

Second Step E-Newsletter March 2010

[Book Review: Just Kidding](#)

Activities for Youth Violence Prevention Week

Whether your elementary or middle school has an overt problem with violence or not, the seeds of violence lie in every community, in small, sometimes easy-to-dismiss behaviors such as teasing or bullying, inability to solve problems, or acting out. This year's [National Youth Violence Prevention Week](#) is March 22–26. The goal of this campaign is to raise awareness and educate students, teachers, educators, parents, and the public on effective ways to prevent or reduce youth violence. Many organizations have teamed up to put the week's campaign strategies together, including founding partners The National Association of Students Against Violence Everywhere and The Guidance Group.

A world free from violence may be an unattainable ideal, but if simply striving for that ideal results in 100 children, 50, children, even one child feeling safer, isn't that a worthy goal? Working toward that ideal may mean taking steps to stop bullying. It may mean changing the school climate by educating every teacher, administrator, and employee about violence so that they know what to look for and how to step in when necessary. Or it could mean taking one week out of the year to ask every member of the school community to pay full attention to the problem of violence.

Consider observing Violence Prevention Week by focusing on each of the daily themes suggested by the campaign partners.

Day One: Promoting Respect and Tolerance

Prejudice, bullying, and disrespect. These are some of the age-old social issues still plaguing children today. On [day one](#) of Violence Prevention Week, teachers can set the tone for the week by guiding a discussion about the meaning of respect. In the STEPS TO RESPECT program, the message is clear: respect is the basis for all relationships. "Respect means treating people the way you want to be treated. Everyone should be treated with respect." Here are some discussion starters:

- Have you ever gotten to know someone who seemed very different from you at first? What happened when you got to know each other?
- What are some ways we can show respect to one another here at school?
- What are some examples from history of people showing respect and lack of respect?

Day Two: Manage Your Anger

The second focus of this week is finding ways to prevent anger from leading to violence. In the SECOND STEP program, students learn that emotions such as

anger can sometimes be very strong. They learn to be aware of how anger feels in the body and brain, to identify events triggering anger, and to recognize the need to calm down. They also learn that it is natural to feel angry, but that it is not okay to be mean or hurt others when angry. When discussing anger with students, it's important to reinforce the difference between feeling angry and acting with aggression or violence toward others. It's not enough to give children—or adults, for that matter—tools to manage anger. They must understand this emotion and the effect it can have on themselves and others.

On [day two](#) of this week, teachers of younger students can have them draw two self-portraits. In one, the child should depict her- or himself as angry. In the second, she or he should be happy and calm. Ask students to tell a story about what happened between the first and second picture. Ask how they calmed down. Older students can draw self-portraits or write a brief story about a time they managed to calm down from an angry situation.

Day Three: Resolve Conflicts Peacefully

Teaching children to manage conflict in a productive way is an important violence prevention tactic. The SECOND STEP program teaches children how to use empathy, anger management, and problem solving to resolve conflicts. One of the [day-three strategies](#), sponsored by the Association for Conflict Resolution, reinforces SECOND STEP conflict-resolution skills by encouraging children to identify and practice active listening skills. Teachers of all grade levels can use this strategy: "Guide students through a brainstorming session where they come up with various ways to be a good listener. Have students participate in role-plays that demonstrate active listening." Ask children if they can think of one or two people in their lives who are great listeners. How can they tell? How do they feel when talking to these people? How can they be more like them?

Day Four: Supporting Safety

School safety is a hot topic, especially in light of recent news stories about bullying and its tragic aftermath. On [day four](#), focus on the importance of a positive, safe school climate and a whole-school commitment to bullying prevention. Programs such as the STEPS TO RESPECT curriculum can help children feel safe and supported by the adults around them so they can build stronger bonds to school and focus on academic achievement.

Schoolwide policies and training help staff feel supported as well, and allow the entire school community to work together to make school a safe place for everyone. Consider having an all-school meeting to make a commitment to bullying prevention. Students from each classroom can generate a list of expectations they have to feel safe in school. ("I can wear what I want and not worry about being teased," "I can walk into any part of the school without

fear," "I know my teachers and other adults in the school will help me if I report bullying," etc.)

Before or after the all-school meeting, have a class discussion about the importance of bystander power. Brainstorm ways students can stand up for each other if they witness a bullying incident on the bus or playground, in the classroom or lunchroom, and even off school grounds. Remind them of the importance of reporting bullying to adults in the school and at home.

Day Five: Unite in Action

The strategy on the [final day of Violence Prevention Week](#) highlights the importance of service in one's community. "By creating a positive sense of community and developing concern for others, students will learn that they can break the chain of violence." There are countless volunteer service organizations that link would-be volunteers to appropriate service opportunities in their area and range of interest. Here are just two: [Youth Noise](#) and [Servenet.org](#).

Decide as a class on a service project, and spend this day discovering what kind of impact a small group of people can make. For example, the class can clean up a vacant lot near the school and start a simple garden. Or students can spend the day in a retirement home talking and playing games with residents. Following this service project, spend a little time each day discussing what happened, how students felt, whether they would want to volunteer again, and what else they could do to make a positive difference in other people's lives.

Days Six to...?

Yes, Violence Prevention Week is officially over. Should your efforts stop on day six? It's up to you.