



Early Identification and Intervention

Anger Management

What Works in Preventing School Violence

RESOURCES:

Eggert, L. (1994). *Anger Management for Youth: Stemming Aggression and Violence*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.
This book contains an anger management step-by-step training guide.

Larson, J.D. & McBride, J.A. (1992). *Think First: Anger and Aggression Management for Secondary Level Students (Treatment Manual)*. Whitewater, WI: Author.
This anger management curriculum comes with a session by session outline of how to train students in anger management as well as a videotape.

Goldstein, A. P. (1987). *Aggression Replacement Training: A Comprehensive Intervention for Aggressive Youth*. Champaign, IL: Research Press.
Describes a three-part training approach to train adolescents in aggression replacement therapy.

WEBSITES:

PAVNET Online: Partnership Against Violence Network.
www.pavnet.org
Links to resources on anger management and other youth violence prevention techniques.

SERA Learning
2675 Folsom Street, Suite 200
San Francisco, CA 94110
1-800-741-9473
Fax: 415-642-3548
www.sera.com
This organization provides information on anger management training and other resources developed by practitioners.

Among the most powerful risk factors for school violence is anger, especially sudden rage. Students who have not learned to manage their anger are at-risk for aggression, perhaps even violent explosive behavior. The goal of anger management is to help students with high levels of aggression or anger learn how to control their emotions. Helping students learn how to understand and manage their feelings may provide them with tools to avoid escalating negative feelings so as to avoid serious confrontations with students, teachers, and administrators.

Overview

In anger management, students are taught strategies (e.g., problem-solving skills) that enable them to control their anger in the face of a conflict. Although specific elements used in anger management vary, most programs use a combination of techniques. First, youth develop their ability to understand the perspective of others, to “put themselves in someone else’s shoes.” Second, students are taught to be aware of their emotional and physical states when they are angry. To help students learn self-control, some programs will teach relaxation techniques. Finally, students learn how to use a specific strategy (e.g., “Stop! Think! What should I do?”) to moderate their responses to potential conflicts. Students are typically trained in problem-solving skills including 1) identifying the problem; 2) generating alternative solutions; 3) considering the consequences of each solution; 4) selecting an effective response; and 5) evaluating outcomes of that response.¹

The intervention is usually taught in ten to twenty 45-60 minute sessions. Training typically lasts between six and eighteen weeks. Activities include group discussions, role-playing, modeling of appropriate behaviors, simulation games, and examples on videotape. Usually between six and ten youth participate, but an entire class may receive the intervention. Group rules are established in the first session. Sessions may have one leader or two, including a school staff member (counselor, teacher, or psychologist) and a community mental health professional.

What We Know

Anger management training can decrease the aggressive behavior of at-risk students in the short-term. Students trained in anger management have been found to decrease their disruptive and aggressive behaviors both at home and in the classroom, and display greater self control.² In one program, 48 at-risk middle schoolers had significantly fewer office referrals as a result of ten weeks of training in the *Think First* curriculum.³

Although we know there are short term benefits of anger management, long-term results have been inconsistent. For instance, a three-year follow-up study of aggressive elementary school boys showed decreased drug and alcohol involvement and improved self-esteem, but no change in delinquent behavior.⁴ However, 7 to 13 year-old children in a psychiatric ward who received problem-solving skills training decreased their problem behaviors in a one-year follow-up.⁵

Making It Work

Although students have been shown to benefit from anger management training, the effectiveness of the intervention depends on a number of factors.

Length of treatment. The effectiveness of anger management training may depend on how many sessions are provided. Generally, six sessions have failed to produce changes in the aggressiveness of students. Twelve sessions have had positive effects on the aggressiveness of students and eighteen sessions have further enhanced these positive outcomes. Additionally, holding booster sessions one year after the initial intervention improves the long-term outcomes for students.⁶ Thus, current knowledge suggests that a greater number of sessions with booster sessions held after one year will contribute to the effectiveness of the intervention.

Framing the training. To ensure the effectiveness of anger management, some program developers have noted that training may need to be made relevant to the students being trained. For instance, aggressive students seem to have a strong need for retaliation. They often consider “having the last word” or “striking the last blow” to be a “win.” Trainers can work with students to help them understand that, if they respond when provoked, they have been manipulated into losing control of themselves (e.g., they “lose”). In order to “win,” they must learn to walk away. Framing the training in terms of the youths’ understanding seems to increase the effectiveness of the intervention.⁷

Supplemental interventions. The benefits of anger management training can be enhanced if supplemented with other interventions. For instance, students asked to set weekly goals in addition to anger management training showed greater decreases in their disruptive behavior.⁸ A more comprehensive approach, *aggression replacement training*, incorporates moral education and structured training in addition to anger management. Students who received aggression replacement training showed increases in moral reasoning, engaged in more productive interactions with others, and improved their ability to solve social problems.⁹

Conclusions

Anger management provides students with tools to control their actions and reactions in a potential conflict.

In the short-term, anger management techniques have generally been shown to have positive effects on the delinquent and problem behaviors of aggressive students. Students who receive anger management training showed decreased drug and alcohol usage, increased self-esteem, and decreased problem behaviors, although the intervention did not change delinquent behavior. Long-term benefits of anger management training still need to be proven. The success of anger management training is, in part, dependent on the length of treatment and how the treatment is framed for the students. Students who engage in supplemental interventions, such as goal setting or aggression replacement training, show enhanced improvements in behavior and attitude. Overall, anger management is a promising intervention that can be used to help decrease disruptive and violent behavior in aggressive students.

— Russell Skiba and Janet McKelvey

References

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- ²Feindler, E.L., Marriot, S.A., & Iwata, M. (1984). Group anger control for junior high school delinquents. *Cognitive Therapy & Research*, 8(3), 299-311.
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- ⁶See Lochman (1992) above.
- ⁷Coie, J. D., Underwood, M., & Lochman, J.E. (1991). Programmatic intervention with aggressive children in the school setting. In D. Pepler & K. H. Rubin (Eds) *The development and treatment of childhood aggression*, pp.389-410. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- ⁸Lochman, J.E., Burch, P.R., Curry, J.F., & Lampron, L.B. (1984). Treatment and generalization effects of cognitive-behavioral and goal setting interventions with aggressive boys. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 52(5), 915-916.
- ⁹Glick, B. & Goldstein, A.P. (1987). Aggression replacement training. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 65, 356-362.

About the Safe & Responsive Schools Project

The Safe and Responsive Schools Project, funded by a three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs, is dedicated to developing and studying prevention-based approaches to school safety. The Project is currently working with schools in districts in Indiana and Nebraska to integrate best-practice strategies in school violence prevention into comprehensive school-based plans for deterring school disruption and violence.

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