

Lesson 1

Hammond

Violence isn't just something that happens and you can't do anything about it, but actually you can prevent it.

Narrator

Lesson One: Understand Youth Violence. Youth violence is a significant public health and safety issue. It can happen at home, during school, on our streets, even online. Youth violence affects all communities. It isn't limited to any one region, community, or demographic group. We know youth violence can take many forms – from bullying to physical fighting to homicide – and can do both emotional and physical harm. And we know assault, gang violence, and crime can have devastating, long-term effects and lead to serious injury and death. The impact of youth violence reaches beyond young people. Families, communities, and businesses are harmed by youth violence. Youth violence increases health care costs, decreases property values, and disrupts social services. But, the good news is that youth violence is PREVENTABLE and NOT inevitable.

Hammond

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Simon

When we talk about primary prevention we think of the story of the fisherman, who is fishing on the river, and sees someone struggling to swim, floating down the river. Puts down his fishing gear, jumps in, and pulls that person ashore. Gets back to fishing. A few minutes later, he sees somebody else floating down the river, struggling to swim, does the same thing. After several more rescues he decides to go back upstream on the river and find out what's going on: why are these people falling in the river? What can be done to prevent this so we don't have to deal with the consequences later.

Narrator

As an active or concerned citizen, you understand the importance of ensuring the safety and prosperity of your community. By using STRYVE Online and working together with others in your community, you can create and implement a strategic youth violence prevention plan that will stop youth violence BEFORE it starts. Although this may seem like a daunting task, communities just like yours have made great strides in preventing youth violence through youth development programs, by establishing supportive relationships between youth and caring adults, and enhancing community norms and environments that promote safety and connectedness. To prevent violence, the first step is understanding it.

Gorman-Smith

The most simple definition is behaviors that cause harm to another person.

Narrator

Youth violence refers to harmful behaviors that can start early in adolescence and continue into young adulthood. They include the intentional use of physical force against others with a high likelihood of resulting in injury, psychological harm...even death. The young person can be a victim, a perpetrator, or a witness to violence.

Simon

So when we talk about youth violence, we typically refer to age group between 10 and 24, so children, adolescents, and young adults. Youth violence includes bullying, gang violence; it includes violence that's tied to an argument about a girlfriend, an argument about drugs, arguments about money. It includes violence that's more instrumental, violence that's perpetrated as part of a robbery, for example.

Narrator

During adolescence, youth are in a unique developmental transition. Not only do they experience physical and biological changes, they are also influenced by relationships and the environments where they live...including family, peer groups, school, neighborhood, and society. These external influences can support or challenge a young person's health and well-being.

Prothrow-Stith

You can have a healthy child in a healthy family and if the community is unhealthy, then during that adolescent period you can really start getting some bad outcomes.

Narrator

Understanding adolescent development can lead to an awareness of what factors protect youth, or put them at risk for experiencing or perpetrating violence. And, this awareness helps determine where prevention efforts need to be focused.

Davis

You have to both reduce risk factors and promote resiliency or protective factors.

Narrator

Protective factors buffer young people from the risks of becoming violent. Examples of protective factors include a youth's ability to discuss problems with parents. Also, a youth's commitment to school and a community where families, peers, and schools promote healthy beliefs and clear standards protect against the likelihood of youth violence.

Risk factors increase the likelihood that a young person will become violent. However, the presence of risk factors does not always mean that a young person will become a perpetrator of violence. Examples of risk factors include poor social skills, ongoing family conflict, social rejection by peers, communities in economic distress and low levels of participation by residents

in community activities. These factors influence youth development and may increase the likelihood that they will experience or become a perpetrator of violence.

Simon

We've learned a great deal about what works to reduce risk for violence. Let's take advantage of that and put our leaders in a good position to make sure that they stay informed, take advantage of the tools that are available, and use those tools to make wise decisions about which prevention strategies are most appropriate for the populations they serve.

Narrator

Youth development programs provide the support, relationships, experiences, resources, and opportunities young people need to become successful adults. Prevention programs may also include social skills-building, parent training, and mentoring strategies. These prevention programs are delivered during and after school, in homes, and in a variety of community settings.

As you begin to work with others in your community and start thinking about developing your youth violence prevention plan, remember that your goal is to promote protective factors while reducing or eliminating risk factors for youth violence in your community. Research clearly demonstrates that the reduction of factors that place youth at risk for violence and the strengthening of factors that protect them from violence can occur. Approaches proven to effectively address these factors are available, and a growing body of evidence indicates these approaches can be cost-effective and have long-lasting benefits.

As this segment comes to a close, here's a quick summary of what we've covered:

Youth Violence is preventable. Youth violence refers to harmful behaviors that can start early in adolescence and continue into young adulthood. They include the intentional use of physical force against others like bullying, physical fighting and assault.

Youth are influenced by their relationships and environments. Protective factors buffer young people from the risks of becoming perpetrators of violence. Risk factors increase the likelihood that a young person will become a perpetrator of violence.

As you move forward through STRYVE Online training, try to identify areas in your community where youth violence is evident. Think of gaps in your community where youth lack resources that promote healthy development. Identify what is helping youth reach their potential. Identify individuals and groups in your community that can work together to strategically plan and prevent youth violence.

Lesson 2

Narrator

Lesson 2: The Public Health Approach

In Lesson 2, we'll explore the public health approach to prevention and the benefits of using the social-ecological model as your community acts to prevent youth violence before it starts. Youth violence not only affects our young people, it affects our schools, our neighborhoods, and our communities. Preventing youth violence decreases the cost of health care, improves property values, reduces the burden on social services, and positively affects the viability of businesses. It also can have a positive impact on schools, peer and family relationships and the criminal justice systems.

Hammond

The notion that we can do something about violence before it becomes a criminal problem is firmly embedded in the public health approach.

Mercy

What public health brings is really a proactive response to violence; trying to address it before it occurs, trying to prevent that initial event of violence from occurring in the first place.

Narrator

The public health approach to violence prevention is a systematic process. It offers a practical, goal-oriented, and community-based strategy for promoting and maintaining healthy communities that is based on the best available evidence.

There are four steps to the public health approach:

Describe and monitor the problem;
Identify risk and protective factors;
Develop and evaluate prevention strategies; and
Widely implement those strategies in communities.

By following this logical step by step process your community will be able to create and implement a sustainable plan to prevent youth violence.

The first step is to define and monitor the problem. This step helps you understand what youth violence looks like in your community so you can work to prevent it. These data can help you know how frequently violence occurs, where it is occurs, trends, and who the victims and perpetrators are.

After understanding the magnitude of the problem, you are ready for the second step -- identifying risk and protective factors. This knowledge will allow you to understand what factors

protect people or put them at risk for experiencing or perpetrating youth violence. This understanding will help you identify where prevention efforts need to be focused.

The third step of the public health approach is to develop and evaluate prevention strategies. There are a number of evidence-based youth violence prevention strategies available. Based on your understanding of your community, you want to identify and use the practices, programs, and policies that are proven to reduce or eliminate risk factors or that are proven to increase or maximize protective factors. By using strategies that are based on the best available evidence and continuing to evaluate these approaches when implemented, your community increases its likelihood for success.

The fourth and final step in the public health approach is to implement strategies widely. Once you've identified strategies that work in your community, they should be implemented widely to reach all individuals and settings that influence the likelihood of youth violence. Now that you have an understanding of the public health approach, let's look at a model that helps address the social and ecological factors that put youth at risk for experiencing or perpetrating violence. By understanding the social ecological factors that influence your community's likelihood of experiencing youth violence, you can effectively plan and act to prevent it.

Mercy

All of us live in what we call "an ecology." There's us as individuals and surrounding us is our family and friends, at one level. We live in communities and that surrounds us in another level. And then at another level the whole society surrounds.

Simon

The social ecological model really serves as a reminder that we need to look at individual level risks - including things like impulse control, personality factors, individual level motivations - but we need to look beyond individual risk and protective factors to those factors that are operating within families, within peer groups, within schools and other social structures in communities as well as larger social factors like the media, like policies that are in place within cities and within communities.

Narrator

Using a framework known as the social ecological model will help you understand your community's risk and protective factors and how to use that knowledge to help develop your prevention plan. The social ecological model considers the complex interplay between individual, relationship, community, and societal factors. It will help you see how to reach different influences to further your youth violence prevention goals.

Murray

We're looking at strengthening families so that they're better able to take care of their children; we're looking at making communities safer and more nurturing places to be; and we're looking

at helping institutions to figure out, together, better ways for them to work together for the greater benefit of all.

Narrator

Your prevention strategies should be comprehensive to include programs, practices, or policies that address multiple levels of the social ecological model. You will also need to plan for your strategies to change as the factors that affect youth change as they grow-up. This comprehensive and developmental approach is more likely to be effective than any single prevention strategy.

The first level of the model includes factors that influence individuals. These are biological and historical factors that increase the likelihood of violence. Risk factors include things like: past victimization, early aggressive behavior, involvement with drugs, alcohol or tobacco, high emotional distress, and exposure to violence and conflict in the family. Protective factors include a low tolerance for disruptive behavior, connectedness to family or adults outside the family, an ability to discuss problems with parents and a positive social orientation. An example of a strategy that could impact an Individual is a training that builds good problem-solving and anger management skills, impulse control, and emotional regulation skills.

The second level focuses on relationships. Close relationships may influence a person's risk of becoming involved in violence. Risk factors include harsh, lax or inconsistent discipline, a low emotional attachment to parents or caregivers, association with delinquent peers, low commitment to school and academic failure. Examples of protective factors include the consistent presence of a parent when a young person wakes up or comes home from school and eats meals or goes to bed; Other examples include a young person's perception that parents have high expectations about school performance; and when the young person is involved in positive prosocial activities with friends. Prevention strategies include teaching parents skills for fostering strong communication, setting boundaries, and monitoring behavior. Additional strategies include mentoring and modeling nonviolent attitudes and behaviors to build positive relationships between youths and other adults, such as teachers and community members.

The third level looks at community factors. This level explores social settings, such as schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods, and how they influence the likelihood of youth violence. Risk factors include limited community participation, fewer economic opportunities and a high level of transiency of residents. Examples of protective factors are economic development, adequate educational opportunities, availability of supervised recreational and afterschool activities. Prevention strategies at this level promote thriving, safer, and more connected schools and communities. This might include promoting and sustaining a strong economic infrastructure, job programs and internships, or enhancing and sustaining schools and parks that promote safety and connectedness.

The fourth level focuses on societal factors. Here we look at broad societal factors that help create a climate in which violence is either encouraged or inhibited. These factors include social and cultural norms as well as broad policies that protect youth. Societal prevention strategies

may address social and cultural norms, policies supporting positive parenting, or policies that decrease inequality. Examples of prevention strategies on the societal level include bullying prevention laws in states and communities. Media campaigns with positive messages about youth or that raise awareness that youth violence can and should be prevented are another example of a societal level prevention strategy.

Mercy

The societal level affects all the other levels of the social ecological model. So if we could change, this is really powerful, if we could change values and norms that we hold in terms of violence at the societal level, it will permeate all these other relationships.

Narrator

Now that you are familiar with the benefits of using the public health approach and the social ecological model framework to help you build an action plan to prevent youth violence; it's time to think about which community members would be most helpful in your collaboration. What community strengths are already present? What might the community need?

Here's a quick summary of the concepts we've covered:

The public health approach to youth violence prevention is a systematic process that includes defining the problem in your community, identifying risk and protective factors, identifying proven strategies for your community and then broadly implementing those strategies and programs.

The social ecological model provides a framework to build an action plan that takes into consideration the complex interplay between individual, relationship, community, and societal factors.

Prevention strategies should include activities that address multiple levels of the social ecological model.