

Anger Management for Teens



Today's teenagers are the first generation to have not just guns but automatic weaponry easily available to them, just as their parents' generation was the first to have wide access to drugs. The toting of guns by teenagers means that disagreements that in a former day would have led to fistfights can readily lead to shootings instead.

Survey data from middle and high school students in Clinton, Eaton, and Ingham Counties finds that: 15 percent of 14 year old students have carried a weapon, 35 percent were a victim of violence, 38 percent threatened someone, 30 percent indicated that they hurt someone badly, 32 percent have been physically harmed, and 56 percent would hit back or hurt worse if they were hit or pushed.

In the Kids Count Data Book 2004 for Michigan, the violent crime arrest rate per 1,000 was 6.6 in Ingham County compared to 3.3 in Michigan. Young people between the ages of 11 and 21 account for 35 percent of the violent crime in Ingham County. (Michigan State Police, 2004)

One reason some adolescents are so poor at handling anger is that as a society we have not bothered to make sure every child is taught the essentials of resolving conflicts positively—nor have we bothered to teach empathy, impulse control, or any of the other fundamentals of emotional competence. By leaving the emotional lessons children learn to chance, we risk largely wasting the

window of opportunity to help children cultivate a healthy emotional repertoire.

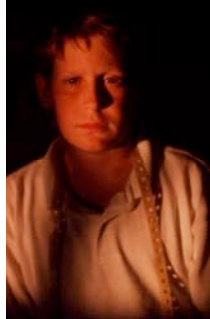
What is in store down the road for these high-risk youths if their impulsive and aggressive behaviors remain unchecked? Research shows that the majority are headed for a lifetime of failure, exacting a great toll from society. This group is particularly at risk for underachieving in school or dropping out, abusing drugs and alcohol, and performing below their potential throughout their careers. As parents, they are often physically and/or sexually abusive, and one in four are imprisoned for adult crimes by age 30.

The Anger Management for Teens program provides a research-based social and emotional learning program for youth ages 12 to 17 years old that teaches adolescents how to deal with emotions, resist impulsive behavior, resolve conflict, solve problems, and understand the consequences of their actions. These critical skills can help prevent violent behavior and improve teen's success in school and throughout their lives. This program focuses on the unique social and emotional learning needs of adolescents. The class teaches students step-by-step strategies for thinking through problems, including resisting peer pressure, dealing with bullying, and defusing potentially violent situations.



The program is free. New classes begin every 5 weeks. Each session is held for 10 weeks. The program is designed to reduce impulsive, high-risk, and aggressive behaviors and increase youth's social-emotional competence and other protective factors. Group discussion, modeling, coaching, and practice are used to increase students' social competence, risk assessment, decision-making ability, self-regulation, and positive goal setting.

The program's lessons are organized into three skill-building units covering: (1) Empathy: teaches youth to identify and understand their own emotions and those of others. (2) Impulse control and problem solving: helps youth choose positive goals, reduce impulsiveness, and evaluate consequences of their behavior in terms of safety, fairness, and impact on others. (3) Anger management: enables youth to manage emotional reactions and engage in decision making when they are highly agitated.



Empathy

Empathy appears to be a significant factor in the control of aggressive behavior. Empathic people are less likely to misunderstand and become angry about others' behaviors because they tend to understand other points of view. They also tend to inhibit aggressive behavior because observation of pain and distress in others elicits their own distress responses. The relationship of empathy to aggression in adolescence has empirical support. Aggressive delinquents were found to exhibit less empathy than non-aggressive delinquents⁶. Research on children's ability

to acquire and enhance empathy skills has achieved positive results.⁷

Anger Management

Like empathy training, anger management is an increasingly important strategy that can be effectively taught to adolescents.⁸ This strategy is comprised of the recognition of anger cues and external events that prompt angry feelings, the use of positive self-statements and relaxation techniques to prevent the onset of angry feelings, and reflection on the anger-provoking incident.

Impulse Control

There is also evidence that adolescents can learn impulse control in therapeutic and classroom environments.⁹ Two strategies have shown promise when used with groups of impulsive and aggressive youths: interpersonal cognitive problem solving and behavioral social skills training.¹⁰ The problem solving approach is applied to guide students in resolving interpersonal problems after they have effectively reduced their anger. Behavioral skills' training focuses on skills to use with specific types of provocations, such as bullying and challenges to fight. Our programs use these approaches. A study combining these two strategies found this approach most effective in instilling prosocial behavior.¹¹

⁷ Beland, 1990; Beland, Frey, and Sylvester, 1997

⁸ Novaco, 1975; Glick and Goldstein, 1987

⁹ Spivack and Levine, 1962; Spivack and Shure, 1974; Camp and Bush, 1985

¹⁰ Michelson, 1987; Dryfoos, 1993

¹¹ Machione, 1984