

*S . A . C .
Save America's Children*



SAVE AMERICA'S CHILDREN (SAC)

Young victims of violent crimes suffer many types of injuries, including; emotional, physical, and/or psychological trauma which may in turn create an inability to thrive in the educational environment. SAC was developed to help break the cycle of school violence and to aid in promoting a safe and harmonious environment which is conducive to learning. Its goal is to bring awareness to the many issues facing today's youth, and to provide them with the necessary resources with which to convey those concerns.

The SAC values and objectives are: Help promote peace, respect, unity, understanding, caring, and solutions to defuse hostile situations in a positive and safe manner..

SAC will provide Program Coordinators who have a background in education to run the weekly meetings during which fun, thought provoking activities will be done to educate student SAC members in the SAC values.

Upon completion of this program, we ask students only that you be willing to join with us in giving back what has been given to you by SAC; a sense of hope.

Ultimately in a society where there exist so many problems with few solutions, we believe this program to be a viable learning tool for bridging the gaps between students, parents, and teachers alike. Together we can make a difference. Together we can....SAVE AMERICA'S CHILDREN!

ENGAGING THE SAC STUDENT BODY

1. Selection Process

Teachers will select, from their respective students, those who reflect the diversity of the population, and who have exhibited the characteristics which are required to implement SAC in the schools. Those students who have expressed an interest in and the willingness to be involved with the program will also be selected,

The Coordinator and selected students will do a comprehensive workshop on each section of the program. This will ensure that the students totally understand SAC objectives and the means to safely implement them within their school environment.

GROUP DISCUSSION

It is important for the Coordinator to create a physical environment conducive to greater discussion. He/She will set a positive tone for learning and sharing by encouraging others to participate, as well as express the importance of respect and past experiences surrounding school violence and other issues requiring special attention.

Complete group participation in each week's discussion is essential.

LISTENING TIME

Once a student contacts either a SAC member, or a teacher, with an interest in sharing their concerns, he/she will be taken seriously and directed to contact the SAC Coordinator for their campus.

The Coordinator will listen to what the student has to say, then once the concern has been voiced, paraphrase what has been said back to the student, thereby assuring the student that his/her words were heard, and will not be taken lightly. During the "Listening Time" the student will be encouraged to ask questions of the Coordinator, to clarify any areas of uncertainty.

The Coordinator will meet with the other SAC members to share, if possible, the information that was gathered in the "Listening Time." After all relevant information has been given; the group will come to a consensus about how best to deal with the information.

ROLE PLAYING

The aim of role playing is to give the students perspective and a deeper understanding of his/her own actions, and how they affect others. It is a victim/perpetrator exercise that best compels a student to experience what it feels like to walk in another's shoes, and is well suited for helping a perpetrator experience what it feels like to be picked upon (name calling, shunning, subject of rumor and innuendo, or teased for any number of reasons.) It also helps victims to have their concerns voiced, heard, and eventually worked out.

Role playing can take on several forms-including but not limited to-a mock Talk Show setting which is a fun way of facilitating lively discussion. However, before beginning an exercise it is paramount that the Coordinator ensures the group that safety, sensitivity, and understanding are the main objectives. And they are there to help and support one another.

Students who find it difficult to open up, or who rarely participate in classroom discussions may find this forum less threatening, as well as an effective way to build self confidence and self esteem

EXAMPLE EXERCISE

1. TEN MINUTE PLAY:

An exercise whereupon student volunteers are given a situation (setting, time and place, and props) to dramatize a particular complaint. Students will be asked to play their respective roles with as much honesty and sincerity as possible. They are to be objective in their performances, giving as much sensitivity to the perpetrator's side of the incident as to the victim's. In this way, everyone will feel as though they are being heard.

SAMPLE SITUATION

MARK is a new student in class. He's very bright; studies hard and gets straight A's. He spends his spare time helping out in the community. MARK'S teacher is constantly holding him up before his peers; a shining example of all that's good and right with the world. Though the teacher's constant praise of him makes MARK uncomfortable, he says nothing and before long a rumor begins to circulate that MARK thinks he's better than the rest of the students. The instigator of the rumor is another student named LARRY, who before MARK arrived, was the apple of his teacher's eye. LARRY, along with TWO FRIENDS, works the other students up so that soon life at school, and away from school, becomes unbearable for MARK.

This situation, fueled by jealousy, has been repeated in human society since Cain and Abel, and contains many facets. MARK is the obvious victim, and LARRY the perpetrator. However, questions to be asked of the SAC students are:

1. Is Mark completely innocent? Should he have spoken to the teacher about how he felt about being held up as a role model for the class?
2. What about Larry? Shouldn't he have had enough self-esteem to not be threatened by Mark's success? Perhaps instead of hatching up plans to bring Mark down, he should have worked harder. He's obviously a bright kid in his own right.
3. How about Larry's friends? Shouldn't one or both of them have the confidence and strength of character to say, "*Hey, Larry...Mark's not doing anything to you. Sure, he's smart. But so are you...get over it!*" Many times friends think the mark of a friend is to support any stupid thing we can think to do. The best friends, the truest friends, tell us the truth to our faces, and help us to back up when we're on the brink.
4. And what of the teacher's role in all of this. Could he/she have found a way to praise Mark without serving him up as the object of ridicule for his peers? Was it possible for him/her to light a fire under the rest of the students *without* rubbing Mark's attributes in their faces?
5. Speaking of the other students, how many of them responded to peer pressure by actively participating in the taunting of Mark? How many passively participated by standing by and saying nothing? And how many were strong enough to speak out against it? Remember the words of Martin Luther King: "*The hottest place in Hell is reserved for those, who when faced with a moral dilemma, do nothing.*"

As you can see from this one example, the right and wrong in a situation is not always obvious. And even when it is, there is plenty of blame to go around. Also, consequences of actions are rarely taken into account. Therefore, it is important that a discussion follow each exercise, wherein the Coordinator will assist the group in picking apart the exercise, and when appropriate, adding his/her experiences and insights to those of the participants.

If the Coordinator sees the view of the group slant too quickly to the side of the victim (depending, of course, on the exercise), he/she may have to act as devil's advocate in order to ensure that the feelings and motivations of the perpetrator are brought out and examined as well.

Remember: a coin has TWO sides. Sometimes a victim may have to look at his role in the incident. Did he/she contribute in some way? Did he/she commit some faux pas that lead to the abuse? (We've all heard about, or experienced, the kid who reminds the teacher—thirty seconds before the bell—about the homework assignment). The perpetrator may very well be in the right, as far as his/her view of the situation is concerned; he/she may just have to be shown another, non-violent, way to handle the situation.

DISCUSSION PERIOD

In an effort to enable the students to process information and to better understand the feelings and motivations of their peers that were brought out through the role playing exercises, the Coordinator should pose the following questions:

1. What went through your mind as you watched the exercise?
2. How do you feel about what happened?
3. Do you think anyone else should be treated in that manner?
4. How would you defuse the situation?
5. What have you learned from this experience?

The Coordinator should encourage all students to participate in this phase of the program, because their feelings and opinions matter. It is through working together that solutions are born, and it is through the discussion process that students are presented with a unique opportunity to create a safer and more harmonious environment, which will in turn lead to a better, well-rounded education.

Communication is the key by which doors are opened and goals achieved.

VIOLENCE AWARENESS WEEK

This exercise will help to maintain focus on the importance of SAC objectives, and the continuing efforts to combat teen violence. It will also provide a festive environment designed for students and staff to work together toward creating—and maintaining—an open line of communication, as well as establishing a bond of trust that's beneficial to both the staff and students alike. There cannot be one without the other.

Students who plan to share at this event will be required to submit a "Letter of Notification" to the SAC Coordinator, so that accommodations can be made.

During this time, the SAC Coordinator will introduce guest speakers from the list of students who submitted "Letters of Notification", to share their thoughts and concerns with the assembly.

CLOSING CEREMONY

Each student that attends all meetings will receive a certificate of completion, a SAC t-shirt, a SAC bracelet and a Restaurant.com gift certificate. Those students who have completed the program should at this time be encouraged to share what they've learned from their experience with the program, and how it has affected their lives up to this point, and how they expect it to affect them in the future.

The documentation of SAC's accomplishments may encourage further participation on the part of students and staff, as well as serve as a positive influence throughout the surrounding communities. Coordinators should contact the local media so that they will have the opportunity to cover Violence Awareness Week, as well as any other newsworthy events that transpire over the year.

AFTERWARD

Respecting differences and creating inclusive environments are central to reducing violence. This concept has been developed to assist students in understanding the underlying dynamics of achieving respect for a range of differences.

The challenge of the program is to help the student affirm his or her own individual and group identity while respecting and appreciating others.

In addition, the awareness and ability to understand and feel others' perspectives and needs is fundamental to reducing violence in our schools.