls for ending all forms of violence against children. Access to education is equally prominent within the SDGs, with SDG target 4.a to build and upgrade education facilities that provide safe, non-violent learning environments for all.

Many efforts are underway that would help to achieve these goals. These activities take place in various settings. Schools have been identified as one important setting for conducting violence prevention efforts. Therefore, in early 2019, with support from several of its affiliated organizations, the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children launched the “Safe to Learn” initiative focused specifically on ending violence against children in schools. The activities promoted as part of this initiative complement current work countries are doing to implement the evidence-based technical package *INSPIRE: seven strategies for ending violence against children*. Enhancing access to education and providing life skills training through schools form one of the seven strategies.

In schools, the provision of education and organized activities are themselves powerful protection against violence. In addition, it is in these settings that opportunities arise to shape attitudes and norms about the acceptability of violence, alcohol and drug use, the carrying of weapons onto school grounds and other risks. In turn, preventing violence in the broader society can directly benefit the core aim of schools to educate children, foster high-quality lifelong learning, and empower learners to be responsible global citizens.

This new resource: *School-based violence prevention: a practical handbook*, is about schools, education and violence prevention. It provides guidance for school officials and education authorities on how schools can embed violence prevention within their routine activities and across the points of interaction schools provide with children, parents and other community members. If implemented, the handbook will contribute much to helping achieve the SDGs and other global health and development goals.

Reflecting the importance of school-based violence prevention, this handbook was produced by WHO, in collaboration with UNESCO and UNICEF. We invite you to join us in acting to increase the number and effectiveness of school-based violence prevention activities to ensure the safety, well-being and happiness of children and their parents and caregivers everywhere.

Etienne Krug

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Introduction

Interpersonal violence (Box 1) affects the lives of millions of children across the world. Up to 50% of all children aged 2 to 17 years are thought to have been affected by a form of violence (physical, sexual or emotional abuse) in the past year – the equivalent of 1 billion children (Hillis et al, 2016). Experiences of violence, particularly in childhood, can damage children's physical and mental health and affect their whole lives (Figure 1). Violence can also affect educational outcomes and children's potential to lead successful and prosperous lives. Schools are in a unique position to address and prevent violence against children. Not only are schools accountable in ensuring that their premises are safe and protective but they can also take an active role in engaging the community on issues related to violence. This can include violence that takes place in schools, such as physical violence, sexual violence, bullying, and corporal punishment. It can also include types of violence that emerge in the home and community, such as child maltreatment, dating and intimate-partner violence and elder abuse.

What role can schools play in preventing violence?

- Simply providing education and organized activities for children can help to prevent violence: Schools and education systems can help by encouraging parents and children to enrol and attend. Having quality education can increase the likelihood of children finding paid work in adulthood, and taking part in organized activities can make it less likely that children will become involved in aggressive behaviour or violence.
- Schools can also be ideal places for activities aimed at preventing violence. They can involve many young people at one time, influencing them early in life. Skilled teachers can deliver violence prevention programmes and act as significant role models outside of family or community life. Schools can reach parents, improving parenting practices that may be harmful to children's health and education.
- Schools make ideal environments to challenge some of the harmful social and cultural norms (standards or patterns that are typical or expected) that tolerate violence towards others (for example, gender-based violence).

What roles do schools play in protecting children?

Schools have an important role in protecting children. The adults who oversee and work in educational settings have a duty to provide environments that support and promote children's dignity, development and protection. Teachers and other staff have an obligation to protect the children in their charge.

This duty is described in Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989), which has been ratified by most countries. It states:

State Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

How can addressing violence benefit education?

Preventing and responding to violence in schools can improve educational outcomes in children and help achieve their educational targets. Many of the life skills taught in violence prevention, such as communication, managing emotions, resolving conflicts and solving problems, are the same skills that can help children succeed in school and that can protect against other issues that affect learning, such as alcohol and drug use.

*Addressing
violence
can improve
educational
outcomes*

Reducing violence and its negative consequences, for example absenteeism, lack of concentration, or school dropout, can have positive consequences on learning. Experiencing violence can also be a reason for demonstrating challenging behaviour which hinders their learning. These challenges prevent teachers from carrying out their roles effectively.

How to deal with three main concerns: lack of time, know-how and resources?

Problem: Three of the barriers that schools often face when considering how to prevent violence are a lack of time, know-how and a lack of resources.

Solution: Activities aimed at preventing violence do not need to be time-consuming or costly; many of the recommendations made in this handbook can be put in place with a reasonable effort, or may already be in place as part of other initiatives. Having a school management that recognizes the value of preventing violence and that leads, motivates and supports staff to achieve a shared vision is more important than having a lot of time or resources.

Suggested action: You can adapt existing systems, resources and skills to include evidence-based violence prevention strategies.

Why is taking a whole-school approach important?

Comprehensive activities that help to prevent violence and which involve all stakeholders who are important in a young person's life have been proven to be more effective in preventing violence than activities that just focus on one particular target group. This approach works towards making sure that the whole school shares the same vision towards reducing violence, and that the school head, teachers, administrative staff, students, parents and the community work together towards this shared goal.

The handbook is aimed at practitioners working at school level, such as teachers, and school personnel by providing practical guidance on what can be done to prevent and respond to violence inside and outside of school. It can be used as resource material among education authorities, civil society organizations and other practitioners working in child welfare.

Box 1: Forms of interpersonal violence covered by this handbook

Interpersonal violence is violence that happens between one person and another. There are many forms, including the following:

Child maltreatment (including violent punishment) involves physical, sexual and psychological/emotional violence; and neglect of infants, children and adolescents by parents, caregivers and other authority figures, most often in the home but also in settings such as schools and orphanages.

Bullying (including online bullying) is unwanted aggressive behaviour by another child or group of children who are neither siblings nor in a romantic relationship with the victim. It involves repeated physical, psychological or social harm, and often takes place in schools and other settings where children gather, and online.

Youth violence is concentrated among those aged 10–29 years, occurs most often in community settings between acquaintances and strangers, includes physical assault with weapons (such as guns and knives) or without weapons, and may involve gang violence.

Intimate partner violence (or domestic violence) involves violence by an intimate partner or ex-partner. Although males can also be victims, intimate partner violence disproportionately affects females. It commonly occurs against girls within child and early/forced marriages. Among romantically involved but unmarried adolescents it is sometimes called “dating violence”.

Sexual violence includes non-consensual completed or attempted sexual contact; non-consensual acts of a sexual nature not involving contact (such as voyeurism or sexual harassment); acts of sexual trafficking committed against someone who is unable to consent or refuse; and online exploitation.

Emotional or psychological violence and witnessing violence includes restricting a child’s movements, denigration, ridicule, threats and intimidation, discrimination, rejection and other non-physical forms of hostile treatment. Witnessing violence can involve forcing a child to observe an act of violence, or the incidental witnessing of violence between two or more other persons.

Corporal punishment: is any punishment in which physical force is used and

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