

# THE NEED FOR PEER LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

## TOMORROW'S LEADERS

*Beyond the horizon of time is a changed world, very different from today's world. Some people see beyond that horizon and into the future. They believe that dreams can become a reality. They open our eyes and lift our spirits. They build trust and strengthen our relationships. They stand firm against the winds of resistance and give us the courage to continue the quest. We call these people **leaders**.*

- from *The Leadership Challenge* by  
James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner

The 21st Century presents humanity with challenges never before faced. The increasing threat of terrorism, environmental concerns, the proliferation of nuclear and biochemical weapons, and the impact of globalism are all issues that demand inspired leadership. In all realms of human experience and endeavor – education, business, economics, law enforcement, community relations, science, medicine, domestic and international affairs, religion, civil and human rights, the arts, communication, and diplomacy – there exists a need for leaders who can motivate and inspire others to create and build new visions for the future.

Those men and women who will be the leaders of tomorrow now travel the hallways of our nation's schools. They may or may not be recognized by their teachers as leaders. They may or may not have opportunities to develop their leadership skills. They may or may not ever fulfill the potential they now carry within them. To do so, they will need opportunities to learn and practice leadership.

Opportunities for leadership development are available to students in most of our nation's schools, but participation in these programs is often limited to positional leaders – those youth who lead student government, sports teams, and extracurricular clubs. While many of these

students do demonstrate leadership ability, the criteria for election to these positions is often aligned with popularity, attractiveness, or sense of humor. An exploration of the true qualities of leadership encourages leadership opportunities that reach a broader range of students. Although not inclusive, the following list provides a good starting point for a consideration of key abilities and practices of effective leaders (Kouzes and Posner, 1995):

- challenging the process
- inspiring a shared vision
- enabling others to act
- modeling the way
- encouraging the heart

Engaging in the process of leadership development has both long-term and immediate benefits to schools and their communities. In the long-term, by acknowledging their role in providing leadership education, schools and communities can provide experiences that ensure the development of leaders for the future. In the present, the learning and practicing of leadership skills by students has the potential to impact school and community cultures in positive, measurable ways. Student leaders can and do

take action in response to some of the concerns that affect the educational experience for many students, including bullying, harassment, and peer conflicts. In doing so, students demonstrate their abilities to be powerful resources to schools to influence peer attitudes and behaviors, and to be agents of positive change.

students, their families, and in classroom teachers. Schools responded to these concerns with new security measures, increased presence of law enforcement personnel, and the development and implementation of comprehensive plans and strategies to prevent school violence.

## THE CURRENT CLIMATE IN U.S. SCHOOLS

The safety of our nation's schools has been an issue of great public interest for several decades.

Beginning in the early 1980s, levels of school violence steadily increased until 1993, when levels of violence, crime, and related behaviors in schools were described as being "epidemic" in proportion. In response, the U.S. government and educational communities have worked to develop strategies to make schools safer places. The U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics and the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, developed a series of indicators to measure levels of school violence and students' perceptions of their own safety while at school. Published annually, the *Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2001* ([www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/iscs01.htm](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/iscs01.htm)) confirmed that levels of school violence and crime and the presence of weapons in schools have consistently decreased over the past decade. Students report they are feeling safer at school and statistics confirm that schools are one of the safest places for young people.

The rash of tragic school shootings of recent years created a renewed sense of fear in

*People just don't understand what it's like to be insulted day after day. It really gets to me and the teachers do nothing to stop it. Sometimes they're just not around when it happens, but when they are around, they usually just walk by.*

- 10th grade student

*I was late leaving school after practice and no one was really around. As I walked across the school parking lot, a car of white kids from my school drove in and started circling around me with their car. They had the window down and were yelling out racial slurs. I wouldn't have been scared, but there were five of them and only one of me.*

- 12th grade student

## The Downward Trend in School Violence

A number of national reports issued by the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education and by national non-governmental organizations provide detailed statistical information to support that schools are becoming increasingly safe (*Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2001; Annual Report of School Safety, 2000; Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General, 2001; National Study on Delinquency Prevention in Schools, 2000, Gottfredson et al.*).

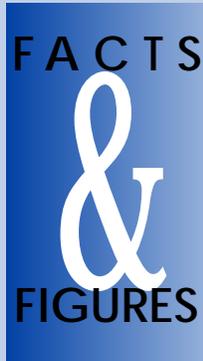
The findings of these reports include:

- a 42 percent reduction in the number of high school students who reported carrying a weapon on school property in the previous 12 months.
- a decrease in all non-fatal crimes against students on school grounds from 144 per thousand in 1992 to 92 per thousand in 1999.
- a decline in thefts at school from 95 per thousand in 1992 to 58 per thousand in 1998.
- a decline in the percentage of students who report one or more places at school as unsafe, down from 9 percent in 1995 to only 5 percent in 1999.

## The Reality Behind the Statistics

Despite the promising statistics in reports issued by the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education and others, some key indicators have remained somewhat unchanged and it could be argued that even those that have declined remain at unacceptable levels.

The daily reality behind these statistics is that:



- **1** in every **10** students is threatened or injured with a weapon at school each year.
- **1** out of every **10** middle school students has been bullied at school during the last six months.
- **1** out of every **14** students carries a weapon to school one or more days each month.
- **1** in every **8** students was the target of hate-related words in the previous six months.
- **1** in every **3** students saw hate-related graffiti at school in the previous six months.

The numbers of students who report being injured or threatened with a weapon on school property has been fairly consistent over the past decade. The actual number of arrests of young people for assault has also remained unchanged.

### Evidence of Bullying, Harassment, and Other Bias Behaviors

Numerous incidents of harassment, bullying, threats, and even physical harm do not reach the attention of the school administration or law enforcement community, because the behaviors are not criminal activities. A clearer and more complete picture of the current climate of our schools is obtained by surveying students directly about their own behaviors and experiences. Student reports indicate that 1 in 20 students experience fear of being attacked or harmed at school and avoid certain places at school to protect their safety, and 1 in 10 students experience being bullied over the course of the school year by one or a group of their peers (*Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2001*).

A U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Fact Sheet, "Addressing the Problem of Juvenile Bullying" (June 2001) describes bullying as being a variety of negative behaviors that are repeated over time and that involve "a real or perceived imbalance of power, with the more powerful child or group attacking those that are less powerful. Bullying can take three forms: physical

(hitting, kicking, spitting, pushing, taking personal belongings), verbal (taunting, malicious teasing, name-calling, making threats), and psychological (spreading rumors, manipulating social relationships or engaging in social exclusion, extortion, or intimidation)."

Although the phenomenon of bullying is not new and appears to be fairly common in schools worldwide, bullying began to receive increased attention in the U.S. following incidents of school violence that have dominated the news in recent years. From pioneering research on bullying in the 1990s by Norwegian social scientist Dan Olweus to the most recent research done in the U.S., there is shared concurrence that educational institutions can best address these behaviors through ongoing, comprehensive plans that include both intervention and prevention strategies.

A number of studies conducted in the U.S. in recent years provide a clear picture of the daily experiences of young people with bullying. The National Institute of Child Health & Human Development funded an independent study that gathered data from more than 15,000 middle and high school students in the U.S. About 1 in

every 3 students reported moderate or frequent involvement in bullying behaviors, with 13 percent involved in bullying other students, 11 percent as the targets of these behaviors, and 6 percent involved at different times in both of these roles (Nansel, et al., 2001).

## From Targets to Aggressors

Although the impact of being victimized by chronic bullying will vary from student to student, it is probable that for some students, the results can be devastating. A study funded by the U.S. Secret Service in 2000 reported that two-thirds of the students involved in school shootings in the past few decades reported they had been bullied by other students on a regular basis. Not every student who is bullied will resort to violence, but for those students who do act out aggressively against their victimizers, common denominators continue to appear. Even if victims of bullying do not respond with violence, it is probable that their educational experience is fraught with fear, anxiety, and unhappiness. The effects extend far beyond the students actively engaged in bullying or being bullied, reaching countless other young people who are passive bystanders. An educational environment that is disrespectful, intimidating, or unfair affects everyone.

When the anti-social behaviors of young children are not addressed in a timely manner, parents and teachers have missed important teachable moments in the lives of young people. When concerned adults recognize these moments and use them to reinforce respect and understanding, such actions contribute to children's overall positive social development and ultimately, to the betterment of our communities. Ignoring these important opportunities contributes to the normalization of biased behaviors, may exacerbate the pain motivating the bullying child's conduct, and could reinforce further violent or anti-social behaviors.

## Propensity Toward Escalation

An old nursery rhyme says that "sticks and stones will break my bones, but names can never

hurt me." The reality is that names can and do hurt people every day. A definition of school violence that includes only fights or other acts of physical aggression minimizes the possible long-term damage done by chronic bullying and other bias-motivated behaviors. When a school community passively accepts these behaviors by failing to actively intervene, it may not be long before increasingly intolerant behaviors become more prevalent.

**An expanded definition of violence should include any act of intentional or malicious harm toward others. All bias-motivated behaviors contribute to the development of hostile environments that threaten the ability of students to learn.**

In a 1997 analysis of violence among middle school and high school students, Daniel Lockwood found that school-based violence usually starts with seemingly minor actions that escalate to more serious outcomes. Lockwood found that although students may not intend violent outcomes, both students acting as aggressors and those who are victimized suffer the consequences. Lockwood's study indicated that violence as a method of settling conflicts is widely accepted by students, but that intervention in the early stages of a conflict is effective in preventing escalation to more serious violence (Lockwood, 1997).

## The Relationship Between Bullying and Prejudice

Prejudice can be defined as prejudging or making a decision about a person or group of people without sufficient knowledge. Prejudicial thinking is often based on stereotypes. Similarly, the thinking that motivates the behaviors described in this guide as "bullying" is often formed without sufficient knowledge and is based on stereotypes. Many common threads connect the development of prejudicial attitudes and bullying behaviors. In both bullying and bias-motivated behaviors, there are real or perceived power differentials between students who taunt, harass, and bully others and the targets of their actions. Targets are often selected and singled out based on a certain aspect of their identity over which they have little or no control.

An insider/outsider framework is created where students who don't conform to some arbitrary standard are treated unfairly because of some characteristic of their identity. Students who are targets of bullying are typically ridiculed, isolated, or harassed on the basis of physical characteristics, such as strength or size; abilities, such as athletic or social skills; or other characteristics, such as socioeconomic class or perceived sexual orientation.

Both bullying and prejudice arise from patterns of thinking where others are judged on the basis of perceived differences. When these patterns of thinking and behaving are unchallenged, they can become ingrained, guiding one's interactions over time. What began as bullying a peer who seemed smaller and weaker may play a role in the development of intolerant ways of thinking about others based on differences in gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or race.

### Intervening in Incidents of Bias

Intervening with students who are engaging in bias-motivated behaviors can be described as a two-part process that includes both direct (reactive) and indirect (preventative) strategies:

- **Indirect intervention** includes developing strategies that promote an educational environment that is respectful, equitable, and fair. Strategies include the development, review, and/or revision of school harassment policies, integration of relevant multidisciplinary curricular content, and a range of formal and informal communication strategies that promote respect and civility.
- **Direct intervention** includes providing members of the school community with training and support to effectively intervene in incidents of bullying and harassment, which includes understanding guidelines for seeking assistance, when necessary.

Consistent efforts to build awareness that bullying and other bias-motivated behaviors will not be tolerated contributes to the development of educational environments that support and

motivate students' willingness and success in intervening on behalf of other students. Within this environment, an anti-bias educational process that includes curricular strategies and targeted leadership development activities provides students with opportunities to develop and practice skills in intervening to interrupt bullying. Among the various strategies developed by schools, peer education has played a promising role in changing the attitudes and behaviors that can lead to bullying and hate-motivated behaviors.

### The Problem of Peer Influence

For many students, school violence, harassment, name-calling, and bullying create educational experiences characterized by fear, frustration, unhappiness, and isolation. Although some educators may be uncertain about how to best react in bullying situations, most will readily intervene when they witness students taunting others on school grounds. An important reality, however, is that bullying tends to occur during those times when teachers or other adults are not present, in the hallways and cafeterias of schools, outside on the school grounds before and after school, and on community streets and neighborhoods.

The difficulties created by this lack of adult presence are compounded by the reality that students targeted by bullying or harassment rarely report the occurrence to any adult. In a survey of secondary students conducted in 1996, educator Sonia Sharp found that 50 percent of students indicated they would not tell an adult if they were bullied by another student and if they talked to anyone, it would more likely be a peer. Sharp explains that teachers are often unaware of the extent of the problem, concluding that the "deliberate obscuring of bullying behavior from adult awareness keeps it embedded in the peer culture" (Sharp, 1996).

These environmental characteristics of bullying indicate that peer interventions may be among the most effective strategies for addressing students' bias-motivated behaviors. Sharp found that when peers do intervene with some consistency, even with simple verbal challenges,

such as “leave her alone” or “ignore them and come and play with us,” their actions are effective in stopping the bullying and over time, can change the educational environment to one of increasing respect and acceptance.

However, there can be pressure not to intervene within peer groups. Students may fear retaliation or lack the confidence or social skills necessary to challenge biased-motivated behaviors in their peers. When these incidents occur, students involve themselves to greater or lesser degrees in roles that range from passive bystander to active supporter of bullying behaviors. Student bystanders can unknowingly communicate support for bullies by remaining silent or by walking away. By participating in avoidance or social exclusion of peers who are frequent targets, students can contribute to the normalization or acceptance of behaviors like bullying and name-calling. Students’ passivity, manifesting in either ignoring biased behaviors or by being friendly and cooperative with peers who engage in harassing others, contributes to the social acceptance of bullying. Those students who join in as active participants, encourage bullying behaviors in others through their verbal support or by shielding the behaviors from adult awareness (Sharp, 1996).

Because bullying and harassment involve an expression of power over another student viewed as being weaker, youth who engage in these behaviors are often reinforced by the presence of members of their peer group. The consistent presence of a bystander group of varying size can create a dilemma for some students who might want to intervene, either by challenging the perpetrators or offering support to the targets.

This dynamic was demonstrated over three decades ago by two psychologists who conducted a series of experiments that confirmed that when individuals are part of a group, they are far less likely to come to the aid of others than when they are alone (Latane and Darley, 1970). The study involved a series of staged emergencies designed to measure how quickly bystanders would offer assistance to someone in need. Latane and Darley discovered that people in a group would come to the aid of another person 53 percent of the time as compared to 75 percent of the time when a bystander witnessed an incident alone.

In the case of bullying and harassment, the dynamics of the peer group causes most students to form their reactions and responses based on their perceptions of other bystanders, a finding that holds great significance for educators. Although students can be effective in intervening, they may not have the natural inclination or social support to do so in the typical group situations where bullying and harassment occur. These realities can contribute to school climates that are conducive to name-calling, harassment, and bullying.

**In a climate where bullying behaviors become the “norm,” students can become desensitized to the experiences of others, as educators become increasingly concerned over the lack of respect and civility among students.**

The U.S. Department of Education and the National Association of Attorneys General 1999 publication *Protecting Students from Harassment and Hate Crime* recommends educating students about harassment and discrimination and involving students in prevention activities as crucial activities in establishing a climate that deters harassment and supports positive responses to diversity ([www.ed.gov/pubs/Harassment](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Harassment)). Although students may not have the natural inclination or skills to intervene, the tendency for incidents of bias, harassment, or bullying to occur in peer group situations outside the influence or awareness of adults, means that peers are a powerful and often underutilized resource for intervention available to schools. When students come face to face with intolerance, they are generally motivated to take action, but without opportunities to understand the impact of these behaviors on the whole school community and to develop and practice intervention skills, they are unlikely to do so.

### Providing Support to Targets of Bullying and Harassment

Bullying behaviors, regardless of whether they are psychological or physical in nature, create a pattern of harassment that can have deep and far reaching effects (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Olweus, 1993). Studies suggest that students who are chronically victimized by bullies, show an increased risk for depression, poor self-esteem,

and other social, emotional, and behavioral problems that can seriously affect their ability to learn. Studies have established, for example, that students targeted by bullies have a higher incidence of Attention Deficit Disorder and schizophrenia than students who are not bullied. Rather than being causative, the implication in these cases is that students already facing serious challenges are often the same ones targeted by the bullying behaviors of other students.

Students who are targets of bullying behaviors can feel isolated and are often in need of counseling and support services at school. At times, a collective assessment by educational professionals may indicate counseling or other therapeutic services to assist students who have been relentlessly victimized by bullying and harassment. Support can be communicated through consistent enforcement of school policies relating to harassment and bullying and through efforts to exercise uniform disciplinary actions. Because peers are most often present when bullying occurs and are the most likely confidants of one another, they can also be providers of support to one another, transforming an otherwise intolerable situation for some students into one that is more manageable.

Peer pressure is a powerful force in the lives of young people. Although peer influence is often associated with the learning of negative behaviors, peers have also demonstrated the ability to influence one another in positive ways. Peers can be supportive allies to other students by communicating empathy and acceptance, and expressing their disapproval of bullying. Because students victimized by bullying behaviors typically share their feelings and concerns with peers, the establishment of a network of trained peer counselors who provide support to victims can deter the escalation of bullying into more serious acts of violence.

## THE NEED FOR IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE

To effectively respond to hate crimes involving youth, schools and their communities require a coordinated strategy that includes a balance of

the direct and indirect interventions as described on page 15. Schools have the potential to exercise leadership in addressing this challenge because they are the first and often primary agency to reflect changes in U.S. demographics, and these changes, in the absence of skilled intervention, can lead to increased tensions (Parker, 1995).

Although school shootings, arson, and other sensational acts attract headlines, many researchers and practitioners are equally concerned by the much more commonplace precursors of violence that occur on almost every school campus in the country. These are the more subtle and more prevalent verbal threats, personal put-downs, harassment, and neglect that injure many young people in an unrelenting manner.

An educational environment that tolerates these behaviors exemplifies the “Broken Windows Theory” described in Malcolm Gladwell’s book, *The Tipping Point*. This theory, originally developed by criminologists James Q. Wilson and George Kelling, provides an explanation for the powerful relationship that can exist between seemingly insignificant occurrences and serious concerns. Gladwell explains that “if a window is broken and left unrepaired, people walking by will conclude that no one cares and no one is in charge. Soon, more windows will be broken, and a sense of anarchy will spread from the building to the street on which it faces, sending a signal that anything goes” (Gladwell, 2000). This theory provides a useful analogy with relation to bullying, harassment, and the potential for their escalation to more serious acts of violence. Allowing name-calling, taunting, rumor-spreading, and other low-level bias behaviors to stand unchallenged communicates that “no one cares and that anything goes,” and the resulting environment does little to deter the escalation of hate.

## The Role of Educators

The multiple demands on the current educational system often result in school communities not addressing bullying behaviors until a serious incident coalesces attention and support. Reactive strategies, while often essential, tend to

be less effective than preventative strategies that arise from the insight, planning, and shared commitment of an organized school community. Single events cannot transform an educational environment to one of respect and fairness; planning and implementation of an integrated plan led by school staff and supported by community members is required for substantive change to occur.

The following are strategies to consider in developing a comprehensive plan to promote citizenship and civility and to deter bullying, harassment, and other bias-motivated behaviors:

- **Provide anti-bias training.** Provide anti-bias/hate crime prevention training for school board members, administrators, school personnel, and students to provide opportunities to develop awareness and build skills, and to provide information and resources.
  
- **Review and revise policies.** Develop concise policies/codes of conduct for addressing hate behaviors. Involve all stakeholders in this process, including school personnel, students, families, and other members of the community. Delineate clear and specific disciplinary and non-disciplinary responses to bias-motivated hate behaviors. Punitive “zero-tolerance” policies have proved to be less effective in reducing bullying than educational approaches, such as counseling, mentoring, and restorative justice options. Ensure that all students, family members, and school personnel are aware of the content of these policies and that they are uniformly enforced.
  
- **Integrate anti-bias lessons into the curriculum.** Support the integration of bias prevention lessons into K-12 classroom curricula, after-school program activities, and peer education and leadership programs. Anti-bias lessons assist students in understanding the manifestations of hate and the tendency for hate behaviors to escalate, while providing opportunities for students to practice safe and effective skills for

responding to hate behaviors.

- **Disseminate information throughout the school community.** Articulate that bullying and hate behaviors will not be tolerated. Promote and support quick and immediate intervention with students who exhibit bullying or other bias-related behaviors.
  
- **Involve students.** Students exert a powerful influence on the attitudes and behaviors of their peers. Peer leadership programs enable students to develop skills to effectively intervene in bias incidents and to become allies to students targeted by bullies. Recognize and reward student leadership.

## The Role of Parents and Adult Family Members

The involvement of parents and other adult family members in the education of their children has long been associated with student success. Schools typically encourage parental involvement through participation in parent associations and other decision-making groups. Family members can play an important role in supporting the anti-bias efforts of schools by assisting in planning programs, by providing feedback about policies, by modeling pro-social behavior, and by maintaining open lines of communication within their families.

Adult family members teach and support the values and skills they believe their children will need to be successful in school and beyond. When parents model respectful communication towards all people and effective strategies for managing conflict, students are provided with a strong foundation for managing their own relationships. Adult family members have ongoing opportunities over the course of their children’s lives to communicate with their children about a wide variety of issues. Maintaining open lines of communication is key to developing an awareness of younger family members’ experiences with bullying. By listening without judging, criticizing, or offering advice,

family members gain informed understanding of their children's needs and can determine the best strategies to support them.

The following publications are useful resources for families:

Stern, C., and Bettmann, E.H. (2000). *Hate Hurts: How Children Learn and Unlearn Prejudice*. New York, NY: Scholastic. ([www.adl.org/ctboh](http://www.adl.org/ctboh))

Saunders, C.S. (1997). When Push Comes to Shove: Dealing with Bullies Requires Adult Supervision. *Our Children*, March/April 1997. National PTA.

## The Role of Students

Adolescence is a period when students spend increasing time with their peers and less time with parents and other adults. Peer influence is shaped through discussion of ideas and by observation of the behavior of others. The power of this influence is commonly associated with the learning of behaviors with long-lasting negative consequences. When used to create positive change, however, there are few methods more effective than peer-to-peer education.

Although many students may be concerned about or uncomfortable with name-calling, bullying, and other harassing behaviors among their peers, most are unsure how to respond. Effective intervention arises from structured opportunities for students to share their life experiences and practice intervention skills.

Peer influence can be exercised through formal and informal approaches.

**Formal interventions**, such as peer leadership programs, include both an academic and skill development process. By participating in such programs, students have opportunities to develop skills to be leaders and role models in their schools and communities. Peer leadership meetings enable participating students to discuss their experiences in a group and to plan programs in their schools that contribute to respectful and inclusive environments.

The success of students' formal interventions

corresponds to the level of institutional support they receive, including the willingness on the part of the school community to allocate resources of time, space, and materials, and to support students' efforts by recognizing students who make a commitment to be leaders.

**Informal interventions** include the efforts and actions of individual students to interrupt bias-related behaviors of their peers. When students have had opportunities to learn skills to interrupt bullying, name-calling, and harassment, their interventions are often more effective than those of adults. Because they share a common language, experiences, interests, and perspectives, peers have the potential to influence behavior beyond the school walls to home and community environments (Topping, 1996).

In addition to challenging and interrupting bullying behaviors, students can also be supportive allies to other students by communicating concern and non-acceptance of bullying behaviors. Students can also assist by involving, when appropriate, teachers or other adults to respond to incidents of bias.

## The Power of Peer-to-Peer Education

In recent years, schools have increasingly used peer programs to assist students to make healthy choices and to build skills to diffuse conflicts. A variety of peer education program models exist, including peer leadership, peer counseling, peer mentoring, peer training, peer mediation and conflict resolution programs. All of these programs target students with demonstrated leadership skills, and involve them in efforts to help shape the culture and climate of their schools. For **peer mediation** and **conflict resolution** programs, for example, school staff identify a group of student leaders and provide them with training to counsel their peers, intervene in disputes, help other students talk through problems, and train other students in the use of conflict resolution strategies. Given the inevitability of conflict in schools, these programs can be extremely effective and appropriate.

**Peer training** programs provide students with training that couples understanding of a

particular content area, such as anti-bias education, with skill development in intervention and facilitation. Once trained, peer trainers facilitate discussions and lead interactive workshops and classroom presentations for their peers.

Schools have used **peer education** models to educate students on health issues such as HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, substance abuse prevention, issues of sexuality and sexual harassment, and other issues confronting teens and pre-teens today. Although there are significant differences between peer education program models, most provide an initial period of training and preparation that allows students

to develop the requisite skills to effectively educate others.

**Peer leadership** programs, developed as part of a school's comprehensive planning and commitment to create a safe school, provide students with opportunities to develop and practice leadership skills within a supportive environment. Participation in leadership activities provides students with opportunities to develop a range of skills that are useful in the present to effect positive change in the school and community environment, but may also be transferable to students' future goals in school and work-related settings.