

### The Impact of Violence and Bullying

Violence is an epidemic that has impacts beyond the physical and emotional trauma associated with the victims. The effects of all forms of violence are far reaching and can be linked to a variety of negative outcomes including academic failure, depression, suicide, substance abuse, and multiple adverse health conditions in children and adults. Violence contributes to the weakening of families, schools, communities, and neighborhoods and has broad financial and economic consequences for society as a whole.

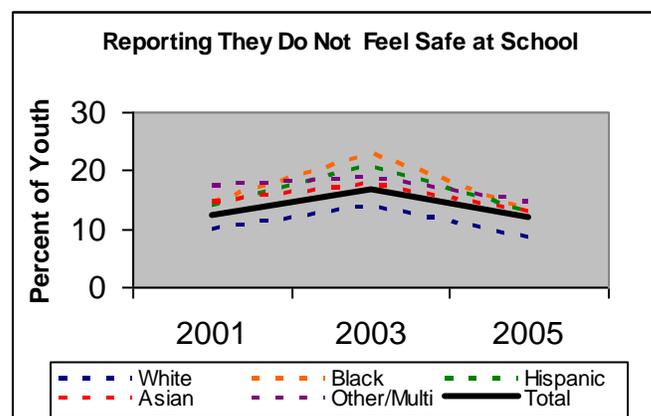
- **Bullying** is a form of violence that affects its victims in life-long ways. Victims of chronic bullying have higher rates of anxiety and depression and lower self-esteem, even as adults. They are more likely to carry a weapon, skip school, use drugs or alcohol, and fail academically.
- Victims of **Domestic Violence** can suffer acute and chronic physical and mental health problems – even long after the abuse has ended. Children and youth who witness domestic violence often have the same emotional responses as children who have been abused. They are frequently anxious, depressed, or act out inappropriately, impacting their academic success, their ability to make friends, and potentially, their life long mental wellness. Teen dating violence can also have multiple negative outcomes for the victim, and may be a predictor of future domestic violence among perpetrators.
- **Youth Violence** is a complex problem that impacts victims, perpetrators, their families, and the community as a whole. Violence or fear of violence can influence an individual's school attendance, have physical and mental health consequences, and economic cost for the community at large.

Fairfax County spent an estimated \$2 million in 2007 to detain youth for assault or violent offenses. Long term costs are far greater.

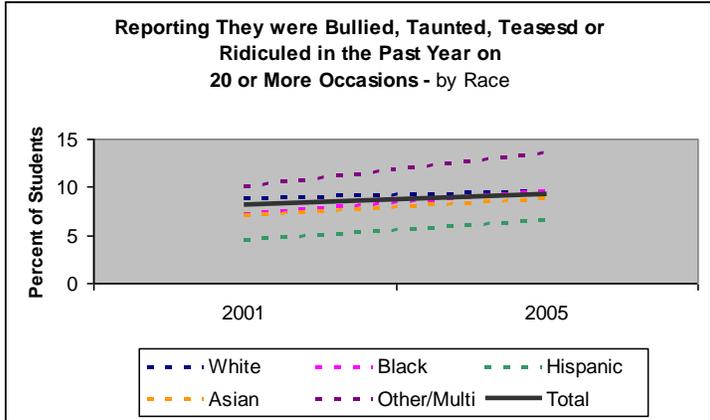
### Selected Indicators: How Are We Doing?

All children and youth deserve to feel safe in their homes, schools, and communities. The following indicators were selected to measure our progress in reaching our goal: **Children and Youth Safe from Violence and Bullying.**

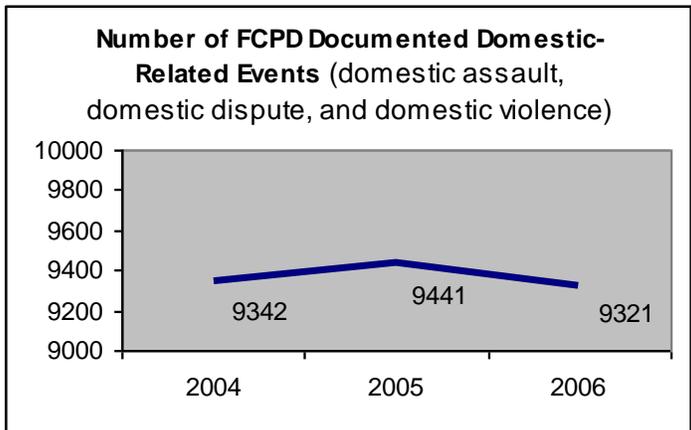
**Percent of youth reporting they do not feel safe in school:** This is measured every two years on the Fairfax County Youth Survey administered to approximately 12,000 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students.



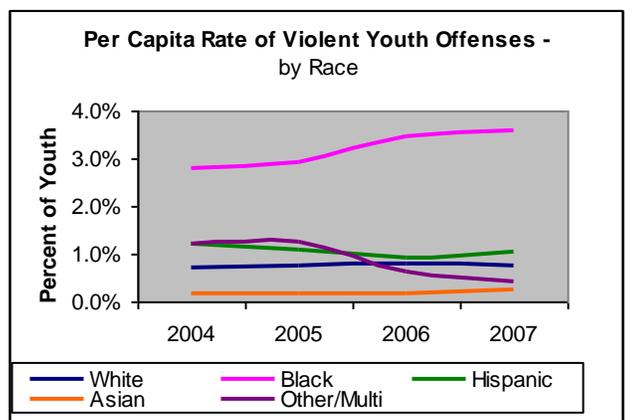
**Percent of youth who report that they have been bullied on 20 or more occasions in the past year:** This question is asked every two years on the Fairfax County Youth Survey administered to approximately 12,000 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. Students are asked to report how many times they have been bullied, taunted, teased, or ridiculed in the past year. The number 20 was selected to represent those that may face chronic bullying.



**Number of FCPD Documented Domestic-Related Events:** These numbers represent the annual number of domestic violence events documented by FCPD, including domestic assault, domestic dispute, and domestic violence.



**Per Capita Rate of Selected Violent Youth Offenses:** This number represents the annual intake for selected offenses including simple assault, assault against a family member, assault by mob, assault on a teacher or principal, firearm use in commission of felony, stabbing, cutting, wounding with malicious intent, shooting, intent to maim, street robbery, sexual battery, and aggravated sexual battery with victim under age thirteen.



## Root Cause Analysis

Violence, in any form, is related to a variety of complex issues and factors. This goal **Children and Youth are Safe from Violence and Bullying**, encompasses multiple forms of violence including community, domestic/intimate partner, bullying, gang/street, school, and family. This multi-agency group examined the underlying factors leading to each type of violence and the relationship between them. They did not just look at the most immediate and easily observed factors leading to violence, but examined the more complex and underlying root causes or systemic factors affecting violence. The results of this root cause analysis were organized into the following three categories:

*"Violence is not the problem of one neighborhood or group, and the response and solutions are not the responsibility of one sector of the community or of one agency, professional group, or business. Coming together and owning this problem and the solutions are central."*

-Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith,  
Harvard School of Public  
Health

### **Power and Control**

Individuals perpetrating violence often do so as a result of a need for power and control. Such a need can be a result of feelings of powerlessness, economic disparity, abuse of power, limited or lack of resources, perceived and real disparities in access, or racism and oppression. Inequality and feelings of powerlessness can lead to multiple forms of violence.

Other individual factors can also result in a need for power and control including insecurity, self esteem, self determination and limited skills in areas such as developing healthy relationships, problem solving, and communication. Parents and caregivers without these skills may be unable to teach or model them for their children.

### **Lack of Connectedness/Isolation**

Feeling a sense of connection or belonging to a community is a key element and strong predictor of quality of life. Conversely, individuals lacking that connection to community, family, or school are at risk for a host of negative outcomes, including violence. Other challenges such as cultural norms, citizenship status, lack of health care, economic challenges, and language or other cultural barriers can lead to isolation. Young people lacking that connection may seek it in gangs or negative relationships. Isolated adults are at risk for a variety of poor outcomes including depression, child abuse or domestic violence, and may lack the social skills necessary to educate and engage their children.

Lacking connections can also make it harder to gain empathy and social skills. Without connections, individuals can lose that sense of accountability and social responsibility

### **Social Norms**

Individuals act within a social context based on their life experiences, culture, and perceptions of others' behaviors and attitudes. A lack of understanding, tolerance, and acceptance of differences related to culture, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, and varying perspectives on acceptable forms of violence and discipline can lead to conflict, perceived racism, oppression, and other unintended consequences. Additionally, research suggests that exposure to violent media can influence social norms and support the belief that violence is normal and acceptable. Media can desensitize individuals and society to violence and create an artificial sense of risk and safety.

### **Other Contributing Factors**

The group examined a variety of factors which are sometimes associated with violent behavior, such as untreated mental illness and substance abuse. While untreated mental illness coupled with substance abuse can increase the relative risk of violence, these factors are not necessarily the root cause of violent

behavior. The risk of perpetrating violence cannot be attributed to all individuals experiencing these issues. In fact, people with a mental illness are more likely to be the victims, rather than the perpetrators of violence. Risk of injury to self, including suicide, can be higher among these populations.

While the risk of violence among people with mental illness as a group is no higher than for others in the general population, dealing with the stressors associated with mental illness and substance abuse may increase the risk of becoming a perpetrator or victim of violence. Therefore, a focus on prevention, intervention, treatment and increased understanding of substance use disorders and mental illness are vital to a countywide strategy addressing the complexity of violence and the health and well-being of children and youth.

## **How Can We Make a Difference?**

Based on the root cause analysis, the Goal Group developed five **Recommendations** intended to guide our system's approach to *Keeping Children and Youth Safe from Violence and Bullying*.

**Recommendation 1: Develop a web-based *Best Practice Guide* that will include research on evidence-based programs, practices and principles that are shown to be effective for addressing violence and bullying.**

This resource will include links to *Demonstrated or Model Programs*, but should also include *Essential Components of Program and Practice* drawn from research and the root cause analysis in this report. Some examples drawn from this group's work include:

- Programs and practices should include elements that allow young people opportunities for initiative and leadership and empower them to set and follow through on goals.
- Programs and practices for youth should incorporate self worth, cooperative learning, building empathy, and positive behavioral support.
- Program and practices should encourage the positive involvement of adults and family.
- Programs and practices should address risk factors in multiple settings (family, neighborhood, schools, community)
- Programs and policies should stress both the role and the involvement of peers and concerned adults in resolving conflict.

The development and use of best practices should promote and build capacity for the use of proven approaches to violence prevention. **All county, school and county-funded programs must use the Best Practice Guide when developing programs, practices, and policies to ensure positive outcomes and consistency in approach.**

**Recommendation 2: Convene a cross-agency team (or sub-group of the Prevention Coordinating Team) to:**

- Examine county, school, and community policies related to violence and bullying and make recommendations for alignment of those policies among county and school agencies. Develop standards for consistent implementation and enforcement across schools, county agencies and the community which include consistent consequences for bullies, clear standards and expectations, and clearly identifiable resources and support for victims and bystanders. Include anti-bullying and harassment policies in schools and other youth-serving programs/institutions.

- Explore county and school policies and barriers that limit participation of the most under-served and at-risk youth, including those in alternative schools.
- This group should have decision-making authority or direct access to decision makers in order to eliminate barriers and refine policies.

**Recommendation 3: Support and expand culturally competent family and neighborhood support initiatives for the most at-risk and hard-to-reach populations.**

The Fairfax County System’s approach should address risk factors in multiple settings, specifically in families, schools and neighborhoods. As part of a countywide effort to address violence in neighborhoods and families, develop a common approach to community engagement and service integration that:

- Builds on strengths of individuals, families and communities
- Builds trust and improves relationships and connectedness to schools, neighbors, service providers, and police
- Develops and engages community and youth leadership
- Increases knowledge and access to community resources

This approach should also include support opportunities for parents of older children and multi-cultural families. Just as educational and skill building programs for parents of young children help them understand child development and appropriate interactions and disciplines, parent education and support for parents of middle age children and adolescents can also help build those skills and increase understanding of adolescent development.

**Recommendation 4: Identify, or develop, and implement a dating violence curriculum in partnership with FCPS, after-school programs, and community and faith-based programs.**

National statistics suggest that between 10 and 20 percent of high school girls have experienced some sort of physical or sexual violence. These victims are more likely than their classmates to be threatened or injured, bring a weapon to school, skip school, use drugs or alcohol, or consider suicide. It is therefore recommended that Fairfax County identify or develop a curriculum with an emphasis on preventing dating violence among youth. The curricula should focus on healthy relationships, communication skills, and developing respect. The program should also work with Domestic and Sexual Assault (DASA) staff and other community experts to serve as liaisons and resources to those delivering the curricula and the young people participating.

**Recommendation 5:** Implementing a consistent system-wide, school-based bullying prevention program (such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program <http://www.clemson.edu/olweus/> ) and a countywide Bullying Awareness Campaign (such as the STOP Bullying NOW Campaign - <http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/index.asp?area=main> ) to ensure a consistent approach to targeting common outcomes.

## **What Else Do We Need to Know**

The Goal Group identified the following additional data needs:

- A systematic way of tracking and reporting Child Protective Services (CPS) calls that include domestic violence

- A method of collecting and reporting the number of domestic violence clients seen by allied professionals
- A measure of the number of young people who feel unsafe in their community
- The number of youth reporting that they have been a victim of dating violence (physical or sexual)
- Twenty-four hour tracking and consistent data collection from the Victim's Assistance Network