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a national information link to foster the prevention of intentional injuries

Supporting Schools to Create Safe Environments by Gurvinder Singh

Schools are among the most powerful institutions to shape the future, success, health and safety of children. RespectED coordinator Eunice Begg describes strategies used to help schools in northern and central Saskatchewan create safety.

Schools are among the most powerful institutions that shape the future, success, health and safety of children. As such, RespectED places special emphasis on the transformative role that schools have in prevention education. Across Canada, it works with schools and school boards to reduce violence and abuse by delivering comprehensive programs, training and tools—a complete system.

RespectED coordinator for the North & Central Saskatchewan Region, Eunice Begg, describes the strategy she

uses in working with the communities in her region:

We engage schools through comprehensive strategies in order to create safe environments for everyone—students, parents and staff. RespectED encourages and supports schools by offering consultation in the screening of personnel, development of codes of conduct, bullying and harassment policies, and guidelines for handling issues of concern. We work with school leadership to help develop committees for safe environments that include broad representation such as: youth, teachers, parents, elders, school bus drivers, administrators, local police officer reps., health, and guidance professionals, community organizations (2008).

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The experience of RespectED, in action for over 24 years, has shown that a combination of policies, education and support can lead to effective results. Policies need to include step by step procedures so everyone in the school community has clarity on roles and responsibilities, understands acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, knows how to access support and report concerns of violence, abuse or bullying.

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New Canadian Red Cross Risk Management Manual by Gurvinder Singh

The Canadian Red Cross has recently launched a new manual, *Ten Steps to Creating Safe Environments for Children and Youth*.

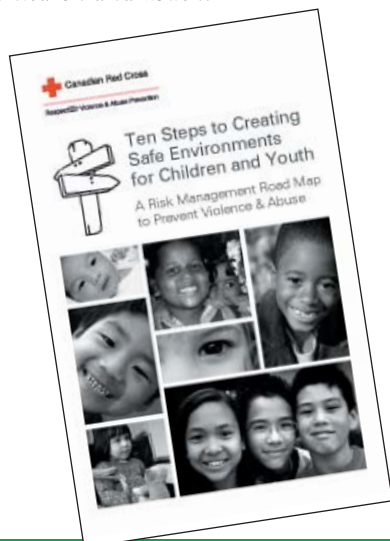
This publication provides a road map for working with young people to help develop, implement and monitor steps to reduce the risk of violence and abuse.

The manual is suitable for any organizations working with children or youth, and will help to both meet the legal duty of care and keep children safe.

Visit www.redcross.ca/RespectED and click on the *Ten Steps* program to learn more, order the *Ten Steps* book (\$10), or download the pdf version for **FREE**

You can also order the *Ten Steps* book by phoning the Canadian Red Cross Contact Centre at 1-888-307-7997

Ten Steps is available in French and English.



The Ten Steps to Safe Environments

1. Understand the issues of violence and abuse—physical, emotional and sexual,
2. Recognize the vulnerability and resilience of children and youth,
3. Define protection systems—including Provincial and Territorial laws and organizational policies,
4. Create a prevention team to lead the integration of safety into the organization,
5. Complete a risk assessment,
6. Develop policies and procedures,
7. Educate adults, youth and children,
8. Respond to disclosures of violence, abuse, bullying and harassment,
9. Meet the challenges, and
10. Maintain safe environments.

Supporting Schools to Create Safety *continued from page 1*

Policies are most effective when they are communicated to the entire school community and community at large on a regular basis so everyone is informed and working together.

Prevention education is another key component to school safety. The goal is to proactively promote safe, caring environments, preventing violence, abuse, bullying and harassment from happening in the first place. With this education in place, everyone is able to recognize violent behaviour for what it is, enabling an appropriate response when it occurs.

One example of schools taking a proactive role in educating youth on safety is the RespectED program *Beyond the Hurt (BTH)*. The program addresses bullying and harassment between young people and is delivered by youth in collaboration with adults like teachers or community volunteers. Begg highlights that, “Youth facilitators are recognized as leaders among their peers. They are role models for the difference each individual can make when they choose to become involved. Youth facilitators inspire their peers to take action in creating safe environments for all.” Teachers, who often also take the training course and sometimes co-facilitate with youth, provide support, along with the Red Cross, to the school-based youth facilitators. To ensure the entire school community is familiar with the program and its messages, *BTH* adult information workshops to school staff, principals, school administrative staff and parents are also provided. “The important thing is to get the consistent training and information to as many players as possible so everyone is operating on the same page and with the same definitions,” says Begg.

With the entire school community working together, the end result of building a safer school environment is achievable. This collaborative effort—the power in numbers idea has proven itself worldwide in hundred of situations. Together we can support the creation of safer learning environments for children.

Canada Raises the Age of Consent from 14 to 16 ...with Exceptions by Kristy Harcourt

Over a number of years and through consultations under several governments, raising the legal age of consent has been debated across political, religious and social lines. Effective May 1st, 2008, the legal age of consent to sexual activity in Canada was raised from 14 to 16.

RespectED: Violence & Abuse Prevention educates young people on a range of topics, including child abuse and relationship violence, with a focus on stopping the cycle of violence. In 2006/07, trained educators helped more than 50,000 youth understand child abuse and/or relationship violence, know they are never the victim’s fault, and learn ways to promote healthy relationships and to get help for themselves or a friend. Since sexual violence can be a component of both child abuse and relationship violence, educating young people about the age of consent law falls under RespectED’s mandate. And because RespectED operates under the Red Cross principle of neutrality—meaning it may not take sides in political or ideological controversies—youth receive the facts.

Teaching young persons the age of consent law presents some challenges. From a teen’s perspective, *consent* often means simply *giving permission*, in the same sense as a caregiver might “give permission” for a youth to go on a field trip.

RespectED educators help youth understand that the legal age of consent is different by explaining that while a young person may feel equipped to permit sexual activity, the law can overrule the young person’s feelings about the situation where certain factors—including age and characteristics of the relationship—come into play. The educators communicate that Age of Consent legislation is part of the *Criminal Code of*

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KEY CHANGES

- ◆ youth can consent to non-exploitative sexual activity at age 16
- ◆ close-in-age exception: youth aged 14-15 can consent to non-exploitative sexual activity with partner who is less than 5 years older
- ◆ close-in-age exception: youth aged 12-13 can consent to non-exploitative sexual activity with partner who is less than two years older
- ◆ charges can be laid for non-contact sexual assault such as luring and exposing oneself to a child under 16

Educators Using Technology to Groom Children and Youth: Dangerous Trends in Schools by Gurvinder Singh

The ability to manipulate and harm children is not confined to physical space. It also extends into cyberspace. When harm in both of these environments is combined, there is an increased risk to young persons. A United States news story as reported by CNN on January 11, 2008, (<http://www.cnn.com/2008/CRIME/01/11/teachers.charged/index.html>) describes allegations of abuse against teachers using cell phones.

The charges highlight a new trend in which mobile technologies, like cell phones, blackberries, and laptops, are re-framing the way people in positions of trust and authority can “groom” children. Mobile technologies can act



as a veil hiding conversations, even as they occur, in the same room—often the communications may not even be noticed by anyone else. “The fact is a teacher can show absolutely zero outward signs of interest in a child, but

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Ontario Youth “Stand Up” and Win Red Cross Public Service Announcement Contest

by Gurbinder Singh

The winners of the Stand Up 2 Bullying video public service announcement (PSA) contest have been chosen, and the top 3 are all from Ontario.

In the fall of 2007, RespectED launched its Stand Up 2 Bullying campaign to raise awareness of the problem of bullying in schools and ways to prevent it. Youth were challenged to create a video PSA to share a peer-to-peer message that a bystander can stop bullying

by “standing up.” Statistics show bullying stops half the time in under 10 seconds when a friend or classmate steps in (Hawkins, Pepler and Craig, 2001, *Naturalistic Observations of Peer Interventions in Bullying*, published in *Social Development*, 10(4): 512-527). The campaign used multiple strategies to reach youth across Canada. Particularly popular were a youth website that provided interactive information on bullying and harassment, group interactions on popular social marketing websites

like Facebook, and a contest that invited youth to provide a 60-second video on the theme of standing up to bullying. From the many creative entries, three winners were selected—all from Ontario.

The first place winners were: Stephen Merrick, Justin Kucharuck and Martin Mor of Holy Cross Catholic Secondary School - St. Catharine's who were awarded a \$500 HBC Gift Card. Please visit the Stand Up 2 Bullying website to see all of the winning entries: www.standup2bullying.com.

Having all the winners in Ontario has created an excellent opportunity for RespectED. Program staff can further develop their relationships with schools and to capitalize on media coverage and public interest to advance the issue of bullying prevention.

RespectED bullying prevention programs focus on youth and adults and emphasize that people who bully, are bullied or are bystanders—including youth, teachers and parents—all have a role in stopping it. No one deserves to be hurt.

No one can tell you who you are better than you. Don't listen to bullies, listen to your heart! ~Christine Cabral, Grade 2, Holy Cross Catholic School, Georgetown, ON



Third place winners, from Holy Cross Catholic School, Georgetown, ON (not listed in order of appearance): Emma Scantland, Erin Troughton, Gabriela Suarez, Julia McKnight, Talor Mallais, Alison Kim, Thomas Davies, Joshua Ivanyshtyn, Max Mancuso, Ryan Keane, Joshua Emmerson, Holly McNeil, Shannon Weslake, Kayla Schumacker, Monika Nawrocki, and Amy Desousa

Canada's Age of Consent Law *continued from page 2*

Canada, and when someone is charged with sexual assault, one possible defence is that the alleged victim had given consent to the act.

It is important to note that the law is focused on prohibiting sexual activity between youth and adults, not on criminalizing sexual activity between peers, and so contains “close-in-age” exemptions for youth aged 12–15. If a youth is 12 or 13, the law allows for consent to sexual activity with someone less than two years older. If a youth is 14 or 15, the law allows for consent to sexual activity with someone less than five years older—with exemptions for couples who are married, live common law, or are pregnant or parenting together. A

youth of 16 or 17 is considered under the law to be able to consent to sexual activity with an adult of any age.

However, there are situations in which consent is considered impossible regardless of these age considerations.

There can be no consent when:

- ♦ The younger person is under 18 and the older person is in a position of trust or authority
- ♦ One person threatens or uses force
- ♦ A third party says “yes” for someone
- ♦ A person is incapable of consent (e.g., intoxicated)
- ♦ One person expressed in words or conduct a lack of agreement or changed his/her mind at any point.

Any non-consensual sexual activity is sexual assault, regardless of the victim's age.

Another change under the new law takes into account sexual luring of a young person (*Criminal Code* section 172). Previously, criminal statutes allowed police to lay charges for abducting a 14- or 15-year-old, but not for non-contact acts of sexual violence. Now, chargeable offences include facilitating sexual interference, invitation to sexual touching, exposure, and abduction of a child under the age of 16.

To read the full government bill, visit <http://www.parl.gc.ca/LEGISINFO/index.asp?Language=E> and look up the Royal Assent version of the text of Bill C-2

Unsafe Schools A World Issue by Gurvinder Singh

Although the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* calls for safety for all persons under 18 and the UN *World Report on Violence against Children* demands an end to all violence against children in all settings, many young people continue to be unsafe in the place where they spend a majority of their day: school.

Reports from all parts of the world show again and again that children—of all ages and both genders—can be at risk of harm not only from their peers, but also from teachers, school administrators and other staff.

Factors that contribute to children's vulnerability to violence in schools include:

- ◆ Length of time children spend in school,
- ◆ Public attitudes accepting education systems as inherently right and in control of young people,
- ◆ Caregivers handing over authority to educators while children are in their care,
- ◆ Educators' power in the lives of young people,
- ◆ Educators' control of children's physical environment, academic marks and school record, and
- ◆ Children's fear of reporting violence because of the above reasons (Adapted from Wolfe, Jaffe, Jette, and Poisson, 2001, *Child Abuse in Community Institutions and Organizations*, published by the Law Commission of Canada).

An alarming number of children continue to be physically, sexually, and psychologically harmed in ways that are openly sanctioned or quietly tolerated by school staff or even governments. A report entitled *Ending Legalized Violence Against Children* (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2006, http://www.crin.org/docs/Gobal_report.pdf) shows that as of November 2007, only 98 states—less than 50% of the countries in the world—have legally prohibited all school corporal punishment. The application of laws, where they do exist and could be enforced, varies significantly. Teachers are able, and sometimes even encouraged, to use their fists or objects (like sticks or canes) to injure, degrade, scare and punish children under the guise of “discipline.” Unfortunately, the idea that fear and violence can create positive change is a persistent one.

South Asia provides one example of just how commonplace and startling corporal punishment in schools can be. In Afghanistan, 83% of children report having been physically assaulted at school (United Nations (UN), 2006, *Violence Against Children in the Countries of South Asia*). In Pakistan, corporal punishment prevails in more than 40% of government schools and in 35% of private schools (UN, 2005, *Violence Against Children: Regional consultation*

Articles 19 & 28(2) of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* require school discipline be administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the whole *Convention*.

In December 2005, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the rights of the child that called for the elimination of all school corporal punishment and corporal punishment of children in detention (A/RES/60/231, December 23, 2006).

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The invention of disreputable legal concepts such as ‘reasonable chastisement’ and ‘lawful correction’ arises from the perception of children as the property of their parents. This is the modern equivalent of laws in force a century or two ago allowing masters to beat their slaves or servants, and husbands to beat their wives. Such ‘rights’ are based on the power of the stronger over the weaker and are upheld by means of violence and humiliation.

~Thomas Hammarberg, Human Rights Commissioner, Council of Europe, Issue Paper 2006/1 “Children and corporal punishment: The right not to be hit, also a children's right”, June 2006

Educators Abusing via Technology

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because of technology, they can have an ongoing relationship and no one would know,” says Ted Thompson, executive director for the United States-based National Association to Prevent Sexual Abuse of Children.

Mobile communications technologies have become embedded in the lives of young people and typically are a vital means of building and maintaining their relationships. Some adults can manipulate this social reliance on technology to flatter, give special attention, pass on pictures that may be sexual or not, and show affection to children over a period of weeks, months or years using e-mail, online messaging, cell phone calls or text messaging. Detective Joshua Shelton of the state of Georgia, as quoted in the CNN news article, says,

A lot of the time, these kids mistake the grooming activity for friendship, which is exactly what it's designed to do—to look like a platonic relationship when all they are really doing is getting closer and closer to them socially so they can get closer and closer to them physically.

The subterranean, unseen character of mobile communications can render them deceptively subtle and seemingly innocent. “The wooing via text messages, cell phone calls and e-mails is so subtle, so affirming and so indulgent, that by the time a teacher makes inquiries involving nudity, a child probably isn't alarmed,” says Betsy Ramsey of the DeKalb County Domestic Violence Task Force in Georgia.

To promote healthy and safe use of mobile technologies, prevention education programs must incorporate the issues of cyber safety. Children, youth, teachers, administrators and parents/caregivers must have the knowledge, skills and support to recognize abusive situations, know how to prevent or reduce potentially dangerous communications, and how and where to get help if they ever need it.

To learn more about preventing violence against children and youth, including online abuse, contact your local Canadian Red Cross.

Violence Prevention: On the International Agenda by Gurvinder Singh

Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

In December 2007, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement held its 30th International Conference in Geneva, Switzerland. Red Cross and Red Crescent national societies and governments from around the world joined together to determine key priorities for the following four-year period. The four themes of the conference were climate change, human migration, emerging public health issues and violence.

In the final declaration from the conference, violence was described as “a leading cause of preventable death, injury and human suffering worldwide” and moving forward, there was a resolve “to work together to develop at all levels comprehensive violence prevention and reduction programmes in order to build safer communities.” The unique needs of children were highlighted throughout the conference.

The Canadian Red Cross signed a pledge on Abuse of Power:

The International Federation is committed to the prevention of all kind of power abuse by its personnel, including staff, volunteers and all those working on behalf of the National Societies. The International Federation unequivocally condemns all forms of abuse of power. We recognize the extreme levels of suffering that result from all form of this behaviour and have adopted a “zero tolerance” approach towards sexual exploitation and abuse.

The Canadian Red Cross, in partnership with the Government of Canada, presented a pledge on Child Protection to “address the plight of children in violent urban settings and the creation of safe environments.” The focus of the pledge is to collaborate on research to prevent violence against children, raise awareness of the issue, implement prevention programs and to ensure implementation and monitoring mechanisms are employed to protect children involved in conflict.

United Nations

A week after the Red Cross Red Crescent International Conference, the United Nations hosted a special session marking the fifth anniversary of the *World Fit for Children summit of 2002*. Over five years ago, the governments of the world gathered to draw up time-bound goals for achieving children’s well-being in the areas of health, education, protection from abuse and violence, and combating HIV/AIDS.

The session identified progress over the past five years in important areas like the soaring achievement of reducing measles among children in Africa by 90%, and reducing the annual deaths of children under five to less than 10 million for the first time since records have been kept.

While progress has been made, sadly not all countries have benefited. In fact, some countries have slipped behind from where they started even five years ago. Issues like preventable poverty, discrimination, disease and violence continue to smother the potential of children across this world. The session highlighted the need for greater collaboration across sectors and agencies to tackle the compelling and urgent needs of children.

A youth representative from Kenya summed up the summit’s key messages during the closing ceremony:

The path to a world fit for children has been, and still is, long and difficult. We still have so much more to achieve. Since 2002, we have started following this path. We the children ... are the hope and the light that cannot be turned off. We have passed the half-way mark [to the Millennium Development Goals]. This is our final chance to urge you to keep your promises, and your final warning, that action needs to be taken. [W]hat matters most to us are results. Children don’t just want resolutions. Children want solutions. We don’t want to hear any more good intentions; we want to see more actions.



To read more about the 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, please see <http://www.icrc.ch/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/conf30>

For more information on the progress over the past five years on the World Fit for Children goals, see <http://www.unicef.ca/portal/SmartDefault.aspx?at=2143>

“The harsh reality is that children’s rights are being consistently violated in every country. These violations are compounded by ignorance, discrimination and the abuse of power.... Children all over the world are being bought and sold, exploited and abused, harmed and orphaned.”

~International Red Cross and Red Crescent statement at the UN Special Session on Children

Unsafe Schools *continued from page 4*

South Asia). In India, 65% of children interviewed for a recent study reported being beaten by teachers at school (Kacker, Varadan and Kumar, 2007, *Study on Child Abuse: India 2007*, published by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India).

In addition to physical abuse, emotional abuse is also pervasive. A U.S. report (Sullivan, 2007, *Deprived of Dignity*) on schools in New York City and Los Angeles found half of the students interviewed stated that their teachers sometimes or most of the time say things that humiliate or insult them, such as calling them stupid or ugly, or telling them they “belong in the ghetto”; one-third said their teachers rarely or never help them with their problems.

Children can also face taunting, torment and aggression in classrooms, hallways and playgrounds from their peers in the form of bullying. The Global School-Based Student Health Survey (<http://www.cdc.gov/GSHS/>) conducted in a wide cross-section of developing countries, revealed that between 20–65% of school-aged children reported having been verbally or physically bullied in school in the previous 30 days. Similar rates of bullying have been found in industrialised countries.



In addition to other forms of violence, allegations of sexual abuse of children by teachers are reported regularly in all parts of the world, including Canada. In the United States, Irvine and Tanner for the Associated Press (AP) (October 20, 2007, *Sexual Misconduct Plagues U.S. Schools*) reported AP investigative findings that 2,570 educators had their teaching credentials revoked, denied, surrendered or sanctioned from 2001 through 2005 following allegations of sexual misconduct. Further, the AP investigation uncovered that many other educators accused of sexual wrongdoing were able to make secret deals, with a promise to their districts to leave quietly—some leaving with new letters of recommendation.

Forcing children to have sex in exchange for passing marks has been found in countries across Africa. In South Africa, a study found that of all rapes of girls under the age of 15, 32% were committed by a teacher (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002). In Zimbabwe, a study revealed that almost 50% of teenage girls interviewed had experienced unwanted physical, including sexual, touches by boys at school (IRIN, 2006).

The level and diversity of abuse in many primary and secondary educational institutions throughout the world is staggering. Schools must be turned into places of safety. This requires not only coordinated preventative action—including policies with real consequences for abusive behaviour between students, teachers and administrators—but also support from parents, police and other members of the community. The essential role of advancing children’s well-being that schools epitomize can be made a reality for all children.

“Progress towards abolishing corporal punishment is being made, but millions of the world’s children still suffer from humiliating acts of violence and these violations of their rights as human beings can have serious and lifelong effects. **Violence begets violence and we shall reap a whirlwind.** If we really want a peaceful and compassionate world, we need to build communities of trust where all children are respected, where home and school are safe places to be and where discipline is taught by example.”

~Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Prevention Nexus is produced by RespectED: Violence & Abuse Prevention at The Canadian Red Cross.

Visit www.redcross.ca to learn more about RespectED and other Red Cross prevention programming.

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