

# Middle School: Violence (Multi-Grade Pilot Unit)



**Attention Educator:** The lessons in the Violence Unit are grade level pilot lessons for 7th and 8th grade students. We need your professional feedback to determine the appropriate grade-level for each lesson. Please send feedback and any suggestions you may have to [kelly@thriveway.com](mailto:kelly@thriveway.com). We appreciate your assistance, and we look forward to hearing from you.

## Lesson 2 – Youth Violence and Gangs/Neighborhood Violence



### Lesson Time:

30 Minutes

### Materials Provided:

- “The Cycle of Violence Wheel” display on projector
- Video: “What Is Youth Violence?” (2:02)

### Materials Needed:

- Projector with Video/Audio Capability
- Pens, Pencils

**Essential Question: How do gangs grow and affect neighborhoods and families?**

### Objectives:

Students will be able to...

- Define youth violence.
- Recognize types of youth violence.
- Connect gang violence and neighborhood/family violence to its impact.
- Identify preventative factors that reduce youth violence.

### Did You Know:

- Youth violence is a significant public health problem that affects thousands of young people each day, and in turn, affects their families, schools, and communities.
- Studies have shown that children who are exposed to violence are more likely to suffer from anxiety, depression, attachment problems, and have aggression and conduct problems. Experiences of violence can also cause academic and cognitive problems and lead to involvement in the juvenile justice system.
- 78% of youth arrests for violent crimes have decreased since 1994.
- 38% decrease in the number of teens under age 18 arrested in 2020.
- While the arrests for youth crime are down, the number of youth homicides have increased by 30% which is the biggest increase since the 1980s.

### Educator Tip:

As you teach this lesson, be sure to talk to the students about the seriousness of youth violence and the potential for youth incarceration. Let each student know that they can speak to you or a counselor if they have been impacted by gang and neighborhood/family violence personally. Victims of gang



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violence may experience feelings of helplessness, frustration, and anger, and may often be fearful of retaliation. Talk to students about reporting any suspicious behavior they notice at school or within their community. Since this lesson talks about various types of violence, you may notice that some students respond adversely by sitting quietly, avoiding eye contact, or becoming emotional. Be mindful of those students. These reactions may be signs that they need to speak with a counselor after the lesson.

## Lesson Introduction: (1 minute)

In our last lesson, we talked about the importance of valuing human life and how that is the first step to reducing all violence. Unfortunately, violence has become so common that many families and communities experience living in a violent world. Today, we will define youth violence, look at statistics on gang and neighborhood/family violence, and hear information on preventing this type of violence. During today's lesson, think of appropriate ways to handle yourself and help others in situations that might arise in our school or community.

## Activity 1: What is Youth Violence? Video (6 minutes)

Youth violence is the intentional use of force or power among people ages 10-24 and is a significant public health problem that affects thousands of young people each day. Because it affects you, it also means that it affects families, schools, and communities. Youth violence is not only widespread in the United States, but it is the third leading cause of death for young people between the ages of 10 and 24. Let's watch this short video from the CDC to learn a little more.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kjj27IFU3DA> (2:02)

What did you learn while watching the video? (*Allow students time to point out what they recall from the video.*) Remember that the video also said that youth violence can be prevented. We want to focus on that - prevention. I want you to learn these three factors that can help you in lowering your risk of exposure to violence: first, for you to have good problem-solving skills; second, for you to experience positive relationships with adults; and third, for you to be committed to school. First, problem-solving skills means working things out in a step-by-step process. We can't expect immediate results from every problem. Expecting instant satisfaction is how people resort to selfishness and violence. Second, you need positive relationships with adults. If you know people who don't have any trustworthy, reliable adults, they can get connected with a teacher or staff member at our school. The adults here care for you and want what is best for you. Finally, being committed to school shows that you want to make your life better. Keep this in mind as we talk today about types of violence and ways to work toward prevention.

## Activity 2: "Ending The Cycle of Violence Wheel" Display Image for Large Group (13 minutes)

The best way to prevent negative life experiences is to understand what puts a person at risk for that negativity. Our video mentioned the things that can contribute to violent behavior: previously experiencing violence, harsh discipline at home, experiencing social rejection, and living in poverty. A risk factor does not mean that a person will definitely become violent. These are just some of the conditions that those who have been violent reported being a part of their problem. Let's look at the risk factors that contribute to



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violence in families, communities and individuals:

- Poor academic performance
- Low commitment to school
- Increased school failure
- Involvement in gangs
- Social rejection by peers
- Harsh, lax, or inconsistent disciplinary practices
- Low parental involvement
- Low emotional attachment to parents or caregivers
- Poor monitoring and supervision of children
- Diminished economic opportunities
- High concentrations of poor residents
- Socially disorganized neighborhoods

Knowing the risk factors can be helpful because you can be aware that valuing school, valuing human life, and communicating with those who love you can reduce your risk. If you are worried about someone else you know who may be considering violence, talk to them about alternative ways to respond to their feelings. We can be hurt, angry, or struggling, yet find relief in ways besides harming other people. On the other hand, if you know someone who is currently the victim of violence, our counselor may need to know so that the person can receive proper care. Violence usually leads to more violence.

## **Activity 3: “Types of Violence: Physical, Psychological, and Gang Violence” – Discussion (8 minutes)**

There are several types of youth violence, but today we will focus on physical and psychological. The one you think of first when you hear the word *violence* is physical violence which involves any act that creates harm to someone’s body. The other type which is also dangerous is psychological violence. Psychological violence is an intentional act that hurts a person’s mental well-being by using manipulation, coercion or harassment. Unfortunately, it’s no secret that young people still talk a lot about violence and even promote it on social media by recording fights and sharing negative, anger-provoking comments.

Another specific area that promotes violence is gang activity and violence. We understand that most teens live in relatively safe areas and may not be exposed to the risk of gangs or violent crime. However, there are a small number of young people who are at risk of or do become involved, and you may either be personally confronted with that or one day be exposed to that. Gangs aren’t just fiction in movies. They are real, dangerous, and difficult to escape. Their existence can have a significant impact on families and communities, as well as the students themselves. People act differently when they are in large groups. Remember that earlier the video said that people in social isolation are at a higher risk of acting violently. Gangs know to prey on those who are isolated. Whether people live in an area with gang violence or not, it’s important for everyone to realize the risks. As adults on this campus, we worry that too many children are getting conflicting messages about gang violence from music, movies, and video games. These make it seem as though it’s happening every day and that it’s no big



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deal. We have to talk about the impact that neighborhood violence has because many groups of young people try to get you involved with the group but will never tell you the extent of their activities until you feel trapped as though there's no way out. The biggest problem with gangs is that their activity is more than violent, it is also criminal. It's not something to judge, just something we need to understand so that we can make a difference and avoid it. How can you help another student look out for negative signs of their involvement and talk to them about the dangers of gangs? Always have open, honest communication with your friends. Make sure to have a safe adult to talk to when you feel unsure about how to respond to a friend about possible involvement with gangs or other dangerous situations. Remind them of the importance of staying involved with positive people and having connections with a trusted adult. Any school with a School Resource Officer could also be a good contact person for your friend in need.

## Closing: (2 minutes)

Don't give up hope because there are plenty of people in your life, including us, who take your safety very seriously. The good news is that reports show that arrests for youth crimes have significantly declined since 2018. This means that fewer young people are turning to extreme violence for their ways of acting out.

We need you to remain strong in your commitment to be peaceful and nonviolent. Don't give up on talking things out, promoting safety and calmness, leaning on trusted adults, and being committed to school and learning. Your life, your family's lives and your friends' lives matter. When you feel hurt and want to lash out, remember that life is bigger and better than the darkness you might be experiencing today. Your life is more permanent than your struggles. Many great leaders promoted peace, and you have that same potential.

## References

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# “The Cycle of Violence”

