

College Guild

PO Box 696, Brunswick, Maine 04011

Challenges to Justice and Freedom

Unit 2 of 5

Individual Well-Being

This unit examines some of the issues that impact individuals' physical, emotional, and social well-being.

Glossary of Terms:

1. **Aggression**-hostile or violent behavior or attitudes toward another; readiness to attack or confront.
2. **Bullies**-a person who habitually seeks to harm or intimidate those whom they perceive as vulnerable.
3. **Bullying**-the repeated use of threats or violence in an attempt to harm or intimidate others
4. **Juvenile Justice**-the area of criminal law applicable to persons not old enough to be held fully responsible for criminal acts. In most states, the age for adult criminal culpability is set at 18.
5. **Learning Disordered**-Learning disorders (or disabilities) involve an inability to acquire, retain, or broadly use specific skills or information, resulting from deficiencies in attention, memory, or reasoning and affecting academic performance. Affected children may be slow to learn names of colors or letters, to count, or to learn to read or write.
6. **Neuromuscular**-Pertaining to both nerves and muscles, as in neuromuscular blockade by an anesthetic agent, the neuromuscular junction (the meeting place of a nerve and a muscle fiber), and neuromuscular transmission (the transfer of "information" from the nerve to the muscle)
7. **Spina Bifida**-a condition that occurs when the spine and spinal cord don't form properly. It's a type of neural tube defect. The neural tube is the structure in a developing embryo that later becomes the baby's brain and spinal cord and the tissues that enclose them.
8. **Vandalism**-intentional destruction or damage to property
9. **Unbiased** - without bias or prejudice; objective; impartial
10. **Well-being**- The importance of well-being has been widely acknowledged over the past twenty years by psychologists. But the concept itself is surprisingly complex and includes fourteen distinct and recurring constructs that are used to describe well-being: happiness, vitality, calmness, optimism, involvement, self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-worth, competence, development, purpose, significance, congruence, and connection.

PART 1: BULLIES

Society likes to think of children as innocent and **unbiased**. The truth is that from a very young age children can be downright cruel. The well-being of children can be dramatically and negatively impacted by being bullied.

Bullies and Victims: It begins in elementary school (kids ages 5-12). We now know that children who commit violence tend to be the ones who were teased and bullied earlier in their lives.



1. List 3 causes for children being bullied in elementary school. Are these the same causes for which children are bullied in middle or high school? Why or why not?

An expert who studies this problem has developed a plan to prevent it.

1) Set and enforce standards. **Aggression** is clearly defined so that **bullying** is quickly recognized by teachers and students and the consequences are always the same. Every act of bullying is interrupted and the aggressor faces predictable consequences.

2) Support changes in the bully's behavior. Not only should the bully be punished, but rewards should be in place, so there are also positive consequences to encourage changing the behavior.

3) Help bullies understand why there are punishments and rewards for different behaviors. Often they don't recognize their aggression, or they

think it was justified.

4) Support the victims of bullying. Assure victims it was not their fault. Educate all students that victims are not "cry-babies", and that other students should report aggression.

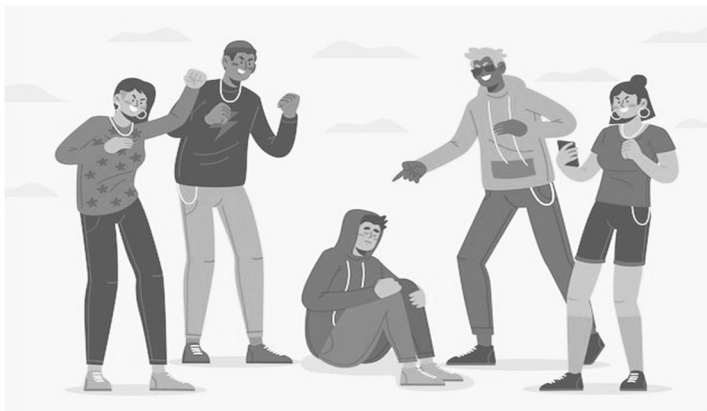
5) Educate all parents about the school's policy on bullying. If possible, teach parents their role in preventing the development of aggression in their children.

2. In your opinion, will this program work? Why or why not?

What aspects are most likely to be successful or at least have an effect on bullying?

3. Will a successful elementary school program carry over into middle school? Why or why not?

One group of children who may be laughed at or bullied by their classmates are the "**learning disordered.**" LD children may be intelligent and creative, but their brains have a problem in the area of understanding and using language, spoken and/or written. Communication skills such as reading, writing, listening, speaking or spelling can be affected. You can see how other children might not understand and think of kids with LD as "retards" – and as easy targets for bullying.



There is a larger percentage of incarcerated individuals with a learning disability than in the non-institutionalized population.

4. Why do you think this is?

PART 2: JUVENILE CRIME

Read Appendix A – it is an article about vandalism, written by journalist John Gaffney.

5. What is your response to this article? Does vandalism by teens impact their well-being?

6. What is the best way to approach and help a teenager who is vandalizing property?

Juvenile justice is one of the most controversial issues in corrections. Many prisoners say that youth detention centers turn young offenders into adult criminals because there is only punishment, not rehabilitation. The following issues are associated with juvenile justice:

- childhood and/or family experiences = physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse, neglect
- elementary school experiences
- middle or high school experiences
- negative peer associations, substance use
- juvenile criminal behavior
- juvenile detention facilities and juvenile court policies/practice

Involvement with the juvenile justice system can impact young people's physical and mental health and well-being throughout their lives, as well as the health and well-being of their families and communities.



7. Pick one of these topics and write an (in depth) essay, poem or fictional story about it.

The poems in Appendix B were written by two boys who describe their feelings about a juvenile detention center.

8. Pick another one of the topics from the list above and write a poem about it.

In responding to the section on juvenile offenders, one CG student, Carrie, had a thought-provoking answer about helping teenage girls who are housed separately from the adult women prisoners. Common thinking is that juveniles

are put at risk by being housed with adult prisoners. Carrie has a different view:

Girls are in more danger of becoming adult criminals if they are kept with their peers than when they are put in the general adult population. They take these children and surround them only with other children with the same mind frame. As much as one of these girls might want to change, that would mean being different from her peers, facing ridicule and rejection, no longer being considered "cool."

She suggests that the majority of women in her prison want to help these girls, to talk to, teach, and show them a better, permanent, positive alternative so that they don't end up like the adults in the end. This helps the women also, who say, *"In a way, we succeed through them."*

9. What do you think about what Carrie says? Would it be the same for teenage boys?

PART 3: PHYSICAL DISABILITY

Metal bars hold the prisoner from physical freedom But some locks can't be opened.

Spina Bifida

*I watch my sister
and her friends:
run
jump
skip
hop
chase the dog.
This wheelchair takes me
a lot of places
but it never gets me
where I want to go.*

John Yarbrough from Boiled White, 2002



Residents held in prisons understand their loss of freedom, but there are all kinds of other issues where a cage surrounds a child.

10. How do you explain to a child why s/he is different from other kids and help improve their sense of well-being?

11. Draw or describe what could be added to or changed on a wheelchair to make it more fun and less medically scary to other children.

Diane is in prison in Delaware. She has a neuromuscular condition which causes severe pain and even makes it difficult to walk at times. In other words, Diane is twice held a prisoner..

...I'm fighting despair every day, and despair is winning more often than not. Between the hopelessness of this life sentence and the constant pain I fight from my medical condition, my quality of life is pretty shabby.....The helplessness and frustration of dealing with the breakdown of my physical self -- what I'd give for good health again.

Progressive diseases or conditions have another huge component to them. For some, it means that the adaptations worked out have to be revised over and over as independence is slowly lost. For others, progressive conditions are life threatening – cancer, hepatitis, muscular dystrophy, etc.

12. What are the best ways you can help a friend who is in physical and emotional pain?

PART 4: FAMILIES

In a household with a handicapped child, there can be other individuals impacted. The brother or sister of this child can also be trapped. Because so much time is spent helping the disabled child, siblings may be expected to be good, obedient, successful in school, and to keep out of trouble. They can get less attention. If healthy children are picked on by their disabled siblings, they often can't fight back. The healthy child may have responsibilities in helping their siblings beyond what is appropriate for their age. On top of all this, they may feel guilty for having a non-disabled body.



13. What effects (good or bad) could growing up with a disabled brother or sister have for an adult?

Other family members can be trapped by someone else's physical disability too.

14. What are the problems faced by a person with a disabled spouse?

15. How is incarceration similar to and how is it different from a physical handicap?

PART 5: GOVERNMENT, BUSINESS & HEALTH

Different countries have different ways of providing for the health needs of their citizens. Canada provides universal access to publicly funded health services which is seen by Canadian citizens as a "fundamental value that ensures national health care insurance for everyone wherever they live in the country."



Healthcare in the United States is largely provided by private sector healthcare facilities, and paid for by a combination of public programs, private insurance, and out-of-pocket payments. The U.S. is the only developed country without a system of universal healthcare, and a significant proportion of its population lacks health insurance.

16. When it comes to treating health problems, what kind of help should patients get from the government, if any?

17. Health insurance rates are sky-rocketing. What specific medical conditions should not be covered by a policy (in order to keep it affordable)?

Self-Reflection Exercise

- 1) What was the most interesting thing you learned about Individual Well-Being?
- 2) How do the lessons of Individual Well-Being apply to your own life?

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes

Appendix A

Open Letter

Castling about for a timely On the record subject this week, we kept coming back to one of the day's major topics- vandalism, how it happened and who's to blame.

Then we thought of writing an open letter to a vandal- a typical young person who for some reason unknown to the rest of us feels compelled to break things, to tear down and destroy. At first we wondered what we should say, how we could make ourselves understood. We couldn't even be sure to whom we should address our letter. Finally we decided to plunge in, hoping at least a few young people, confused by a society they can't understand, might hear of what we had to say and try to understand. (On the Record does have some young readers, we are told, but we don't know how many of them are causing trouble.)

We hardly need to start our letter by defining vandalism. Everyone knows what it is. Its chief ingredient is destruction. Property is the first casualty, but when vandalism goes unchecked, it also destroys ideals and reputations, even lives.

The victims of vandalism are legion. Those who do the destroying probably think no harm comes to them, but the reverse is true of course. The man who returns to his car to find his windshield smashed, the woman frightened by a fire in a mail box, or the child nearly run down by a racing auto suffers immediately. But eventually, one way or another, the wrong doer is hurt, too.

Mothers and fathers are casualties, first because they are the parents of vandals and secondly because the rest of society keeps reminding them that they are to blame. And in a way they are, especially those who give their children cars and money and time before they have lived long enough to possess a sense of responsibility and reasonable judgement as well.

Taxpayers suffer, too, and so does the community's good name. The agents of law enforcement suffer, because they are burdened beyond their means and must abide public indignation.

A youngster who has spent his evening causing injury to others (for that is what vandalism is) must not think very highly of himself as he drops off to sleep. Is he proud of what he has done? Does he fancy he has righted some wrong by destroying the recreation facilities the community has built for him? Is he convinced that he can only establish his place in society by tearing down what others have set up? Or is he merely caught up in a pack of misguided young people, half hysterical with the "power" that flows a fast car and a can of beer?

Does the young vandal imagine that he is alone against society, that there is no one around who understands or will listen to his problems? Is he so out of touch with the substance of his community that he believes his only chance for a place in the sun is through the violation of accepted standards?

From this corner, we would like to make one fact clear above all others: for every young person in the community who is beset by devils he cannot comprehend there are several adults ready to help and to understand. And this is not chit-chat. There are, after all, many ways to work off steam, to establish one's skills and win recognition that are constructive, not destructive, and it is the job of the adults of the community to show the way. The aim of this open letter was not to preach, to talk in high-sounding phrases and fill space. In a word, what we hoped to do was to let any young people who happen to be listening know that they are not alone, that there are adults ready and willing to help them if they will meet us half way. At the same time, however, the point must be made, and firmly, that lawlessness cannot be tolerated, whatever its cause, and must be stopped.

Our own hope in thinking out loud about vandalism leans towards prevention, through understanding and a revived human spirit. For that's where the root of the seemingly senseless destruction lies, we feel...in a sense of inadequacy, coupled as its almost invariably is with aimlessness and an almost total lack of supervision.

Appendix B

DAYDREAMS

Daydreams are exciting-I'm a basketball star!
Daydreams are peaceful-I'm sitting in a field!
 there's no noise.
I'm rich, I have money,
 I have power,
 I have freedom.

If I had freedom I would go home.
If I had money I would buy a car,
 a house,
 eat lobster, fettuccine, McDonalds.
I would travel
 to Florida
 to California,
 sunshine, beaches...

If I had freedom, I would go home.

NIGHTMARES

Being in Maine Youth Center is a nightmare!

What scares me?
 dying
 going to prison someday
 UFO's
 really bright lights.
The most scared I ever was
 was when I got shot
 was a really bad acid trip.

What makes me angry?
 staying here
 being separated from family and friends.

The Maine Youth Center is a nightmare.

Freedom minds (a poetry and art club)
Maine Youth Center, Maine