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# School Violence Prevention: What You Can Do



More than 219,000 students have experienced gun violence at school since the 1999 Columbine tragedy according to The Washington Post. While a report by the Institute for Education Sciences (IES) found that bullying rates, gang affiliation and instances of student victimization have decreased in recent years, the Center for Homeland Defense and Security (CHDS) notes a steep rise in gun violence. The CHDS reports that in 2018 alone, there were 97 gun-related incidents on a school campus that lead to 56 deaths and 109 injuries.

The events that took place at Columbine, Sandy Hook and Marjory Stoneman Douglas are forever etched in memories. For Birmingham, Alabama's Samford University Orlean Beeson School of Education faculty and administration, these events and others raised the question: "What can we do to protect and prevent within our local districts?"

In early 2018, discussions surrounding a curriculum devoted to school violence prevention began and the new B.A.D.G.E. Preventing School Violence Conference

series was a result of those discussions.

Over a five-year span, the series — led by co-developer Dr. Jonathan Doll — will examine five areas (B.A.D.G.E.) where advocates and educators can become agents of change in school violence prevention. These five areas are:

**Behavior, Applying Behavioral Skills**

**Attitudes, Reforming Attitudes**

**Delinquency, Reaching All Groups**

**Growth Mindset and Gradual Release**

**Elevating Excellence, Sustainability**

Doll, a consultant and author of "Ending School Shootings: School and District Tools for Prevention and Action," says, "Throughout the development process, we were strategic in designing a conference that it could be replicated in a variety of different cities and venues," said Doll.

According to Doll, communities should be forming and providing environments

The emphasis on school violence prevention has everything to do with the first tenet of **B.A.D.G.E** – behavior: educator behavior, family behavior, institutional behavior and student behavior.



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that are supportive of students at risk of violence and therefore establishing settings that are less conducive to potential incidents occurring.

“Our focus is not to teach schools how to stop an active shooter or create an emergency readiness plan. Those skills are very important, but our goal is to empower school districts to prevent these catastrophic events through early identification and intervention,” said Monique Gardner Witherspoon Samford University’s Orlean Beeson School of Education assistant dean.

The emphasis on school violence prevention has everything to do with the first tenet of B.A.D.G.E – behavior: educator behavior, family behavior, institutional behavior and student behavior. Different behaviors often lead towards violent actions and often times support could be offered to shift said behavior and prevent school violence. With learned proactive discipline techniques and restorative-type interventions, educators, parents, and advocates can begin developing an action plan for implementation within their school.

“School violence is not something new,”

said Doll. “It spans many forms, including bullying, abuse, threatening, fights, gang violence, weapon use, cyber acts of intimidation or threatening, other forms of hate-speech, and even to devastating acts of violence that involve law enforcement and the justice system. However, we believe that with the right supports, solutions can be found and practiced.”

So, what are the solutions? Collaboration, inclusivity and restoration, where possible, are the three most prudent solutions that can foster a more supportive environment in schools according to Doll. He also believes that social emotional learning is key. It is recognized that schools often face challenges in implementing these preventative solutions.

Doll also advocates that in order to provide the preventative solutions listed above, schools must first have a well-established system for identifying students in need of support. Additionally, there must be an increase in the level of empathy for students who are emotionally-hurting.

“Empathy does not mean that punishment and alternative educational

settings are avoided,” said Doll. “It means to provide services and supports for every at-risk student while not ignoring any threats to safety.”

“Recognizing trigger behaviors and addressing them before the occurrence of violence is key,” adds Witherspoon. “Hurt students, hurt students; therefore, we believe addressing behaviors and building supports is the first step to school violence prevention. But this is a gradual process and a shift that will take time.”

Witherspoon says she believes early identification and prevention is the answer, “We all want to take every measure possible to ensure that classrooms and schools are safe and hosting conferences that promote healthy dialog, discourse, awareness and professional learning is part of reaching a solution.”

*The B.A.D.G.E. Conference: Preventing School Violence is coordinated under the leadership of David Finn, Orlean Beeson School of Education professor and Tarsha Bluiett, Orlean Beeson School of Education associate professor and M.S.E. in Elementary Education director.*

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