Chapter 22
Prevention of School Violence: Directions, Summary, and Conclusions

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This volume has addressed critically important issues in understanding and providing a prevention model for school-related violence. We have learned much, and more remains to be learned to address this most important community issue. A review of the chapters follows with some concluding thoughts, personal comments, and lessons that we have hopefully learned.

Theory, Assessment, and Forms of School Violence

The first section of this volume focuses on the theory, assessment, and various forms of school violence, and we start with an interesting discussion by Drs. Miller and Kraus as they provide a clear and cogent definition of school violence that clearly shows the complexity and extent of the problem. It includes physical aggression as well as psychological trauma, sexual abuse, and numerous other “boundary” violations. The scope presented is vast and the risk factors discussed—childhood substance use and delinquency, and poor peer relations among early adolescents (weak ties with “good” peers and strong ties with “bad” peers), and gang membership—make it apparent that the prevention of and responses to school violence will require a complex set of communication and intervention strategies.

Drs. Miller and Kraus further present clear information on prevention goals, levels of prevention, and program interventions that seem to hold promise for helping to eliminate school violence as a public health issue. They outline some of the more effective models that use social skills training, parent involvement and training, school bonding between teachers and students, mentoring as a key strategy, and counseling support for both victims and perpetrators of school violence (Miller, 1996). A compelling case is made that the solution to school violence lies in a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach with extensive involvement and collaboration among school staff, health educators, police, mental health experts, and other concerned social agencies. The issues around school violence are complicated and yet Miller and Kraus lay the groundwork for a hopeful response based on the research that currently exists and that which is needed.
Chapter 3 by Dr. William French is also very comprehensive as he examines a framework for understanding the neurobiology of violence and victimization. French outlines numerous biological variables that interact with the environment, which, in turn, impact violence and aggressive responses in children and youth. The key according to his review and research is not to focus on nature versus nurture, but rather, to focus on how the two interact to impact various aggressive and violent responses in our youth.

This chapter further explores the impact of trauma, abuse, and neglect on the development of our children in relation to violence and victimization. Various domains of trauma are outlined and discussed as they relate to aggressive responses. The concepts of “hot” and “cold” aggression are presented and used to further our understanding of the various types of youth violence and aggression. French discusses a strong connection between victimization and violence, the psychopathic implications of violence which may be summarized as a lack of conscience and a lack of moral sense, and how the concepts of “hot” and “cold” aggression help us to further understand the connections. And finally, he offers an integrated model of neurobiology in terms of how the brain functions to help us understand victimization and violence at yet an even deeper level.

Chapter 4 provides a thorough overview of the potential effectiveness of well-designed and implemented “Threat Assessments” in our schools to help prevent school violence from occurring. Dr. Callahan views the Threat Assessment as part of a comprehensive plan where school safety strategies are used in conjunction with positive, proactive, learning strategies such as teaching social skills, developing connectedness, classroom and school management, resiliency development, clear crisis procedures, and training all in recognizing at-risk factors. While threat assessment is difficult because no single profile has emerged from the literature, it can be effective if used with well-defined interventions. Dr. Callahan advocates for a comprehensive approach to addressing school violence.

She advocates in this chapter for a school violence prevention approach that focuses on building climates and cultures that emphasize respect, safety, and emotional support. The threat assessment is one tool to help in this ongoing process. The protocol calls for assessing actions, communications, and circumstances around an individual of concern. Professor Callahan provides thorough threat assessment information via a referral form, worksheet, threat assessment concepts, risk for harm categories, an interview outline, and questions for mental health professionals to use during an interview. A summary table of early warning signs of potential at-risk students is provided as a practical tool for all school administrators and teachers to identify help that a student may need. She provides some very useful tools for the school practitioner.

In Chap. 5, Amy Nigoff presents a thorough discussion on a social information processing model that may contribute to violent responses by students in certain social situations. The model is based on the theory that how children process and interpret social situations will lead to either violent or nonviolent responses. More specifically, if children misinterpret certain cues or parts of the situation then violence is likely to occur. Nigoff suggests that if children can learn about the