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Violence Involving Youth

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- Six hundred and fifty nine children ages 12 and younger were murdered in 1999 (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2000).
 - Firearms were used in more than half of all murders of youth ages 0-18 (Ibid).
 - One-third of 11-18 year olds were involved in at least one serious violent fight in the past twelve months (Udry, 1998).
 - Thirty-three percent (33%) of all sexual assault victims reported to police were between the ages of 12 and 17 (Snyder, 2000).

Overview

Violence committed against and committed by the youth of America is a serious problem. The victimization of youth ranges from child abuse, child sexual abuse, gang violence and youth-on-youth attacks to hate violence, rape and murder. In alarming rates, young people are turning to violence to resolve their problems and to criminal activity as a lifestyle choice. There are many theories about this type of violence. Some theorists suggest that children learn from their environment-- be it the influence of a crime filled neighborhood, an abusive home, or an isolated rural area where support services are minimal.

Communities across America are responding by offering a multitude of programs to help decrease youth crime and victimization. Parenting skills development programs have been established in many communities to educate parents about coping skills -- including practicing positive anger management -- in hopes of reducing child abuse and domestic violence in the home environment.

In addition, school systems are beginning to develop intervention programs aimed at detecting child abuse. Such programs are integrated within school systems and offer children and youth a safe haven to turn to when a crisis occurs.

Educators have stressed the importance of developing educational curricula which teach self-esteem, conflict resolution skills, respect for cultural diversity and pride in one's culture. Effective curricula in this area are introduced in early childhood education and are consistently reinforces throughout the duration of a child's educations. Such efforts require the support of parents, teachers, social workers and community leaders working together.

Programs for At-risk Youth

Another approach to address youth violence is the development of programs where at-risk youth are united with inmates to see first hand the consequences of anti-social, criminal behavior. The

innovative "Impact of Crime on Victims" program sponsored by the California Youth Authority teaches youthful offenders about how their criminal actions affect their victims, their families, their communities, and themselves.

Communities can offer volunteer opportunities for youth, neighborhood crime watch programs and mentor programs. Such programs empower young people to feel a sense of responsibility to their communities and some control over their future.

Programs such as these can begin to address violence against our children -- an investment that is essential to our society's future. Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children's Defense Fund, sums up the importance of this goal: "The inattention to our children by our society poses a greater threat to our safety, harmony, and productivity than any external enemy."

Youth and the Internet

Adults are not the only ones spending time online. More than 30 million U.S. children have online access (Pew Internet and American Life, 2001). According to a study by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 1 out of 5 youth ages 10-17 who use the internet regularly received at least one sexual solicitation over the past year (Finkelhor, 2000). More disturbing is that less than 10 percent (10%) of sexual solicitations are reported to authorities such as a law enforcement agency, an internet service provider, or a hotline (Ibid).

Youth can be easy prey for online predators. Parents and care-givers need to monitor the time children spend online. Teaching youth to safeguard personal information is an effective method of safety planning. Online safety awareness for youth is extremely important.

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