



“Moving from Complaint to Possibility...from Planning to Implementation”

Youth

Be the change you want to see in the world. Become a leader in changing the culture of violence. Violence is a major public health issue affecting mental, physical, emotional, financial and spiritual health. Education, awareness, and prevention efforts are key components to reducing the prevalence of violence and its devastating impact on society. Youth must understand the high cost of violence, such as death, disability, incarceration, family disruption, community fear and distrust of youth, and its impact on the entire community. They must also respect the rights of others in order to earn respect. To reduce the violence that runs in our communities, youth must do the following:

- **Express** anger in a positive way and address personal issues with help from peers, parents, teachers, coaches, and others.
- **Organize** and call for an *immediate* end to *all* of the violence in our communities. Come together and participate in activities that work toward decreasing the tension that exists among individuals, various neighborhoods and communities. Create councils in each community that will be staffed and led by youth and guided by concerned and committed adults. These councils should meet regularly at a safe place to share relevant ideas and concerns. Invite adults and other youth from the various neighborhoods, who have been identified as being a positive influence in the community.
- **Advocate** for youth involvement on government and community boards seeking input from youth in diverse communities. Efforts should be made to improve communication between police and youth in the community and to build new bridges for mutual respect.
- **Participate** in opening lines of communication between youth and adults during community forums and other activities aimed at reducing violence. Reach out to parents, family members, and other adults to encourage them to participate in activities that youth enjoy. Youth are strongly encouraged to take advantage of all positive opportunities offered.
- **Practice** the proper way to conduct oneself when stopped by the police. Be aware of one's rights and responsibilities when dealing with the police. Take advantage of programs that provide these skills as well as other information. There are brochures and pamphlets provided by social service and government agencies. For example the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) and the NAACP Pittsburgh Branch provide a pamphlet entitled “*You and the Police: Rights, Responsibilities and Realities.*” The City of Pittsburgh has published *Information for People Concerned about Police Conduct.*
- **Call** upon parents, guardians and loved ones to be good role models. Share with them the important role they play in influencing the lives and attitudes of children. If necessary *demand* they be good parents by being *present* in their lives. All too often some young

people have been forced to take on the role of parenting younger siblings when parents or other family members have been unable to do so. Sometimes young people must take on the leadership role in displaying positive family and community values.

- **Demand** that parents, guardians and/or other caregivers take control of their households and provide the nurturing and discipline that children need from the earliest ages. To do so earns the respect of one's children.
- **Show** respect for parents, guardians and other adults in one's household so that they can trust children and youth to make responsible decisions. Lead by example and show younger siblings how to treat parents respectfully, so that when they become older, they will also be trusted to make good decisions.
- **Interact** with other youth in a respectful way to get respect in return.
- **Lead**, don't follow! Be strong and act independently. Young people should not try to be what *others* want them to be, unless those goals are positive. Far too many youth follow other youth who exhibit serious negative behaviors such as getting involved in unhealthy, and possibly criminal, actions. Be a role model to younger children and encourage them to achieve positive goals, as well.
- **Reject** the mindset that everyone else is the cause of one's negative life circumstances. This kind of attitude encourages one to play the role of victim and fosters feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, and not having the ability to change one's life situation. Understand that one *does* have the *personal* power to change life's circumstances. Develop and adopt the faith to do so.
- **Utilize** one's talents and skills for positive purposes. It is in one's own best interest to pursue legal avenues to make money. Recognize that being involved in drugs and in other illegal activities contributes to the breakdown of the family and the community, imprisonment and even death. Remember that short term money will likely lead to short time lives!
- **Encourage** one's peers to look at legal employment as the preferred lifestyle, one that should be sought by *all* members of the community. Discourage them from continuing illegal and criminal behaviors. Help them understand if they continue they will be forced to suffer the consequences.
- **Influence** one's girlfriend or boyfriend in a positive manner. In many instances both young men and young women negatively influence, and even compete for authority, in their relationships. Be supportive of doing the "right thing." There is more value to a relationship when both parties wait before taking it the next level.
- **Delay** sexual involvement. Both boys and young men *and* girls and young women should place greater value on their bodies. Some girls and some young women believe they need to be sexually involved to maintain a relationship, which may include getting pregnant. Some young men believe that some young women use sex just to "trap" a man. Moreover, in some situations, because of the way girls and young women present themselves, some young men may feel pressured to engage in sexual activity. In all cases, such behaviors should be strongly discouraged. Sexual activity before becoming

emotionally, and/or financially secure or responsible can lead to STDs, unplanned pregnancies, broken lives and broken dreams.

- **Discuss** healthy sexuality and how to build healthy relationships with parents, guardians, or other trusted adults, before becoming sexually active. Young men *and* young women both should participate in sexuality and family life planning education where available. Teen fathers and teen mothers should seek out and participate in parenting support/education programs.
- **Respect** the fact that boys and young men do not have the earning capacity of older males. Neither should boys or young men be expected to compete with adult males.
- **Understand** the fact that girls and young women should, in no way, encourage or force their boyfriends or partners to get involved in criminal behavior to provide for their needs or wants. Remember that material possessions do not bring happiness and should not determine someone's self worth – "*who* you are and not *what* you are."
- **End** rumoring. Girls and young women are strongly encouraged to quit the rumors, which pit male against male. Such behaviors far too often lead to physical confrontations between competing young males, sometimes leading to death. Such deaths profoundly affect everyone involved, including the entire community.
- **Advance** academically. Realize the importance of making good grades and of being actively involved in positive school activities. Share with other students the fact that being a good student is the very best way to guarantee future employment and career success, and a much healthier community. Such students should be seen as the heroes of the school not the brunt of jokes and ridicule. Understand that to be smart is *not* acting *white*, and being smart is giving one the opportunity to be "green," as in making money.
- **Mentor** younger children. Utilize one's talents to improve the educational achievement of the younger people in one's community. This is a constructive use of time and talent and it will positively affect the climate of the neighborhood in which one lives. Volunteering not only helps others, it also makes one feel better about him/herself.
- **Stay** in school and attain the highest level of education possible. Explore other avenues for further education beyond high school that lead toward a career path. These avenues may be technical or trade schools, as well as colleges and universities.
- **Complete** training programs that build trust/respect/self-esteem and give instruction on job application skills, interviewing skills, interpersonal skills, goal setting and job preparation. Take advantage of support systems and training that will teach one how to remain employed and advance one's career goals.
- **Demand** that *all* adults work diligently to assist youth in obtaining meaningful and legal employment. Youth should not feel that the only way to become financially stable is to engage in illegal or criminal behavior. Youth should seek employment opportunities with major businesses and corporations, as well as businesses in local communities.

- **Form** peer support/tutoring groups in schools, community centers, and religious institutions. Train to become peer educators in conflict resolution and anger management.
- **Participate** in student advisory boards that are balanced and diverse. Volunteer to become advocates/liaisons between the student population and school administration to have a strong “voice” in their education.
- **Train** as volunteers to serve as youth counselors. Participate in related activities such as speak-out assemblies at churches, schools and community events.
- **Participate** in the political process by voting in each and every election because voting *does* impact every aspect of society. Even youth who have not reached voting age can make a difference. Get involved in the political process; participate in activities such as voter registration, flyer distribution, and making phone calls for getting out the vote.
- **Be involved** with the Coalition Against Violence. Youth from across neighborhood boundaries work together in all initiatives and strategies.
- **Develop** an anti-violence youth task force as an umbrella group of the Coalition Against Violence.