



VIOLENCE AMONG BOYS AND GIRLS

LET'S WORK ON IT TOGETHER!



**ACTION PLAN TO PREVENT AND DEAL WITH
VIOLENCE IN THE SCHOOLS
2008-2011**

Reference Tool

Violence among girls and violence among boys can vary considerably with respect to how it is exhibited and the impact it can have. Girls and boys each have unique characteristics that influence their behaviour, therefore they each have different ways of demonstrating violent behaviour. Given the potential impact on the well-being and mental health of young people, it is important that we be aware of these differences so that we can recognize violence when it takes place and intervene appropriately with both boys and girls. As such, the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport has developed this reference tool on violence among boys and violence among girls in keeping with Measure 1.1.3 set out in the Action Plan to Prevent and Deal with Violence in the Schools.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT VIOLENCE AMONG BOYS AND VIOLENCE AMONG GIRLS

Physiological and developmental component

For starters, there are anatomical, chemical, hormonal and functional differences between boys' and girls' brains. Although these differences are small, there are visible structural differences in the areas of the brain that affect language, memory, vision, emotions, hearing and spatial orientation.¹In addition, brain development occurs at different rhythms and at different periods according to gender. Boys acquire spatial perception earlier, while girls develop more quickly in the areas of language, verbalization and emotional control. For example, in kindergarten, girls may be up to one year ahead of the boys in these areas.²However, it must be noted that the structure and function of the brain can be modified by past experiences.³Therefore, from a physiological point of view, the tendency to use violent behaviours can be changed. Intervention and support in situations involving violence can help young people learn alternative behaviours in the same way as they learn pro-social behaviours featuring qualities such as cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, self-control, communication skills and conflict resolution skills.

Adolescence is a particularly sensitive time during which young people's identity development is influenced by traditional roles and differentiated expectations imposed by society regarding, among others, ways of expressing anger and self-control.⁴ This period presents many significant developmental challenges for both girls and boys. Adolescence is defined by an increased need for intimacy, recognition, approval from peers and a strong sense of competency, control and power.

These needs can bring about confusion, an increased drive to compete with peers and selfish ambitions. As a result we see an increase in relational aggression. At the same time, being the target of indirect aggression at this stage in life can have a significant impact on an individual and hinder development.

1 Larry Cahill, "Cerveau masculin, cerveau féminin," *Essentiel Cerveau & Psycho*, no. 5, February-April 2011.

2 Armin Raznahan, "Filles et garçons, un cerveau différent," *Cerveau & Psycho*, no. 42, December 2010.

3 Lise Eliot, "La vérité sur les filles et les garçons," *Essentiel Cerveau & Psycho*, no. 5, February-April 2011.

4 Pierrette Verlaan, et al., "Les conduites agressives des filles... des maux qui blessent," *La foucade*, special issue, December 2010.

Sociocultural component

Behaviours are not only influenced by these physiological differences, but also by factors such as the environment, culture and education. Girls and boys socialize differently in a culture such as ours. According to Eliot, in situations of violence, aggression and empathy are considered inversely proportional. The greater an individual's ability to comprehend the emotions of others, the harder it is for that person to hurt others. In this vein, research reveals that girls and women have a greater ability to empathize than boys and men. At the same time, research also shows that boys and men tend to be more physically and verbally aggressive than girls and women.⁵

Girls and verbal sparring

Girls are encouraged early on to respond with words and to demonstrate empathy. They are therefore already using more complex verbal strategies than boys. When they reach school age, they learn social skills mainly through their relational experiences in a group. These groups help them meet their need for closeness, intimacy and acceptance. According to Verlaan et al., girls are more sensitive about what others think of them and about their interpersonal relationships. They also attribute greater importance to mutual support, confiding in one another and intimacy. Girls seek comfort and support in the form of physical proximity.⁶ Girls develop solidarity and establish rules and standards for a group by confiding in one another and by sharing information about each other.⁷ Consequently, conflicts among girls usually revolve around spreading rumours, revealing secrets, loyalty and social exclusion. Since girls generally avoid confrontation, their disputes tend to last longer. Girls are involved in conflicts with friends and with family members more often than boys.⁸ Although this form of violence exists among boys as well, violence among girls:

- is more indirect and relational (intimidation, ruining reputations, rejection)
- usually aims to maintain exclusiveness⁹
- takes place within a tight-knit group

5 Lise Eliot, "La vérité sur les filles et les garçons," *Essentiel Cerveau Et Psycho*, no. 5, February–April 2011.

6 Claude Zaidman, "Jeux de filles, jeux de garçons," *Les cahiers du CEDREF* [online], no. 15, 2007, posted on November 10, 2009, consulted March 8, 2011. [<http://cedref.revues.org/461>]

7 Pierrette Verlaan, et al., "Les conduites agressives des filles... des maux qui blessent," *La foucade*, special issue, December 2010

8 Deborah Prothrow-Stith and Howard R. Spivak, *Sugar and Spice and No Longer Nice: How We Can Stop Girls' Violence* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

9 Rhiarne E. Pronk and Melanie J. Zimmer-Bembeck, "It's 'Mean' But What Does It Mean to Adolescents? Relational Aggression Described by Victims, Aggressors, and Their Peers," *Journal of Adolescent Research*, vol. 25, no. 2, March 2010, 175–204.

Yet another aspect of the social component is how the two genders react to aggressive behaviour. The idea that girls can be violent is still a difficult concept for most. Physical violence among boys is better tolerated than violence among girls. According to Verlaan et al., social punishments following physical acts of aggression are more severe for girls than for boys.¹⁰ Social learning reinforces the differences between boys and girls, particularly with regard to emotional reactions. As Eliot points out, society has a tendency to toughen up boys more than girls, not only by encouraging them to express their emotions less, but also by teaching them to be less sensitive to the emotions of others.¹¹ This explains in part why girls tend to use indirect aggression rather than direct confrontation.

It should be noted, however, that a recent increase in acts of physical aggression among girls has been observed, although it still remains far below the number of incidences among boys.¹² This increase could be explained by the fact that the gap between the two genders with regard to socialization has also very recently begun to shrink and by the fact that openly expressing anger has become socially more acceptable than in the past.

Boys and play fighting

Boys tend to learn social skills through games involving physical contact, rowdiness, roughhousing and chasing each other. Wrestling or play fighting is the learning strategy boys use to explore solidarity and cooperation with peers.¹³ Generally speaking, violent situations among boys do not arise among friends, but rather among acquaintances in a group that is less close. In cases of social exclusion, the violence involves a much larger group and the attacks revolve around themes such as masculinity, athletic ability or perceived sexual orientation.¹⁴

A study by Tremblay et al.¹⁵ shows that when young children acquire the skills required to control their aggressive reactions, they resort to violence less often when they are older. This learning is acquired through language, the development of social skills and play fighting.

Educators must recognize and accept that play fighting is part of learning and a positive step in the development of a child. This is particularly true for boys who learn self-control and the ability to feint using aggressive gestures. Through these games, they learn to test themselves against others, determine who is the strongest, distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable aggressive behaviour, and gradually stop resorting to violence. In addition, they develop the art of compromise and respect for rules.¹⁶

10 Pierrette Verlaan, et al., "Du côté de la recherche. Les conduites agressives," *La foucade*, December 2010.

11 Lise Eliot, "La vérité sur les filles et les garçons," *Essentiel Cerveau Et Psycho*, no. 5, February–April 2011.

12 Deborah Prothrow-Stith and Howard R. Spivak, *Sugar and Spice and No Longer Nice: How We Can Stop Girls' Violence* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

13 Pierrette Verlaan, et al., "Du côté de la recherche. Les conduites agressives," *La foucade*, December 2010.

14 Rhiarne E. Pronk and Melanie J. Zimmer-Bembeck, "It's 'Mean,' But What Does It Mean to Adolescents? Relational Aggression Described by Victims, Aggressors, and Their Peers," *Journal of Adolescent Research*, vol. 25, no. 2, March 2010, 175–204.

15 Richard E. Tremblay, et al., *Prévenir la violence par l'apprentissage à la petite enfance*, (Montréal: Centre d'excellence pour le développement des jeunes enfants, 2008).

16 Ibid.

Paquette et al. define play fighting (pushing, pulling and bugging each other) as vigorous play that involves chasing each other, tackling each other, shooting at each other, pushing and rolling around together in a playful and obviously fun way.¹⁷

Contrary to popular belief, children who like to play fight are generally not those who get into the most fights.¹⁸ It is important that educators make this distinction. It goes without saying that intervening to ensure safety is not the same thing as intervening in a situation involving violence.

Indirect violence

Violence can be direct or indirect depending on whether it is carried out through an intermediary or not. Indirect acts of aggression usually involve exclusion or social alienation or relational aggression. Indirect violence is particularly complex because it is orchestrated from within a social network and aims to damage the social status of an individual or exclude him or her from the group. Gossiping, spreading rumours, creating scandals, slandering, divulging secrets, talking behind someone's back or writing nasty remarks (e.g. in graffiti, e-mails) about someone, ridiculing someone, attempting to ruin someone's reputation, or suggesting that someone be excluded from a group are all examples of indirect violence. Nonverbal language such as turning away, whispering and eye-rolling are all attitudes that are barely perceptible, but may indicate a situation of indirect violence.

This social violence is probably the most harmful form of bullying. It is probably also the most common, yet at the same time the least known. Based on the work of Xie, Farmer and Cairns, Verlaan et al. highlighted the fact that an estimated 21% of interventions carried out by school staff are linked to conflicts involving ostracizing behaviour and scandals, compared to 55% involving physical aggression and 3% involving verbal aggression.¹⁹ In fact, when victims of indirect aggression do find the courage to come forward, the adults do not know what to do about it.²⁰ The lack of intervention could be linked, in part, to ignorance or to the fact that indirect aggression is now seen as commonplace. However, this same group of researchers found in the work of Boulton that more than 90% of teaching staff define violence as aggressive acts, either physical or verbal, that force a student to do something his or her aggressor wants him or her to do. Moreover, half of teachers (52%) do not consider excluding someone from a group as aggressive behaviour, and a quarter of them believe that spreading rumours about someone is not violence. In addition, certain adults believe that indirect bullying is a normal step in the development of young people, and many young girls find these behaviours acceptable and even believe them to be part of their learning.²¹

17 Daniel Paquette, et al., "La violence : un jugement de valeur sur les rapports de pouvoir," *Revue de psychoéducation*, Vol. 39, no. 2, 2010.

18 Ibid.

19 Pierrette Verlaan, et al., "La violence, au féminin, à l'école," *Vie pédagogique*, no. 156, January 2011.

20 Pierrette Verlaan, et al., "Du côté de la recherche. Les conduites agressives," *La foucade*, December 2010.

21 *It's a Girl's World* (National Film Board of Canada, 2005).

Girls often resort to indirect aggression when there is a conflict, when they are angry or when they want to hurt someone. Verlaan et al. estimate that 25% of girls are involved in a situation of indirect violence on some level, whether they are perpetrators, victims or bystanders. These researchers suggest that this over-representation is influenced, among others things, by certain girls' lack of interest in schoolyard activities or by a desire to spend recess doing more exciting things than the usual activities such as dodge ball or capture the flag.²²

Indirect aggression seems to be more common among girls. When questioned, girls reveal that they believe indirect aggression hurts more than being hit or pushed. Although more common among girls, indirect aggression is not limited to girls; boys and adults also use indirect aggression. According to Verlaan et al., girls' strategies for inflicting indirect violence improve with experience and continue to be used into adulthood. Boys, on the other hand, gain maturity and are influenced by social pressures that discourage them from resorting to physical blows, leading them to gradually give up physical aggression and learn indirect strategies.²³

When asked, both boys and girls agree that the reasons behind the various forms of relational aggression are similar: power, popularity, finding one's place, fitting into a group.²⁴ Students claim that most cases of violence occur in places where there is less supervision, such as:²⁵

- schoolyard
- hallways
- washrooms
- school bus
- in the community
- online

Indirect or relational aggression can stem from a conflict, but it is not just a simple conflict. It is a form of aggression that is intolerable and that requires intervention like any other form of violence. As in the case of bullying, the code of silence often reigns. Therefore, mediation should not be the first step in intervention. According to Verlaan et al., it is essential to understand that:²⁶

1. *conduct related to indirect aggression affirms power through behaviour that damages the reputation of someone else and excludes him or her socially*
2. *instigators of indirect aggression gain power over their victims in different manners thanks to their standing within their peer group, their knowledge of the victim's weaknesses or support from other students*
3. *by bullying their victim, perpetrators establish their dominance and the victim becomes more and more humiliated, distressed and fearful*

22 Pierrette Verlaan et al., "Du côté de la recherche. Les conduites agressives," *La foucade*, December 2010.

23 Ibid.

24 Éric Debarbieux, "La violence à l'école, entre exagération et méconnaissance," (INHES, 2006).

25 Pierrette Verlaan et al., "La violence, au féminin, à l'école," *Vie pédagogique*, no. 156, January 2011.

26 Pierrette Verlaan et al., "Du côté de la recherche. Les conduites agressives," *La foucade*, December 2010.

Perpetrators of aggression: boys and girls

For a variety of reasons, we have traditionally associated violent gestures with boys rather than with girls. However, the concept of violence is changing over time and indirect forms of violence, which are more common among girls, have only recently been recognized as violent acts. In addition, the violence perpetrated by boys is often more visible because it is often expressed as a physical gesture, whereas girls express their aggression through words and nonverbal language.

According to Potvin and Lapointe, studies show that the teaching staff's attitudes toward girls are considerably more positive than their attitudes toward boys, and are even less positive toward students that are very socially incompetent. Behavioural problems in boys seem to be more often related to school than those of the girls, which seem to be more often related to family.²⁷ St-Laurent points out that the proportion of girls with behavioural problems is one girl for every five or six boys with behavioural problems.²⁸ In addition, boys are more likely to demonstrate the characteristics of at-risk students as defined in Québec. The work of Owens et al. (2000) reveals that when all incidents of violence are taken into account, girls and boys are almost equally guilty of being perpetrators of violence.²⁹ In fact, in cases of online violence, girls report being victims of cyberbullying twice as often as boys. They are also perpetrators of cyberbullying and indirect aggression more often than boys.³⁰ According to Eliot, both genders engage in competitions and both genders fight; the difference is in the degree to which this is done openly or is concealed.³¹

Contrary to popular belief, violence, whether direct or indirect, is not limited to students with behavioural difficulties. Many students may behave violently, especially when in a group. Just like bullying,³² indirect violence has a major social component because the perpetrator's actions have an impact on the victim's social relationships.

Certain factors that may increase a student's tendency toward violent behaviours are the same for boys and girls. Here are a few examples:³³

- exposure to violent situations involving their parents
- association with peers with antisocial behaviours
- learning or behavioural difficulties

27 Pierre Potvin and Jean-René Lapointe, *Guide de prévention pour les élèves à risque au primaire* (Centre de transfert pour la réussite éducative du Québec, 2010).

28 Lise St-Laurent, *Enseigner aux élèves à risque et en difficulté au primaire*, 2nd edition (Montréal: Gaëtan Morin, 2007), 376.

29 Pierrette Verlaan, et al., "Du côté de la recherche. Les conduites agressives," *La foucade*, December 2010.

30 Robin M. Kowalski, "Cyber Bullying. Recognizing and Treating Victim and Aggressor," *Psychiatric Times Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, Vol. 25, no. 11, October 2008.

31 Lise Eliot, "La vérité sur les filles et les garçons," *Essentiel Cerveau & Psycho*, no. 5, February–April 2011.

32 See the reference tool *Bullying: Let's Work on it Together!*

33 Alan Leschied, et al., *Female Adolescent Aggression: A Review of the Literature and the Correlates of Aggression, 2000–2004* (Ottawa: Department of the Solicitor General Canada, 2000).

Statistics reveal that young girls who are depressed are four times more likely to adopt violent behaviours. In addition, girls who are victims of physical or sexual abuse are more likely to have violent tendencies. Research by Verlaan et al. reveals that all girls involved in violent behaviour, whether physical, verbal or indirect, as victims or perpetrators, have more problems adapting to internal and external problems than girls who are considered unaggressive.³⁴ Studies by Déry et al. indicate similar findings and show that girls who have external troubles also have internal problems (generalized anxiety and depression) twice as often as boys.³⁵

Is violence used to meet a need?

Generally speaking, girls and boys resort to violence for the same reasons. It serves to:³⁶

- prove that they are not wimps
- build a reputation
- avoid becoming a target
- stake out their territory (their girlfriend or boyfriend)
- defend their mother from insults
- bring pleasure

When asked, girls explain that bullying is mostly related to social manipulation and is perpetrated in order to maintain status within their social network. Friendships with a high level of trust and intimacy can generate situations of aggression that have a greater impact and can be very harmful, all while remaining very discreet.³⁷ Verlaan et al. refer to a study by Owens et al. involving adolescents that presents two main explanations for why girls resort to acts of ostracism and spreading gossip:³⁸

- alleviating boredom and creating excitement in their lives (e.g. making fun of another student in the schoolyard just for fun and to pass the time)
- having close friendships and being part of a group meets their need for attention and their desire to be included in a group. It can lead to jealousy and vengeance. The perpetrator is able to get attention from her peers by revealing another girl's secrets or to establish a hierarchy within the group by clearly defining who is accepted and who is not.

³⁴ Pierrette Verlaan, et al., "Du côté de la recherche. Les conduites agressives," *La foucade*, December 2010.

³⁵ Michèle Déry, *Programme Actions concertées - La persévérance et la réussite scolaires*, Résultats de recherche – Les difficultés de comportement chez les élèves: l'urgence d'agir en concertation, 2009.

³⁶ Deborah Prothrow-Stith and Howard R. Spivak, *Sugar and Spice and No Longer Nice: How We Can Stop Girls' Violence* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005) 208.

³⁷ Vanessa H. James and Laurence D. Owens, "They Turned Around Like I Wasn't: An Analysis of Teenage Girls' Letters About Their Peer Conflicts," *School Psychology International*, February 2005, Vol. 26, 71-88.

³⁸ Pierrette Verlaan, et al., "La violence, au féminin, à l'école," *Vie pédagogique*, no. 156, January 2011

Female bullies may:

- have mood swings
- be sad more often
- have inappropriate feelings of power

Violence within a group of girls

Girls who exhibit indirect aggression are often the ones who have a significant leadership role within a small group of girls, whereas girls who are not part of a network rarely use indirect aggression.³⁹ Observation of the behaviours and interactions within a group of girls shows complex, sophisticated and very hierarchical group dynamics. They have implicit rules and roles are clearly defined. A typical group of girls consists of one girl who is in charge, girls who follow her and girls who feel rejected.

Within a group, the roles are interchangeable and can change frequently. Power within the group is determined according to a coded language containing many unspoken messages and secrets. Therefore, when a conflict occurs, many girls do not talk about it openly, they avoid dialogue and seem to try to find a reason not to resolve the conflict. When there is a conflict, the atmosphere within a group is riddled with confusion, isolation, joining forces and rejection. The girls involved therefore never know who they can trust and who are their real friends. A systematic study of relations in a class can be conducted using a sociogram, which will reveal the instigators of aggression and their targets, as well as show who is being influenced.

Girls and boys who are targets of aggression

Whether direct or indirect, violence causes confusion and suffering in a variety of ways. For both boys and girls, being the victim of repetitive social alienation can have serious consequences on their lives, and the suffering and humiliation can persist over time. The impact of indirect aggression is comparable to that of bullying. The victims may:

- have poor relationship skills
- appear more sensitive, timid, reserved or nervous than other students
- look sad, depressed or unhappy, exhibit a new lack of motivation for school work, show a decline in school performance
- experience mood swings; feel anger, fear, shame, doubt and guilt

39 Pierrette Verlaan, et al., "Du côté de la recherche. Les conduites agressives," *La foucade*, December 2010.

- fear that the aggression will never stop
- feel rejected
- feel helpless, useless or worthless
- show signs of anxiety, solitude, isolation, withdrawal; experience a loss of self-esteem, appetite or sleep quality
- fear that gossip or malicious stories will be spread about them
- fear social isolation, solitude and rejection
- have low self-esteem
- resort to avoidance strategies: being late or absent, quitting school or taking a roundabout way of getting to school
- risk developing externalized behavioural difficulties
- have emotional difficulties such as depression or eating disorders
- have suicidal or homicidal thoughts
- have a tendency to keep their problems to themselves
- deny the situation, try to hide what has happened, turn to other friends, escape into the world of books and sometimes perform better in school
- worry about the perpetrator's revenge or the disapproval of other young people
- believe that they have to take care of the situation by themselves
- abuse alcohol or drugs
- be at risk for teen pregnancy
- have irrational thoughts (e.g. "everyone is against me")
- have difficulty trusting others
- experience an interruption in the development of their identity
- believe that adults cannot do much to help them

Research shows that students whose social skills are not as strong are more likely to be targets of acts of violence. These at-risk students have few friends to protect them and are often not well liked by their peers. The teenage girls questioned on the subject identified several characteristics that may make certain girls a target for relational aggression:⁴⁰

- personally have caused, provoked or aggravated a situation by their behaviour or attitude
- be vulnerable because they do not have many friends or they are new to a school
- lack assertiveness
- have certain visible differences such as obesity, height, skin colour, wearing a distinctive piece of clothing, handicap, ethnicity

40 Laurence Owens, et al., "It Hurts a Hell of a Lot . . . : The Effects of Indirect Aggression on Teenage Girls," *School Psychology International*, Vol. 21 (4), 2000, 359-376.

Girls and boys who witness violence

Because direct and indirect violence closely resemble bullying, one could presume that students who witness such acts of violence may:

- feel anger or a sense of shame, guilt or powerlessness
- feel empathy for the victims
- worry about being targeted themselves or being associated with the victim, the perpetrator or the act of aggression
- actively assist the perpetrator by participating in the act of aggression (active assistant)
- help the perpetrator as an active bystander by laughing and encouraging the behaviour (reinforcer)
- refuse to get involved, but may act as a passive onlooker (outsider)
- help the victim by turning to an adult for help (indirect defender)
- help the victim directly by standing up to the perpetrator (active defender)

Violence in school can affect the entire school population. It can lead to:⁴¹

- a decline in academic performance
- an increase in delinquent behaviour
- an increase in absenteeism or school disengagement
- an increase in the number of situations requiring disciplinary intervention
- feelings of frustration among school staff
- a climate of fear and disrespect

PREVENTING AND DEALING WITH VIOLENCE AMONG BOYS AND VIOLENCE AMONG GIRLS

When it comes to preventing and dealing with violence, there are no magic solutions. No single approach can put an end to aggressive behaviour for good. The implementation of a prevention program, however comprehensive, is not sufficient to prevent the various forms of violence from occurring. The entire school team, not just a few individuals, needs to be involved in intervention. It is important for the school to take a clear stance by establishing a policy or a similar measure that clearly states that violence is not acceptable and that expresses the school's intention to ensure that everyone's rights are respected. This will reassure victims, witnesses, school staff and parents alike, and make sure they know that the school will take action in cases of violence.

41 Kaye Rendall, et al., *Mean girls, 101½ Creative Strategies and Activities for Working with Relational Aggression* (YouthLight Inc., 2007), 128.

Research shows that since violence among girls is not as well known, school stakeholders feel less able to intervene.⁴² However, just like any other form of violence, aggressive gestures, words and attitudes should not be tolerated, whether committed by boys or girls. These acts are reprehensible and require intervention.

With respect to interventions involving boys, it is important to carefully distinguish between what is play and what is violence. Games usually last a long time and the intensity is maintained through reciprocity and various mechanisms (handicap their adversary, time outs and changing roles). Most play fighting is friendly. During play, you can see positive expressions on the boys' faces (laughing, smiling) and there is a level of control in their gestures.

In real fights, facial expressions are negative, the episode is usually over very quickly and the opposing individuals separate soon after. Play fighting and real fights also start differently and end differently (either shared pleasure or injury and suffering).⁴³

With girls, it is important to pay particular attention to relationships within groups and to recognize the signs of indirect or relational violence, exclusion and social alienation.

To deal with violence effectively, the school must implement a strategy consisting of the following key characteristics:

- **Good fit with the school**

- Verify the nature of the aggressive behaviours by taking note of the acts of violence using a democratic approach that allows all students and the entire school staff to state their views
- Review the situation periodically
- In cases of indirect violence, use a sociogram to study the relationships within the groups and identify the leaders and the isolated students
- Determine guidelines and actions intended for all students and adults in the school, including victims, bystanders and perpetrators

- **Support of all members of the school community**

- Under the principal's leadership, all staff members must be involved at all stages of the process, i.e. selecting the orientations, and planning and implementing the actions
- Make sure that everyone is on board and participates in selecting the orientations and in planning and implementing actions, in particular by encouraging teamwork

⁴² Remarks by Sophie Malavoy, "Un gars, une fille: des coups et des mots," *Rebelles*, Vol. 25, no. 3, 6-8.

⁴³ Peter Smith and Thelma Hunter, "Children's perceptions of playfighting, playchasing and real fighting: a cross-national interview study," *Social Development*, Vol. 3, no. 1, 1992.

- **Shared understanding**

- Provide a clear, concise definition of violence⁴⁴
- Make the school staff aware of the particularities of violence among girls and of violence among boys
- Keep in mind and take into account the importance that interpersonal relationships have in girls' lives
- Make sure that everyone is able to distinguish between playing or roughhousing and acts of violence
- Make sure that everyone understands and is able to recognize indirect violence just as well as direct violence, and that they understand the impact it has on those involved and their living environment

- **Inclusion of proactive measures (educational and punitive) adapted to the students**

- Increase stakeholders' vigilance, particularly with respect to relational aggression and violence among girls
- When possible, hold individual meetings with the victims, perpetrators and bystanders before moving on to a form of intervention involving the group
- Teach alternative solutions and encourage students to use words to express their emotions and resolve conflicts
- Set up interesting activities for the students that boost their self-esteem, especially during recess, paying particular attention to the interests of both boys and girls
- Set up activities or programs in the school or classroom designed to help students develop the social skills associated with preventing violence, such as:

- | |
|-------------------------|
| • respect |
| • empathy |
| • healthy communication |
| • dealing with emotions |
| • conflict resolution |

- Make sure adults who act as role models are vigilant so that situations involving violence, indirect or other, do not occur among themselves
- Foster a culture of personal responsibility
- Teach collective values
- Specify the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders before, during and after violent incidents

⁴⁴ See the definition of violence in the newsletter *Violence in the schools: Let's work on it together!*, Vol. 1, no. 1, Summer 2009.

-
- Provide confidential ways for students to report situations involving violence and file complaints so that the nature and seriousness of the situation is understood, and also provide appropriate follow-up:

- mailbox
- Internet address
- contact information for an adult at the school to whom students can turn

- Establish mechanisms for communication

- between staff members
- between the school and the families of the victim and the perpetrator
- between the school and the families of any bystanders, if applicable

- Establish mechanisms for handling complaints and providing support services:

- for students who are victims of violence
- for students who witness violence
- for students who are perpetrators
- for parents who believe their child may be involved in a situation of violence

- Promote good social behaviour

- Establish the means to keep track of all incidents involving violent behaviour (physical, verbal, relational, psychological, sexual) and record them in the personal assistance file of all students affected or involved

- Establish procedures for managing violations of school rules and safety measures:

- set and apply consequences in a fair manner
- ensure that consequences and restitution have a direct link to the act committed (e.g. research and oral presentation on bullying, homophobia or discrimination)
- conditions for the victim's return to school, if absent, and for the perpetrator, if he or she was suspended
- follow up with the victims and bystanders to make sure that the perpetrator's behaviour has changed

- Provide support for parents in their role:

- workshops on child supervision and discipline
- information to help them monitor their children's activities and friendships
- information on their child's developmental stages

- Establish procedures for securing the assistance of appropriate professionals
- Provide training to help school staff develop knowledge and skills for dealing with an incident or a complaint

A passive approach or lack of action on the part of adults has consequences for the victim, the perpetrator, the bystanders and the whole school. According to Verlaan et al., when a victim of indirect aggression sees that the situation goes unnoticed by adults, his or her sense of security at school is affected. Adults' passive attitudes also send a message to the perpetrator that violent behaviour is tolerated or allowed at school.⁴⁵

An intervention system that is focused on assigning blame and punishment can generate resentment, strengthen group solidarity, increase the desire to continue the aggressive behaviour, label the victim and prompt the perpetrator to develop more subtle strategies. This could make it more difficult to detect violence and thus complicate intervention.

Implementing a whole-school program takes time and entails sustained effort. Often, a major obstacle to implementing such a program is the sense that immediate action is required; this may prompt the school to take a reactive, incident-specific approach rather than a proactive, planned approach.

45 5 Pierrette Verlaan, et al., "La violence, au féminin, à l'école," *Vie pédagogique*, no. 156, January 2011

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Violence

Réfléchir et agir ensemble, Vie pédagogique, no. 156, January 2011:
<http://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/bs2018122> (in French only)

RESOURCES

Groupe de recherche sur les inadaptations sociales de l'enfance

Toolkit to raise awareness about indirect violence
<http://www.grise.ca/> (in French only)

National Film Board of Canada

It's a Girl's World, DVD
https://www.nfb.ca/film/its_a_girls_world/

Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur

Violence in the Schools section
<http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/current-initiatives/bullying-and-violence-in-the-schools/>

Directory of Resources for Preventing and Dealing With Violence

Resources and Documentation in the Violence in the Schools section on the Ministère's Web site
<http://www1.education.gouv.qc.ca/violenceEcole/>