16 Best Practices in School Violence Prevention

Jim Larson
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater
Sarah Mark
Madison (WI) Metropolitan School District

OVERVIEW

"Am I doing everything that I can to ensure the safety of the children and adults in my school?" Who among us has not asked such a question after reading the latest heart-wrenching headline? There is arguably no greater responsibility that educators share than the physical and psychological well-being of the students under their care. In its many forms, school violence is dimensional in severity and manifests from mean-spirited teasing to targeted multiple homicide.

School violence prevention is the science and practice of managing what is knowable and mitigating the effects of what is not. The last half-century of prevention science has provided the blueprints for educators to create safer and more effective schools for all children. School psychologists now have access to a wealth of research-supported programs and procedures in areas such as social–emotional learning; bullying prevention; anger management; and crisis prevention, mitigation, and response. As data-based practitioners and child advocates, school psychologists can play critical roles in helping to bring that science forward and in doing so have a positive impact on the safety and well-being of the children and families they serve.

The purpose of this chapter is to assist school psychologists in that worthy effort. To that end, the information in this chapter will provide a brief overview of the status of violence in the schools, suggested areas of additional competencies to increase professional effectiveness, the structure and procedures for assessing and understanding the violence prevention needs of any particular school, and a discussion of violence prevention programs and procedures organized by the three prevention tiers.

Over the past decade, the subject of school violence prevention has evolved from a small niche for a few academics and interested school psychologists to a mainstream area of training and practice. A 2012 review of international online databases found that 771 peer-reviewed articles with the words *school violence* in the title have been published since the year 2000, up from only 21 in 1993 (Larson & Beckman, 2012). Assisting in this trend, a dedicated journal, the *Journal of School Violence*, began publication in 2001. In recent years, educators have come to recognize the link between safe environments and academic success and, along with that, the limitations inherent in relying primarily on the use of exclusionary discipline as a response to aggressive behavior. As a consequence, considerably more attention is now paid at the school level to positive behavioral supports, bully prevention, threat assessment and response, and anger management intervention. School psychologists, individually and collectively through the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) initiatives and publications, have taken leadership roles in each of these areas.

There is no denying that the high profile school shootings that occurred in the late 1990s changed the face of public education in the United States. Doors that were once opened were now locked, and a new and chilling vocabulary emerged. Terms such as *threat assessment*, *risk factors*, *school shooter*, and *hit list* made their way into the school lexicon. Although the frequency of those tragic, multiple homicide events has abated, due in part to increased vigilance and organized prevention

efforts by both students and school staff members, the tragedy in Newtown, CT, in December 2012, once again brought reminders of vulnerability and the recognition that school-associated homicide is still a fact of life both in the United States and internationally.

Between July 2009 and July 2010, there were 17 school-associated homicides of students ages 5–18 in American schools (Robers, Zhang, & Truman, 2012), a total that maintained a declining trend over the past 2 decades. In contrast to the rampage attacks that occurred in the late 1990s, more recent student homicides in and around school are much more likely to be the result of a conflict between two individuals that leads to the death of one of them. Whereas the likelihood of a targeted homicide occurring in any one particular school is exceedingly remote, the horrific prospect demands ongoing but reasoned vigilance. An essential feature of such vigilance is the provision of a safe and supportive learning environment for all students.

Consequently, it is not homicide directly, but rather the other more prevalent behaviors—chronic bullying, mean-spirited teasing, sexual harassment, relational aggression, and fighting—that school psychologists and other educators seek to prevent on a day-to-day basis. A fight between or among students in the school setting can be an extraordinarily disruptive and frightening event that can easily spiral out of control.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics in its *Indicators of School Crime and Safety 2011* (Robers et al., 2012), in 2009, 31% of students in grades 9–12 reported that they had been in a physical fight in the past 12 months, and 11% reported that they had fought on school property. Although male students were more likely to have been in a fight, 23% of female students reported that they had been in a physical fight in the past year, and 7% of this fighting took place on school property, a slight decrease from previous reports (Robers et al., 2012). Students are not the only ones to face the problem of physical violence in school. During the 2007–2008 school year, 4% of teachers reported that they were physically attacked by a student (Robers et al., 2012).

This level of violence is not equally distributed among all students and all schools. Examining for racial differences, the *Indicators of School Crime and Safety 2011* (Robers et al., 2012) report found that 9% of Caucasian students and 8% of Asian students reported having been in a fight on school property compared to 17% of African American students, 14% of Hispanic students, and 21% of American Indian/Alaska Native students. The presence of gangs in the school environment shows

similar inequality of racial distribution, with 14% of Caucasian students reporting gang presence compared to 33% of Hispanic students, 31% of African American students, and 17% of Asian students.

The fact that many minority students tend to be concentrated in the largest urban school districts and poorest federal reservations helps to explain this disparity. Schools located in economically depressed neighborhoods where street crime, drugs, and gang activity thrive are at increased risk to experience problems with student behavior and school safety (Sprague, 2007). For example, during the 2011–2012 school year 882 students were arrested inside the New York City public schools (Lieberman, 2012). During the same period, 319 Chicago public school students were shot on city streets, 24 fatally (Sleven, 2012).

School psychologists are aware that students often bring unresolved neighborhood conflicts with them into the school building where they can erupt into violence. In describing life at a New York City high school, Mateu-Gelabert and Lune (2007) observed: "Students came to school with a set of expectations (learning in an academic environment without having to be concerned for their safety). Yet, many found, they needed first to deal with the street behavior they found in school" (p. 187).

No student should come to school routinely expecting to be bullied, sexually harassed, beaten up, or otherwise victimized, and yet many do. Understanding, addressing, and evaluating the many variables associated with preventing student violence presents challenges for school psychologists across communities and across individual schools. For some school psychologists, the dominant issue may be preventing verbal and relational bullying while others must struggle daily with how to prevent street violence from erupting in the school building. In either case, school psychologists recognize the importance that a safe, welcoming, and nurturing environment plays in the educational process and daily bring their training and expertise to the challenges presented.

In the Preventive and Responsive Services domain of the NASP *Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services* (NASP, 2010), school psychologists are urged to bring evidence-based prevention and intervention practices to address the academic, social–emotional, and behavioral needs of all students. Consistent with NASP recommendations, effective school violence prevention follows a multitiered, problem-solving model that brings both preventive services for all students as well as targeted, intensive

supports for students with the greatest needs. Given the link between a safe school environment and positive student outcomes, it is critical that school psychologists, in collaboration with fellow educators, help all schools develop comprehensive, evidence-supported approaches to school violence prevention.

BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

What do school psychologists need to know and be able to do to address school violence? Not surprisingly, the answer to this question lies in the same competencies that school psychologists need to be successful in the other areas of professional practice. Preventing school violence is no longer an esoteric subspecialty of general practice. Rather, it is the outcome of effective modern day, prevention-oriented school psychology aimed at enhancing learning opportunities for all students. To understand the issues associated with school violence subsumes both an array of practice concerns with which most school psychologists have training and skill as well as less familiar, more focused areas. For many practitioners, functional assessment of anger-related student aggression, bullying prevention, needs assessment design, classroom/school-wide discipline procedures, and crisis management may be accustomed practice areas, whereas target hardening, threat assessment, primary and secondary prevention procedures, victim support, and school–community coalition building may be comparatively new ground. Four critical contextual areas of competency applied specifically to school violence prevention are summarized next.

Understand the Roots of Local Violence

In the school setting, violence manifests in numerous forms, often reflecting the socioeconomic condition of the surrounding neighborhood from where the students are drawn. If there are street gang problems, high criminality, heavy drug use, and/or racial strife outside of school, one can be comparatively certain that there will be spillover into the school buildings. In the same fashion, in low crime neighborhoods where perhaps extensive cyberbullying takes place outside of school and powerful social cliques regularly exert their negative influences, these schools must also prepare for the inevitable problems. Although the organizational and social structure of the school does influence the probability of some forms of violence (e.g., schools are fertile grounds for bullying but less so for fighting), it is often more useful to the practitioner to think of school

violence more broadly as violent behavior occurring on school property. Consequently, to achieve a deeper understanding and to prevent violence in the school setting, one must also strive to understand the social, cultural, psychological, and economic influences of the greater community context within which it occurs.

For instance, school psychologists should be alert to the ways in which violent street codes create social and psychological pressure on some students—including those otherwise doing well—to respond aggressively to perceived provocations from classmates or teachers. Big city or small, a change in recent immigration trends can foster growing racial divides, and these issues can raise tensions that students bring with them into the building. In many communities, the complicated access to oversubscribed community mental health service can have implications for service delivery priorities in the schools.

School psychologists are aware that the exterior influences on the level of violence in any given building are idiosyncratic to the community around it. It is important for school psychologists to acquire a firm understanding of the nature and extent of these influences by drawing upon community resources best positioned to be knowledgeable. For example, collaborative relationships with the mental health community, law enforcement, social services, or health providers can provide school personnel with alternative perspectives and open avenues to multitargeted prevention strategies.

Use Effective Data-Based Decision Making

Horrific occurrences in schools, such as those at Columbine, CO, in April 1999 and Newtown, CT, in December 2012, understandably frighten parents, students, educators, and the general public. At such times, media-fed rumors and misstatements of fact abound, and the potential for schools and communities to fall victim to recency bias and emotionally driven decision making is high. Should the school hire armed guards? Purchase metal detectors? Allow concealed carry in the school buildings? Aware of this, school psychologists can assist in bringing all violence prevention options under administrative consideration into the light of scientific inquiry, establishing what the published data say about *this* prevention measure under *these* circumstances. In such times, school boards and administrators are often under intense pressure to respond to community fears, and school psychologists are professionally and educationally well positioned to be of significant assistance.

Nurture a Strong Mental Health Focus

In the aftermath of every incident of homicidal violence in the school setting come the often justifiable hand wringing and finger pointing directed at the mental health delivery system. School psychologists are cognizant of the fact that a significant percentage of children's mental health needs are met in the school setting. Effective school violence prevention requires a vibrant and competent school-based mental health delivery system of skilled direct and indirect intervention and containing strong collaborative relationships with community mental health services. Efforts are directed at creating school connections and school bonding among all students, particularly those who show evidence of struggle in these regards. Such a system must avoid poorly informed calls for the use of student profiling as an alleged prevention method. Rather, school psychologists and other school professionals should provide ongoing, multisource mental health information to students, teachers, and the public and pursue efforts to ease child and adolescent access to treatment.

Prepare to Respond

In spite of the best efforts of schools to prevent all forms of violence, tragic occurrences are inevitable. No school, with full assurance, can prevent a highly motivated individual from inflicting deadly harm inside its walls. Although the statistical likelihood of a single or multiple homicide on school grounds is exceedingly remote, school psychologists must ensure that school personnel are prepared to respond, even in the unlikely eventuality. As Larson and Beckman (2012) observed:

> Homicide and other assaults with deadly weapons bring the danger of the outside world into the safety of the school building, and most often with forethought and purpose. The envelope of civility, rules, structure, and predictability becomes violated, and the coping mechanisms of individuals are put to the test. The traumatic effects on the larger population of the school will vary along multiple dimensions, including event exposure and predisposing psychological risk factors. (p. 224)

The full range of school violence prevention includes the need for school psychologists to become skilled in the many aspects of school crisis prevention and intervention as outlined in Brock (see Chapter 15). School personnel trained in NASP's PREPaRE model are well situated to assist in creating a structure to enhance prevention measures as well as manage the aftermath of a tragic incident of school violence.

BEST PRACTICES IN SCHOOL VIOLENCE PREVENTION

School violence prevention efforts are best conceptualized as the product of a problem-solving process applied to the now familiar multitiered model of service delivery. The application of problem solving to violence prevention involves a five-step process: Step 1, problem identification; Step 2, problem analysis; Step 3, problem response proposals; Step 4, response implementation; and Step 5, evaluation of prevention strategies. The foundations of this application have been described in depth elsewhere (e.g., Larson & Busse, 2012). While the process is typically recursive and may involve frequent loops back to previous steps for clarifying information, the directional flow is as follows: In Steps 1 and 2, an issue of school safety is identified, assessed, and reframed as a gap between existing conditions and desirable conditions of safety. In Step 3, assessment-informed changes or interventions are proposed to close the gap. In Step 4, they are implemented at one or more of the prevention tiers. In Step 5, the changes are evaluated in both a formative and summative fashion and recommendations for maintenance or additional changes are made.

Team Planning Structure

Planning and decision making for school violence prevention, like most other broadly based initiatives in the school, should be managed in a representative team format. The essential qualities of what may be called the School Safety Team are diverse representation among major stakeholders and enthusiasm for the task. School psychologists should take leadership roles in ensuring that the team is reflective of the cultural composition of the school and community. In addition to the school psychologist with skills in assessment and progress monitoring, core team membership should include individuals with one or more of the following competencies: (a) knowledge of the community, (b) teaching of social and emotional learning, (c) law enforcement, (d) counseling, (e) school discipline, and (f) concerns of parents (see Table 16.1). School psychologists who have overseen the implementation of NASP's incident command system model, PREPaRE, will have an identified group of professionals appropriate for membership on the School Safety Team.

Table 16.1. Sample School Safety Team Membership

Sample Core Prevention Coordinating Team
- Principal or designee (ex officio)
- School psychologist
- School social worker
- General education teacher representative
- Special education teacher representative
- Student (middle or high school)
- Parent representative (e.g., PTA leader, disability/diversity advocacy group leader)
- Community representative (e.g., police liaison, clergy, local merchant)

Supplementary Coordinating Team Members
- School nurse (crisis planning)
- Curriculum specialist
- Behavior specialist
- Community agency representative
- University faculty

Assessment-Driven Decision Making

In a multitier, problem-solving model, the initial task for the violence prevention planning team involves defining the problem, and school psychologists can apply skills in data-based assessment to assist in the design and analysis of a comprehensive needs assessment. The results will generate important information from which to begin planning as well as provide a preintervention baseline to assist in ongoing program evaluation. National school violence prevalence studies have utility for forming broad national and regional public policy, but are not as helpful when it comes to helping a specific district or school to evaluate the most pressing needs on their school campuses. To plan effectively and implement a school violence prevention program, each school needs to conduct a needs assessment that is tailored to understanding the particular local concerns of all identified stakeholders.

The traditional mechanism used to gather this type of information is self-report surveys of staff, students, and parents. This assessment should provide data regarding the current level of prevention efforts from a multisystemic viewpoint that looks at environmental modifications, school-wide programs, classroom initiatives, and targeted individual interventions. School psychologists may find it helpful to begin the needs assessment process with a series of listening sessions with teachers and other staff members during which participants are asked to raise their concerns regarding school safety. Open-ended questions are particularly useful, such as, "We are interested in making some changes so that our school is safer for everyone. Where do you think we

should start?" The information gleaned from these meetings can serve as a guide for school psychologists during the item development phase for the needs assessment survey. A useful guide for writing such surveys is available from the University of Kansas (http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1042.aspx). A model needs assessment survey for school staff members was developed by the Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment (http://www.teachsafeschools.org/checklist.html).

In addition, school safety climate data from student self-reports are useful for both prevention planning as well as formative and summative evaluations. *The California School Climate and Safety Survey–Short Form* (Furlong et al., 2005; http://www.michaelfurlong.info/CSCSS/cscss-forms) is a 52-item revision of an original 102-item form. This well-designed scale yields self-report information from students in three principal areas: school danger, school climate, and school victimization.

Information that is initially sought for needs assessment purposes can later provide feedback about the patterns, trends, and correlates of violence-related behaviors. For example, examining discipline data and assessing the campus settings where reported violence occurs can be useful to augment the validity of self-report data. Contextual information is important to gather because strategies to prevent or inhibit violent behavior on campus may include modification of setting variables such as the school's physical plant and supervision allocation. Web-based software is available to assist schools in the accumulation and analysis of these data. The School-Wide Information System (http://www.pbisapps.org/Pages/Default.aspx) is a Web-based office referral organization and monitoring system designed to help school personnel use office referral data in the development of student interventions.

Data from all sources need to be analyzed to develop hypotheses, with the ultimate goal of understanding why the problem is occurring. These results are then shared with faculty, students, and the community. An important task for the School Safety Team is to communicate the results in a manner so that all of the stakeholders understand the problem in the most useful and effective fashion. School psychologists can assume leadership in this area by (a) assisting all parties to understand issues associated with the validity and reliability of surveys and other forms of gathered data, (b) developing data-based conclusions from the information gathered, and (c) ensuring communication of the findings to students and other stakeholders in a developmentally and linguistically sensitive manner.

With the data gathered and analyzed, the time has come to consider prevention strategies. The target units of support are populations of students identified by relative risk status and the school, home, and community systems that can be effectively influenced to address those risks. In other words, the team will ask: "What do all of our students need?" (universal prevention programs); "What do some of our students need?" (selected prevention programs); and "What do a few of our students need?" (indicated prevention programs).

What follows are selected violence prevention programs and procedures appropriate for each prevention tier. Limitation of space prevents a more complete discussion of programs that could represent best practices in this area. Readers are referred to the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov) and the Hamilton Fish Institute (http://gwired.gwu.edu/hamfish) for additional resources.

Tier 1 Prevention Strategies

At the primary prevention level, universal prevention programs are concerned with providing all school building occupants with architectural/environmental modifications, information, strategies, and coping responses designed to prevent or mitigate the occurrence of violent, antisocial behaviors. Examples of school violence–oriented universal prevention efforts include architectural design features such as adequate lighting and open sightlines to discourage problem behavior and building access control policies that may include the presence of armed personnel. Well-conceived and enforced codes of school conduct and classroom-based socioemotional curricula are essential features of a universal prevention program.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

Sprague (2007) posited four sources of school vulnerability that may be implicated in any incident of school violence: (a) design, use, and supervision of school space; (b) administrative practices; (c) characteristics of the surrounding neighborhood; and (d) characteristics of students enrolled. The most neglected of the four, he noted, is the design, use, and supervision of school space. When most schools in the United States were built, the issue of safety from assault did not figure into the architectural plans. Consequently, many school buildings can be easy targets for those who would do harm to the occupants.

The phrase *hardening the target* has entered the vernacular and refers to efforts aimed at making a structure such as a school building safer and less vulnerable to antisocial behavior. Locking exterior doors and increasing the adult presence on the playground are two common examples. In recent years, a more systematic approach to safety-oriented environmental and architectural design procedures can be found in an emerging knowledge base known as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). CPTED refers to "the broad study and design of environments to encourage desirable behavior, heighten functionality, and decrease antisocial behavior" (Schneider, 2007, p. 4).

A CPTED analysis of a school building will examine (a) the natural surveillance provided by windows, and obstructions such as those afforded by corners and solid doors; (b) the natural access control and how to limit and control entry to the building; and (c) procedures for establishing and enhancing the message of who is in charge, known as territoriality (Schneider, 2007). Two useful surveys, the Basic School CPTED Survey and the Annotated School CPTED Survey are available in Schneider (2007).

School Resource Officers

Following the murders in Newtown, CT, in December 2012, the subject of providing armed adults (private security or local police) in all school buildings across the country was raised, and federal dollars were made available. A school resource officer is a certified law enforcement officer who is permanently assigned to a school or set of schools. School resource officers typically engage in three primary activities: law enforcement, law-related teaching, and mentoring (Myrstol, 2011). In a review of the literature, Myrstol (2011) found consistent support for school resource officers among administrators and teachers but a greater ambivalence among students. School psychologists should be alert to the finding that the presence of school resource officers has the potential to increase the criminalization of student behavior. Schools with school resource officers tend to show a greater number of arrests for disorderly conduct, particularly among students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Theriot, 2009). There is, however, emerging support for the role of school resource officers in reducing the incidence of more serious school violence, such as sexual assault, strong armed robbery, and aggravated battery (Jennings, Khey, Maskaly, & Donner, 2011).

Social–Emotional Education

Universal social–emotional curricula can lead to a decrease in student aggression and related behaviors,

including disruption, conduct problems, and emotional distress (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). These curricula also can lead to an increase in social–emotional skills and positive social behaviors (Durlak et al., 2011). However, not all curricula are created equally. Researchers have identified four key factors that appear to differentiate more effective programs from less effective ones. More effective programs tend to have sequenced activities, use active forms of learning, focus on personal or social skills, and be explicit in targeting specific social–emotional skills (SAFE; Durlak et al., 2011).

Although social–emotional curricula have been shown to be effective in large and diverse samples of students, they seem to be more effective for some groups of students than for others. Students who might benefit more from these programs include younger students and students with higher initial levels of aggression (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2010). The literature is mixed about the possible effects of socioeconomic status. Some researchers have found that students with lower socioeconomic status benefit more from these programs while others have found that students with higher socioeconomic status benefit more (e.g., Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2010). On the one hand, students with low socioeconomic status are at greater risk for aggressive behaviors and thus may have more potential for improvement with intervention. On the other hand, implementing social–emotional curricula in high poverty schools presents a unique set of challenges, including high mobility, higher levels of teacher stress, and greater difficulties with classroom management (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2010). More research is needed to understand how socioeconomic status affects the effectiveness of social–emotional curricula and what steps can be taken to best reach students across socioeconomic status levels.

Logistically, universal social–emotional learning programs are relatively low cost and easy to implement. Classroom teachers can successfully implement these programs and, indeed, may be in an ideal position to do so. On a practical note, teachers are already in their classrooms, reducing scheduling and staffing concerns. In addition, at least in the primary grades, teachers are with their students throughout the day, which allows them to help students generalize their new skills in naturally occurring opportunities. Perhaps it is not surprising then that students taught by their teachers, as opposed to other school or nonschool personnel, made gains in the most areas in a recent meta-analysis (Durlak et al., 2011).

Numerous social–emotional curricula are commercially available. Information on specific programs can be found in a variety of sources, including the *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning 2013 Guide: Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs* (http://casel.org/guide); the What Works Clearinghouse, maintained by the Institute of Educational Sciences of the U.S. Department of Education (http://www.ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc); Blueprints for Violence Prevention Model and Promising Programs, maintained by the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado (http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints); and the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices, maintained by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov).

Tier 2 Prevention Strategies

As the number of potentially harmful risk factors increases and the mediating influence of available protective factors decreases, prevention and learning needs change. The second tier of prevention intensity targets those students who are at higher risk to become involved in serious school violence-related behaviors. These students receive selected prevention services. Students appropriate for such additional service may self-identify through the failure of universal efforts to help them inhibit their anger outbursts or predatory aggressive behavior or they may be proactively identified through systematic risk and protective factor screening procedures. This group may include the more obvious students who are chronic fighters or those who are engaging in bully-related behaviors but also younger students who have multiple identified risk factors who may as yet be drawing less attention. Selected prevention efforts involve coordinated programming that may include additional classroom or building-level positive behavioral supports, systematic skills training through pull-out groups, or community-based individual or family interventions. The goals of selected prevention efforts are to provide students with the knowledge and, importantly, the skills necessary to replace aggressive problem behaviors with more educationally and socially responsible behaviors in and out of the school. When these skills are taught effectively, with attention to maintenance and generalization, higher risk students are more able to participate in and benefit from the myriad school and community opportunities available to all students.

As noted earlier, students from certain ethnic groups are more likely to report involvement in violence at

school. Compared with their Caucasian peers, African American and Latino students are also more likely to experience exclusionary discipline policies, including office referrals, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions (Sullivan, Klingbeil, & Van Norman, 2013). Consequently, the potential for overrepresentation of students from diverse racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds in Tier 2 interventions must be considered. To offset this potential, it is important to clarify the skills and knowledge school psychologists, teachers, and other school staff members need to interact effectively with students from underserved populations.

Check-In/Check-Out

Check-in/check-out is an efficient, effective way to reach many of the students who require additional behavioral support beyond the universal level. These students are typically identified through the use of office referral data and teacher nominations. Students who participate in check-in/check-out meet briefly with a designated staff member each morning to receive their daily point sheet and discuss their behavioral goals. Students give their point sheet to each of their teachers during the day and receive feedback at the end of each class. At the end of the day, students review their point sheet with a staff member and take their point sheet home to be signed.

Check-in/check-out effectively reduces disruptive and other problematic behaviors of many, though not all, students who require support beyond the universal level (Filter, McKenna, Benedict, & Horner, 2007; McIntosh, Campbell, Carter, & Dickey, 2009). Teachers, students, and parents find it easy to implement, and school staff are able to successfully implement this intervention without outside support (Filter et al., 2007). Check-in/check-out appears to be an effective intervention for students who engage in problematic behaviors in order to receive attention, but might not be appropriate for students who wish to escape from academic activities (McIntosh et al., 2009). An in-depth functional behavior analysis is not necessary at the Tier 2 level and, indeed, would likely limit the number of students able to receive appropriate interventions. However, school psychologists or other staff should consider the function of a student's behavior before recommending that they participate in check-in/check-out.

First Step to Success

First Step to Success is collaborative intervention between the teacher and a student services professional designed for children from preschool to Grade 3 who are exhibiting significant levels of aggressive and/or oppositional behavior. The program uses visual feedback in the form of a bicolored card held up by the teacher and operant reinforcement in form of social praise and classroom reinforcers to modify specific problem behaviors. The student service professional (school psychologist or other, referred to as the consultant) models the intervention in the classroom for a series of 20–30 minute periods over 5 days, turning the intervention over to the teacher on the sixth day. The intervention lasts a minimum of 30 school days, and each day requires anywhere from 30 to 150 minutes of part-time teacher intervention time. There is also a parent education program that focuses on home–school cooperation. Sprague and Perkins (2009) evaluated previous research and found that all children improved on measures of problem behavior, academic engaged time, and teacher-rated behavioral adjustment.

First Step to Success is not a complex intervention, but it is comparatively labor intensive for a busy classroom teacher. Consequently, school psychologists need to be certain to secure a truly informed agreement with the teacher ahead of time so as to help ensure the highest possible intervention integrity.

Parent Management Training

School psychologists who choose to offer Tier 2 prevention services to younger students who are experiencing multisite aggressive behavior, in particular at home and in school, may find it essential to work directly with parents. Groundbreaking work by Patterson and others (e.g., Reid, Patterson, & Snyder, 2002) has provided insight into parenting practices that may unwittingly train and maintain aggressive behavior in children. Providing school-based treatment with students and ignoring possible counter training in the home may hinder or thwart the expected outcomes and lead to frustration for all involved.

Parent management training is a behaviorally focused intervention designed to train parents how to use social learning techniques, in particular operant conditioning, to alter child problem behavior (Kazdin, 2005). It is direct, well supported in the literature, and grounded in techniques with which most school psychologists are very familiar. Two of the most useful treatment manuals can be found in Kazdin (2005) and Kazdin and Rotella (2008). As most school psychologists know, the biggest challenge to school-based parent training is gaining consistent access to the parents with the greatest needs, and parents with the greatest needs often present the

greatest challenges in this area. Successful implementation of this intervention may require contractual changes in the work day to allow for after school or evening hours, a budget for transportation and other incentives, and caregivers and facilities for child care.

Coping Power Program

The Coping Power Program is a small-group, cognitive–behavioral intervention for students in fourth through sixth grades. The program consists of 34 sessions with an additional 16 session parent component. The child component of Coping Power Program focuses on (a) goal setting, (b) anger regulation, (c) perspective taking, and (d) social problem solving. The parent component addresses (a) behavior management strategies, (b) family communication, (c) parental involvement in school matters, and (d) parental stress management (Lochman, Boxmeyer, & Powell, 2012). The Coping Power Program produced reductions in self-reported covert delinquent behavior and parent-reported substance abuse at the 1-year follow-up date and lower rates of teacher-reported aggressive behavior (Lochman & Wells, 2003).

Tier 3 Prevention Strategies

The third tier and smallest population requiring violence prevention services are students who will benefit from indicated prevention services. The needs of students at this level have typically proven unresponsive to prevention efforts at the universal or selected levels, and the school's and community's most focused and intensive services are indicated. At the Tier 3 level, prevention goals are typically a matter of maintaining current functioning strengths, with hopes for improvement in self-management skills. From a school violence prevention perspective, students appropriate for indicated prevention services may have repeatedly demonstrated or threatened behavioral aggression of such severity that they pose a danger to others in the school. When explosive anger and aggression are predictable components of a particular individual student's behavior, then school psychologists should take the lead in providing prevention strategies to ensure best the safety of all concerned.

Wraparound

Students whose behavioral self-regulation is so problematic that they pose a danger to themselves and others in the school and other settings are frequently the beneficiaries of a variety of services in and out of the school setting in what has come to be called a *wraparound*

organizational structure. In this context, multiple supports and services are wrapped around the student and, in many cases, the family in an effort to prevent problems from advancing to an even more serious level (see Eber, 2008; see also http://www.pbis.org/school/tertiary_level/wraparound.aspx for wraparound in the positive behavioral interventions and supports context). The wraparound teams are composed of differing memberships for each student and typically facilitated by the school psychologist or other student services professional. Among the primary objectives are to establish effective, problem-solving partnerships among the family, the school, and community resources with goals guided by the youth and family (Eber, 2008). Indicated-level school-based violence prevention strategies within the context of wraparound services might include interventions such as individual anger regulation counseling, aide accompaniment, adjusted school day, mentoring, alternative site placement, and academic support services.

Conflict Prevention and De-Escalation Strategies

Through consultation and inservice training, school psychologists can play an essential role in the task of reducing the potential for volatile student conflicts. Conflict prevention and de-escalation techniques have become an increasingly common topic of professional development for school staff, particularly as laws regarding restraint and seclusion have been enacted. Commercial crisis intervention training programs are available for training school personnel crisis antecedents, verbal de-escalation techniques, and restraint. The outcomes of these programs mostly have been studied in hospitals and mental health facilities and have typically focused on changes in restraint and seclusion use, rather than on changes in violent incidents (Livingston, Verdun-Jones, Brink, Lussier, & Nicholls, 2010). Useful information and techniques for school psychologists in efforts to develop crisis de-escalation inservices may be found in Colvin (2009). Additionally, training from the Crisis Prevention Institute (http://www.crisisprevention.com/Specialties/Nonviolent-Crisis-Intervention) has been well received by many school districts although systematic research on effectiveness is lacking.

Threat Assessment

Student threats of violence are prevalent in many schools. On average, 7–9% of teachers receive threats of injury from students over the course of a school year

(Robers et al., 2012). In 2002, a collaborative effort between the U.S. Secret Service and the Department of Education resulted in the publication of *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates* (http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi_guide.pdf). This document held that school-based targeted violence could be largely prevented through a systematic process of investigation once a threat is brought to the attention of school personnel. The document provided a basic structure for implementing the process. Subsequently, *Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence* (Cornell & Sheras, 2006) was published and provided step-by-step organizational guidelines for the assessment and management of a credible threat of violence from a student or other party. These guidelines trace procedures from the initial assessment process through follow up and support for students who initiate threats of violence. Under the threat assessment model, school-based teams are created consisting of an administrator, the school resource officer, the school psychologist, a school counselor, and the school social worker. When a threat is brought to the attention of the team, it is categorized as either *transient* (easily resolved) or *substantive* (poses a serious danger to others). Substantive threats are further categorized as serious or very serious, depending in part on the potential severity of the threatened act. School psychologists play an essential role through their expertise in "psychological assessment and intervention that can be useful in responding to a student's aggressive behavior and addressing the social and emotional difficulties that frequently underlie threatening behavior" (Cornell & Sheras, 2006, p. 14).

Progress Monitoring and Evaluation of Prevention Activities

Most school psychologists are aware of programs in their districts that look good or are otherwise received positively by the stakeholders, but for which there is no evidence that demonstrable positive change is occurring. It is no less so in violence prevention than in other aspects of service delivery that decisions about maintaining, modifying, or discontinuing programs or procedures need to be linked to the continual analysis of acquired data. Occasionally, this can be a politically or socially difficult task, especially when entrenched or popular programs are called upon to show authentic outcomes, but answer they must. Few schools would continue a reading curriculum that failed to teach the

skill; the same must be true for any aspect of the school violence prevention effort. The time is too short, the resources too limited, and the stakes are too high.

In approaching this task, both formative and summative evaluations should be designed. Formative evaluations monitor ongoing progress toward program goals and inform critical changes to be made in implementation. Formative evaluations answer the question, "Is the prevention program on the right track?" The use of goal attainment scaling ratings adjusted for the expected progress can be a time-efficient and useful method for formative assessment. In addition, treatment integrity checks along with regular opportunities for staff discussion and problem solving will provide helpful and statistically defensible data regarding progress (see Turner-Stokes, 2010).

Goal attainment scaling is a criterion-referenced approach to behavioralizing problem definitions that also can be used to create testable hypotheses and document intervention effectiveness. Goal attainment scaling ratings can be used at either an individual or group level and involve operationally defining successive levels of program progress on a 5-point or 6-point scale (i.e., -2 to $+2$, wherein -2 indicates that a problem is much worse and $+2$ indicates a program goal is attained). For example, consider a student needs assessment survey item that states "I have avoided using the restrooms out of fear for my safety." Baseline data indicate that 20% of sixth- and seventh- grade students responded "true" to the item (20% becomes goal attainment scaling rating 0). The School Safety Team might agree that a decrease to a rate of 10% would indicate progress toward the program goal, and that would be entered as goal attainment scaling $= +1$. A decrease to less than 2% would indicate the program goal was attained, and entered as goal attainment scaling $= +2$. On the opposite side, no change or an increase up to 25% would indicate the prevention efforts were not having the desired effect (goal attainment scaling $= -1$), and an increase to above 30% might indicate that the efforts themselves may be iatrogenic and significantly worsening the problem, and a goal attainment scaling rating of -2 would be entered. There is no absolute formula for determining the criteria for each rating level, but reason, availability of intervention resources, and conservative judgment should prevail. Goal attainment scaling ratings can be used to gather outcome data on a number of different action hypotheses and subsequently combined to provide an overall progress index. Figure 16.1 provides an example of this procedure.

Multiculturalism and Child Development Issues

As noted, the potential for African American students and students of Hispanic heritage to be disproportionately identified for disciplinary consequences in part speaks to the need that all school psychologists involved in violence prevention activities have to maintain and grow their multicultural competencies. This is particularly true when the prevention work involves working with parents in programs such as in the aforementioned First Step to Success, Coping Power, or Parent Management Training. School psychologists need to be alert to any culturally imbedded parenting strategies, including those that may clash with their own experience or learning (e.g., Lansford, Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, & Petit, 2004). In addition, school psychologists need to have a firm understanding of child developmental pathways that may lead to aggressive behavior so as to better assist teachers and caregivers. Knowledge of the critical social and emotional competencies expected of early childhood learners can assist the school psychologist in the design of effective intervention strategies before problem behaviors become more difficult to change. A useful discussion of these developmental issues can be found in Bierman (2007).

SUMMARY

The emergence of school psychology as an influential force in national policy, research, program development, and service delivery in the area of school violence prevention has been one of the most significant and rapid changes in the profession over the past

Figure 16.1. Goal Attainment Scaling Example

Prevention Area: Bullying Prevention   Rater: Principal

Level of Expected Outcome	Goal 1 Reduction in Restroom Avoidance	Goal 2 Reduction in School Avoidance
Review date: May 23		
Goal attained (+2)	Reduction to 2% or less for same period in following year	Reduction to less than 3% for same period in following year
Expected improvement (+1)	Reduction to 10% or less for same period in following year	Reduction to 3% for same period in following year
Current status* (0)	20% of students reported they avoided restrooms for fear of bullies	5% of students reported staying home from school to avoid bullying
Less than expected outcome (−1)	No change or increase of less than 5% for same period in following year	No change or increase of 1% for same period in following year
Much less than expected (−2)	Increase of 5% or greater for same period in following year	Increase of greater than 1% for same period in following year

GAS Rating _____   GAS Rating _____

*Failure to achieve minimal criterion for positive movement is a 0 GAS rating

Note. GAS = goal attainment scaling.

number of years. Isolated, but high-profile violence in the schools in the late 1990s and at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT, in December 2012, caused educational staff in general and school psychology practitioners in particular to struggle with understanding the role of the school environment in the perpetration of violent behavior. Those horrific acts were the catalysts that sparked a renewed commitment to providing safe and nurturing learning environments for all students. While recognizing that targeted homicide in schools remains a reality, albeit a low probability one, school psychologists understand that school violence manifests itself in multiple forms—fighting, chronic bullying, mean-spirited teasing, sexual harassment, relational aggression—and that each has real and serious consequences for the lives of affected children and youth.

The current science and practice of school violence prevention involves understanding the multisystemic pathways that influence the development and maintenance of violent behavior and then applying effective prevention strategies across the broad spectrum of student needs. It involves recognition that highly publicized approaches that, for instance, rely on hypothesized profiles or on zero tolerance reactionary consequences are inadequate. Rather, best practices in school violence prevention involves recognition that collaboratively developed, empirically based, multicomponent, multilevel approaches rigorously applied and longitudinally maintained stand the best chances for success.

And finally, it involves a sobering understanding that in the end there is little a school can do to completely ensure that a committed individual will not be able to carry out his or her own plan of homicidal violence. Even in this reality, school psychologists must take an assertive leadership role to bring clear-eyed problem solving and the best available science to prevention decision making. In this manner will they be able to leave the building each day firm in the belief that they have done all that they can for the safety of the children in their care.

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