

# **Human Aggression (Part 9)**

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## **4.0 Preventive Measures**

Preventing violent behavior before it occurs is obviously preferable to any form of treatment after the fact. A decade of marked growth in prison populations has not reduced violence in American society, particularly among adolescents. It is time to test the promise of well-developed, fully implemented early prevention programs. Advocates of such programs argue that they would decrease the rate of crime and violence for less money than it costs to lock up offenders and keep them confined (Huesmann et al, 1997). It bears repeating, however, that adequate prevention programs can only be constructed on a foundation of knowledge about the causes of violent behavior. Although nowhere near complete, that knowledge base is already sound enough to justify devising and testing prevention strategies for the groups of children at highest risk for adolescent violence and adult crime (Huesmann et al, 1997).

## **4.1 Comprehensive Prevention Models**

Social scientists have learned a great deal about which groups of young people are most likely to commit violent acts, but existing knowledge about the development of violent behavior has not been fully exploited to devise prevention programs for high risk children and adolescents (Huesmann et al, 1997). Because aggression and violence usually arise from multiple causes, prevention programs directed at only one or two causes are unlikely to succeed.

A broad based ecological approach to prevention is needed. Childhood aggression can predict adult violence in some individuals. Researchers have learned that a small proportion of children—perhaps 5 or 10 percent—grow up to account for close to 50 percent of all arrests and the majority of all violence (Huesmann et al, 1997). This group of children is a logical target for special prevention planning and prevention research at this time. In childhood they are aggressive, disobedient, and disruptive at home and in school, disliked by peers, neglected by teachers and parents, and likely to fail in school. Later they drop out of school. Unsupervised

and susceptible to the pernicious influence of other delinquent youth, they grow up to be antisocial, aggressive, and violent young adults. They are likely to become involved in abusive spousal relationships, and they often abuse their own children, thus transmitting their violent legacy to the next generation (Huesmann et al, 1997). But not every child growing up under these conditions follows this destructive path, and the example of such children has provided valuable insights into how to design prevention programs.

Researchers have shown that targeted interventions can reduce the escalating sequence of aggression and violence in some children (Huesmann et al, 1997). Early help in parenting and home visits from trained outreach workers in early childhood have interrupted this negative sequence for many children. Such help may be particularly important for children of young, poor, single mothers, for as a group, these children have extremely high rates of aggressive behavior. Parent training in behavior management, when consistently received, has been shown to reduce youthful delinquency rates.

Other prevention techniques, such as attitude change, anger control, social skills training, and community action directed at the specific processes involved in violence (i.e., socialization, cognitive, situational, or bio-behavioral factors) have shown promise in small-scale tests (Huesmann et al, 1997). Most of these techniques have not been tested adequately in field trials, however, even though some have been implemented at substantial cost (Huesmann et al, 1997). This suggests a top priority:

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