



DoDEA

SAFE Schools

NEWSLETTER



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Prevention Programs Guide Coming

By January 2006, each principal will receive a copy of *DoDEA's Spring 2006 Prevention Programs Guide* via e-mail. Along with the three previous editions, this guide will be available on the DoDEA web site at: www.dodea.edu/schools/ISGuides.htm.

This guide is the fourth in a series of supplementary guides to the *DoDEA Safe Schools Handbook* (Chapter 3, Section 2) and presents 22 additional program descriptions. This reference guide is a resource for administrators and counselors to use when selecting prevention programs to reduce negative behaviors such as bullying or aggression. ■

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End the Choking Game

Educators can save lives by warning students and parents/sponsors about choking games. Youth throughout the U.S. are dying from attempts to enjoy a free “high” through self-asphyxiation, or cutting off their air supply. According to Dr. Ashish Sinha, an anesthesiologist at the University of Philadelphia Hospital, there are two highs: first, when the child almost loses consciousness from lack of oxygen; and second, when the restraint is loosened and oxygen rushes into the brain.



Youth take turns choking each other using belts, ropes, or their bare hands. Children who choke themselves while alone are at the greatest risk. If they completely lose consciousness while using a ligature, there is no one there to loosen the restraint and restore their breathing. This has resulted in several deaths that initially appeared to be suicides, but were actually accidental deaths due to suffocation.

Warning signs that a student is playing a choking game include:

- ◆ Blood shot eyes or pin point blood spots in the eye.
- ◆ Unusual marks on the neck (i.e., bruises or pin point blood spots).
- ◆ Ties, bungee cords, belts, plastic bags, or ropes with unusual knots.
- ◆ Ropes tied to furniture.

Some children report that since they were not doing drugs or alcohol, they did not think they were doing anything wrong. Unfortunately, interrupting the oxygen supply can cause brain damage or death. For additional information see related articles on page 5 of this newsletter or the Guidance Channel Online: “The Choking Game: Information and Tips for Parents” at: www.guidancechannel.com/default.aspx?index=1878&cat=13. A fact-sheet for parents is available at: www.kitsapcountyhealth.com/communityhealth/health_promotion/docs/ip_handout_chokinggame.pdf. ■

Suicide Prevention Training on CD-ROM

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is the third leading cause of death for young people. The Jason Foundation's comprehensive suicide prevention program, *A Promise for Tomorrow*, includes practical tips to help adults and fellow students steer troubled youth toward the help they need.

In early December, as part of their on-going effort to prevent suicide, the Jason Foundation donated CD-ROMs with a Staff Development Training Seminar to all DoDEA middle and high schools. Teachers and staff use the CDs to complete a two-hour, individual-study suicide prevention course on their personal computer. The intent is to increase suicide awareness by letting adults take the course at their convenience. These CDs supplement the suicide prevention kits that were provided in September 2005. Participants receive a certificate of completion by entering their name in the Jason Foundation database at the conclusion of the training.

The self-paced, interactive CD-ROM familiarizes staff with the:

- ✓ Scope and severity of the problem;
- ✓ Indicators that students might be at elevated risk of suicide; and
- ✓ Warning signs that suicide might be imminent.

This training does not qualify staff to counsel students on suicide. Instead, it increases the number of adults who are aware of the problem and can refer troubled students to qualified mental health professionals.

The Jason Foundation program is not a required program being implemented by DoDEA. Rather, it is one

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more tool in the quiver of prevention programs available to DoDEA counselors and administrators. Please look for the CD-ROMs in the mail, addressed to "School Counselor." For additional ideas, see the prevention program guides available on the DoDEA web site at: www.dodea.edu/schools/ISGuides. ■



Hanau Middle School, Hanau, Germany

Heidelberg Mentoring Program Helps Students Succeed

Counselor Monika Juergens recently described Hanau Middle School's successful implementation of the Heidelberg District Mentoring Program. Hanau Middle School organized separate "Study/Homework/Success Clubs" for sixth, seventh and eighth-graders. Adults from the military community visit the school from 3-5 p.m., three days per week, and help students with homework. The adults also listen to students describe their goals and plans. As part of mentoring, adults share personal life experiences to motivate youth for success.

Ms. Juergens said that the toughest challenge they faced in establishing the program involved organization. "Lining up mentors, completing background checks and pairing mentors with mentees took six months," said Ms. Juergens. Now, all three Success Clubs are fully staffed with mentors and students. There are 25 students in the sixth-grade club alone!

Ms. Juergens expects to recruit new volunteers from an Army battalion that just came home from Iraq. She noted, "The experience is very rewarding for the young single soldiers as well as the students." For help establishing and sustaining a mentoring program visit the National Mentoring Center at: www.nwrel.org/mentoring/organizations.html. For additional information on Hanau Middle School's Success Clubs contact Ms. Juergens at: Monika.Juergens@eu.dodea.edu. ■

Drills and Exercises Work!

The formula $SSP = RRP + IRP$ is familiar to all DoDEA administrators who attended Safe School refresher training in 2004. The Risk Reduction Planning (RRP) was viewed as the more arduous activity. Some considered the Incident Response Planning (IRP) portion of the training easier because it involved using checklists to prepare plans and collect emergency supplies. Experience is showing that Incident Response Planning is important and essential, but it is incomplete without some form of practice. Chapter Two of *DoDEA's Safe Schools Handbook* outlines the various ways of practicing emergency preparedness by conducting seminars, drills, tabletop exercises, functional exercises, and full-scale exercises. The bottom line is to PLAN and PRACTICE.

Planning puts things in place by:

- ▶ Ensuring that people know and understand their roles and responsibilities.
- ▶ Establishing a framework for operating during a crisis situation.
- ▶ Establishing checklists and procedures.

Practicing allows staff to:

- ▶ Test the plan.
- ▶ Learn lessons without the severe consequences of a real emergency.
- ▶ Perform under pressure.



Cedar Grove Middle School students practice Shelter-in-Place

Schools that conduct drills and full-scale exercises gain valuable experience and learn important lessons. These two forms of practice offer administrators the opportunity to test their plans and make appropriate adjustments so they are ready for a real incident.

- ▶ **Drills** are of short duration. A lockdown or evacuation drill can be completed within 20 minutes. A drill will test the procedures, the communication system, and the reaction of staff and students. It stops short of involving the Incident Command System (i.e., fire, rescue or law enforcement/security forces).
- ▶ **Full-scale Exercises** take several hours and require the entire community to participate. Exercises test the Incident Command System's reaction and the coordination that has taken place with the school.

Administrators are encouraged to conduct some form of practice routinely throughout the year. Just as a football team scrimmages so it can perform well in a game, a school needs to practice so it can perform well in a crisis situation. ■

Security Orientations for Substitutes

How can you ensure that substitute teachers, or teachers who visit the school infrequently, understand your protective action procedures? Provide each new substitute a two-minute overview of your security procedures when they sign in at the office. Include a security orientation in the packet prepared for substitute teachers by providing them a flip chart or one-page summary of your evacuation, lockdown, shelter-in-place and take cover procedures. ■

Responding to Concerns About Drills

Some educators resist practicing protective action drills because they are concerned about unnecessarily alarming **students**. Administrators concerned about scaring children note that young elementary students have trouble distinguishing between real and imaginary events. They practice protective actions during teacher work days, when students are not in the building, to avoid the risk that students might think there is a real perpetrator and have nightmares. The rationale for drills is simple. Positive responses to address concerns about drills are listed below.



These U.S. public middle school students practice leaving their portable classrooms to shelter-in-place in the gymnasium.

- ◆ **Preparation minimizes fear.** The more children practice, the less unusual the procedures feel. Teachers need to carefully talk through the procedures, in age-appropriate language, before implementing them for the first time.
- ◆ **Participation boosts students' sense of security.** Children feel more secure when they learn how to protect themselves. Drills also provide an opportunity to teach students what to do if they find themselves outside of class during a lockdown.

Other administrators confide that objections from **parents and sponsors** deter them from practicing their incident response procedures. Appropriate communication can preempt objections, but it is important to start early. Notify parents and sponsors prior to a drill or full-scale exercise and remind families throughout the school year, that your comprehensive safe school program is designed to protect their children. Use the tips below to reassure parents and sponsors that drills will help their children feel more secure and be better prepared.

- ◆ **Put the drills in perspective.** Provide an orientation at the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meetings. Discuss actions the school is taking to reduce risk (i.e., publicizing the anti-bullying policy, implementing mentoring programs), as well as those preparations the school has made to respond to an incident (evacuation, lockdown, shelter-in-place and take cover).
- ◆ **Send a letter home.** Send a letter to parents/sponsors immediately prior to the drills to alert parents that the drills will be conducted. Notify parents/sponsors that if they are visiting the school during a lockdown or shelter-in-place drill, they will be “locked in” for the duration of the drill.
- ◆ **Review parent reunification procedures.** Remind parents of the protocol for picking up children during an incident. Explain that if students are evacuated to an alternative site, parents can obtain their child at the parent-student reunification center by presenting photo identification.
- ◆ **Cite the regulations.** Inform parents that DoDEA requires practice lockdowns. The requirement to conduct regular lockdown drills is spelled out in DoDEA Regulation 4700.2, “Internal Physical Security” (page 11, paragraph E2.2.1.3) available at: www.dodea.edu/regs/regs_num.htm. Also, DoDEA Manual 1005.1, “Administrator’s Manual,” reiterates the requirement to practice lockdown drills. The Administrator’s Manual states, “Principals should have a well-coordinated and practical antiterrorism plan, school evacuation and lockdown plans, and crisis management plans for students and staff” (page 131, paragraph 47.3.3.1).
- ◆ **Provide special needs children with extra attention.** Some special needs students sometimes respond adversely to any departure from their daily routines. Assigning an aide to carefully prepare and work with special needs students during a drill can lessen this reaction.

Sponsors and parents have heard of the violent incidents that have occurred in schools throughout the world. Consequently, they will appreciate the staff’s efforts to protect students. ■



Best Practice: Mentoring

Mentoring benefits both youth and adults. A recent research brief published by Child Trends, a non-profit research organization, confirms the value of mentoring. The report, *Mentoring: A Promising Strategy for Youth Development*, found that mentoring improves both attendance and attitudes toward school. Mentored youth are more likely to go to college and less likely to become involved with drugs, alcohol, or violence.

Recruiting mentors is a challenge. However, adults usually enjoy mentoring once they become involved. Ninety-nine percent of adults in mentoring relationships would recommend the experience to others. The AOL Time Warner Foundation recently surveyed 2,000 adults and estimated that 57 million adults would seriously consider mentoring. Adults expressing an interest in mentoring typically were between the ages of 18 and 44, had some college education, access to the Internet, and a child in their household.

Fortunately, DoDEA schools enjoy an established working relationship with one of the best mentoring organizations available: Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS). For information on existing mentoring programs in your area contact BBBS at: www.bbbsi.org.

The National Mentoring Center and the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention published an 82 page mentoring training manual that includes sample lesson plans and activities. The manual is available for free at: www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/training_new_mentees.pdf. For further information on the Child Trends report, visit: www.nwrel.org/mentoring/research.html. ■

Middle School Youth Susceptible to Experimenting with Choking Games

Experts warn that middle school youth are particularly susceptible to experimenting with choking games because they are still developing sound judgment, and are often heavily influenced by peer pressure. Dr. Gary Park, Director of Critical Care at Mary Bridge's Hospital in Tacoma, Washington, said that 9 to 15 year-olds are at the greatest risk. Dr. Thomas Andrew, New Hampshire's Chief Medical Examiner and consultant on 20 choking game deaths, agreed and added, "These victims are high-achieving, sports and action-oriented kids."

Many students learn about the choking games via e-mail or the Internet. They refer to these games by several alternative or street names, including:

- ✓ Airplaning
- ✓ Black Hole
- ✓ Blackout
- ✓ Dream Game
- ✓ Fainting
- ✓ Flatliner
- ✓ Knock Out
- ✓ Pass Out
- ✓ Space Cowboy
- ✓ Space Monkey

An adult who hears students talking about playing such games needs to intervene, and warn children about the risks of brain damage and death. For further information see the related article on page 1 of this newsletter or visit:

- ◆ ConnectWithKids.com: "The Choking Game – What Parents Need to Know" www.connectwithkids.com/tipsheet/2005/235_jun29/choke.html.
- ◆ "Stop-the-Choking-Game" a public awareness campaign sponsored by parents of victims: www.stop-the-choking-game.com/services.html.
- ◆ "Teen Choking Game Newsletter" free subscription required: www.teenchokinggame.com. ■

Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum

Second Step is a violence prevention program for students, pre-K through ninth-grade. It was designated an exemplary program by the U.S. Department of Education. Used across the U.S., as well as in foreign countries such as Germany and Japan, *Second Step* contains grade specific curriculum in three learning areas:

1. Empathy.
2. Impulse control and problem solving.
3. Emotion and anger management.

The pre-K through kindergarten curriculum kit includes: emotion cards, hand puppets, stuffed animals, CDs, posters, teacher and administrator guides, and a parent awareness packet. The puppets are intended to help introduce topics, such as showing others that you care about them when they are upset, and how to react when you don't get what you want. Scripts for teachers to use in these puppet shows are on the back of the emotion cards. In addition, the "Be Calm Bunny" stuffed animal serves as a "talking stick," telling children when it is their turn to talk.

For grades 1-9, photo lesson cards, overhead transparencies, academic integration suggestions, posters, teacher and administrator guides, and live action videos make up the curriculum kits. Each video leaves a conflict unresolved, prompting a discussion and encouraging students to come up with a solution to the problem that was introduced.

For example, in a video for younger students, one boy pushes another away from a microscope before it is his turn. The video models how to calm down, and then prompts students to think further when the first solution the boy tries – talking to his classmate – doesn't work. A video for middle and high school students demonstrates how to deal with put-downs. It shows two boys making fun of each other on the basketball court. As the confrontation escalates into a fist fight, the video takes the concept a step further, by asking students to differentiate between light-hearted teasing among friends and put-downs that are truly nasty and mean.

The video clips and sample materials are professional and well produced. The program is well organized and easy to use; it does not require a lot of extra planning by teachers. In addition, the program includes Spanish language materials, a brochure on how to implement the program, and tools to evaluate how successful the program has been at your school – an important step that is often overlooked.



Unlike many other prevention programs, an abundance of research has been conducted regarding the effectiveness of *Second Step* in reaching its goals, including decreasing physical aggression on the playground. These studies can be found in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and *Applied and Preventive Psychology*. (For full citations, please visit: www.cfchildren.org/aboutf/mediaf/solutions).

The Committee for Children, the creators of *Second Step*, offers a free preview CD-ROM, which provides an excellent overview of the entire program. This tool should help administrators decide if *Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum* would be right for their school. To order a preview CD-ROM, visit: www.cfchildren.org/requestf/. For more information about *Second Step*, see the Prevention Programs section of your Safe Schools Handbook, page 3-31. ■