Teenagers Identify Causes of Violence in Schools and Develop Strategies to Eliminate Violence Using GroupSystems Electronic Meeting System (EMS)

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Abstract
Is it possible to engage teenagers in a serious effort to identify the root causes of school violence and to develop strategies to deal with it? If so, will computer-aided group decision support tools add value to the process? Those are the questions we addressed with the 1998 Teen Think Tank on School Violence. While this was neither a formal nor a scientific treatment of the subject, the results of the initial experiment were overwhelmingly impressive. Using the GroupSystems Electronic Meeting System (EMS), sixteen teenagers grappled with the issue of school violence and generated more than 800 different ways to predict, prevent, avoid, protect, react, eliminate, or cope with youth violence. After brainstorming for ideas, they also used EMS to categorize, prioritize, and to reach consensus about their best ideas. Then they developed teen recommendations for students, parents, teachers, school administrators, and law enforcement officers. This was all accomplished in two EMS sessions; and none of the students had any prior knowledge or experience with EMS.

This report presents a synopsis of their findings and a brief description of the EMS process.

Overview
At the conclusion of the Teen Think Tank on School Violence, Julie T., a high school sophomore from Birmingham, AL declared: “We generated many new ideas of profound insight and many ideas that are simple, but all of them could be used to reduce school violence.” She and 15 other students participated recently in a marathon brainstorming session about school violence using a computerized electronic meeting system.

The electronic meeting system (or EMS) software from Ventana Corporation is called GroupSystems. It is a powerful productivity tool that helps teams work together better and faster, to reach consensus, prioritize ideas and resolve conflict. Under the direction of an expert facilitator, EMS can enable a small group to produce a prodigious amount of quality work in an incredibly short time.

During the two sessions, the students brainstormed about a number of questions relating to school violence and generated more than 800 ideas. They categorized their ideas into logical groupings, ranked them and then eliminated all but the best ones. The very best ideas in each category were then used to produce the material for their final report. At the conclusion of the second session, the students were unanimous in their praise for the process; and one student observed, “It simply could not have been done any other way.”

The findings of the students may be summarized as follows:

- We must deal with the causes of violence rather than building bigger, stronger walls to protect ourselves from violence.
- Morality and values must be taught to children at home, in school, and in the community.
- Parents are too busy, many teachers are fearful (of students, violent acts, lawsuits, etc.), and students feel they have become anonymous captives within a highly ‘de-personalized’ public school system.
- Students must be treated with respect, fairness, courtesy, and acceptance by teachers and administrators.
- Violence must be dealt with quickly, fairly, and with significant consequences for the offender.
- This Think Tank project should be continued with other groups.

The EMS process for the think tank is described in Section 1. The students’ “best ideas” appear in Section 2. And the summary with some adult observations is presented in Section 3. The student essays about violence; the complete, unedited, raw results of the initial brainstorming exercises; and the students’ testimonials about the Think Tank and EMS are available as separate papers (See references).

These students are idealistic, full of creative ideas drawn from first hand experience, and overflowing with youthful enthusiasm; but they lack the power and authority to carry out their ideas. They ask only to be given serious consideration.
1.0 The Process
The Teen Think Tank process used an electronic meeting system (EMS) to engage a group of teenagers in an electronic brainstorming session to seek innovative ways to cope with violence in schools. This section of the report describes the participants, the EMS process, and the way EMS was used in the two think tank sessions.

1.1 The Participants
Sixteen students ages 15-17, from Jefferson County International Baccalaureate School, Shades Valley High School, and Hueytown High School, all of Birmingham, Alabama; and four adults (parents) who accompanied the students generated the material in the report.

1.2 Selection of Students
Letters were sent to 42 students inviting them to take part in the project. It was represented as a pilot project to let students be heard on the subject of school violence. There were spaces for 20 participants and the decision was made to have 16 students and 4 adults. The spaces were filled on a first-come basis.

1.3 Some Background about EMS
An Electronic Meeting System (EMS) is a powerful productivity tool that helps teams work together better and faster, to reach consensus, prioritize ideas and resolve conflict. It harnesses the power of computers to produce high quality collaborative results with less effort. This “electronic think-tank” approach provides a quantum leap in productivity and effectiveness of meetings and other teamwork activities. The underlying technology, GroupSystems for Windows, is a commercial client-server productivity tool produced by Ventana Corporation.

The EMS software is a set of programs or tools that runs on networked computers. Using PCs, participants engage in structured electronic dialogues with each other under the direction of a skilled EMS facilitator. Participants contribute ideas simultaneously and anonymously, without fear of criticism; and everyone has an opportunity to “have his say”. Ideas are evaluated by the group based on the merits of the ideas and not on the personality or the “clout” of the persons. In a nutshell, EMS serves to generate, organize, prioritize and document ideas quickly and with little effort. Notes and flipcharts are no longer needed since EMS provides a printed report or an electronic copy of all comments immediately at the end of the meeting. The system also includes an array of facilitation tools to give direction to the process and to keep the group on track and on schedule.

In summary, there are several reasons why EMS has proven to be effective:

Parallel or simultaneous input - With EMS, all the participants are encouraged to speak at the same time, electronically, by keying their comments into computer keyboards in parallel. Each participant has a separate computer that is connected to all the other computers. This technique is sometimes referred to as “electronic brainstorming”; and participants (and observers) have expressed amazement at the quantity and quality of material that a small group of people may generate in a very short time.

Anonymity - With EMS, all electronic input is anonymous. This has the effect of “leveling the playing field”. People in EMS meetings are no longer afraid to speak up since no one knows the source of any comment. Each idea or thought is judged on its own merit, rather than being based on the personality or the forcefulness of the person who said it.

Triggering - In an electronic meeting, the collective thoughts and ideas of the group are displayed on each person’s computer and on a large, public screen. Thus, each participant may review the ideas and comments that have been contributed by the other participants at any time. Since each participant may see everyone else’s work (without knowing their identities, of course), many new ideas and thoughts are triggered. Because they are free to be totally candid, people are willing to share budding or embryonic ideas that would never surface in most meetings.

Structure and focus - Unlike chat rooms, electronic bulletin boards, and threaded discussion groups, EMS imposes a measure of structure and focus for the meeting. Using the EMS facilitation tools, the facilitator can keep the group on track and on schedule.

Automatic “minutes of the meeting” - No longer is it necessary to transcribe illegible notes or dozens of flip charts after the meeting is over. With EMS, all information (every word, idea, or thought) is captured electronically into the system instantly as it is entered. There are functions for classifying, categorizing, voting and prioritizing of action items. All this material may be produced as hard copy printouts or it may be transferred to another computer tool such as a word processor or a spreadsheet program.
1.4 The EMS Process for the Teen Think Tank

The process the students followed consisted of using of the following EMS tools under the guidance and direction of an expert EMS facilitator, using a carefully planned agenda:

Brainstorming - The students were challenged to brainstorm about a number of topics such as: “Today, we have people who have a tendency to hurt other people. Please list ways to cope with such individuals.” A typical brainstorming session ran 8 to 10 minutes during which 75 to 100 ideas were generated. Many of the ideas were unique and some were similar to ideas submitted by other students. A number of different questions relating to school violence were brainstormed during the Teen Think Tank sessions. The specific topics that were brainstormed appear in Section 1.5. Each question produced a large number of interesting responses, all of which were processed as shown below.

Categorization – The responses from each brainstorming session were transferred to the EMS categorizer tool. The students would “drag” the ideas into “buckets”, each of which represented a logical grouping of ideas. Sometimes they used “destructive” categorization where the idea disappeared from the original list when the first student dragged it into a category. Other times, they used “non-destructive” grouping where the original idea remained in the list so it might be categorized in more than one area.

Ranking – After the ideas or comments were grouped by category, they were then ranked or prioritized by the students. This was done by several methods but almost always by a two-step approach. First, the students would rank the importance of each idea on a 5-point scale from “very important” to “very unimportant”. During the first cut, they would eliminate all but those ideas judged by the group to be “important” or “very important”. Then, each student would choose his or her five most important ideas from among those remaining. All voting was done using the EMS computer tools and was completely anonymous. This procedure allowed the students to participate and to “buy-in” to the collaborative process of selecting only the very best ideas from a large list for each category. In each exercise, they reached consensus quickly with little debate and almost no argument whatsoever.

Expansion and Elaboration - After the process of elimination described above, the students devoted their thinking to expanding or elaborating about each of the top ranked ideas in each category. This was a free-form exercise. The students could comment on any or all the selected topics. They could make as many comments as they chose about any topic. They were encouraged to stay on topic. In all cases, the students were encouraged to focus on the concept of the idea(s) and not on spelling, capitalization or grammar.

Completion - The expanded topics were saved in a word processor and the students volunteered to write essays on one or more sections. The selected topics were e-mailed to the students and they responded via e-mail with their completed essays. The resulting essays appear in a separate paper entitled “Student Essays about Violence in Schools...from the Teen Think Tank of 1998”.

Conclusions - The students’ findings and their best ideas are presented in Section 2. A summary of conclusions and observations by the adult participants appears in Section 3.

1.5 Brainstorming Topics for the Teen Think Tank

During the brainstorming portions of the two think tank sessions, the students brainstormed concerning a number of different topics in five broad categories. The ideas generated during each of the brainstorming exercises were prioritized by the group, and only the best ones were used to produce the material presented in Section 2.

1.5.1 Brainstorming - Future Vision – Assume Year 2020 without violence
- Things that must have eliminated violence in 2020
- Reactions to less violence
- Things that may prevent violence
- Things to be concerned about in 2020
- Concerns of government and society

1.5.2 Brainstorming - Actions needed to prevent school violence.

1.5.3 Brainstorming - Coping with Violent Behavior
- Causes of violent behavior among teenagers
- Ways to protect yourself against violent behavior
- Ways to avoid or prevent violence

1.5.4 Brainstorm the question: “Is Violence Inevitable?”

1.5.5 Lateral Thinking about Coping with Violence

1.6 The Project Sessions

The first session was Saturday, July 11, 1998. The students and parents generally felt that this 5-hour session was very productive but inconclusive. They wanted to finish what they had started. On Friday, July 17, 1998, most of the group returned to the EMS facility. In a
marathon session lasting from noon to 10:30 p.m. with only one break for dinner, the students did all the categorization, ranking, selection, and elaboration for the topics in Section 2 of this report. Any adult reading this report should be aware of the incredible ability of these students to stay on task. Granted, the EMS tools provide for short periods of intense activity for up to 10 minutes followed by times of less strenuous work. However, nothing can take away the image of the students working intently, laying back and having fun while the next session was being set up and then getting immediately back on task. Not a single complaint was heard during the entirety of both sessions, or following either session.

2.0 The Students’ Best Ideas for Coping with Violence

This section reflects the results of brainstorming by the students and multiple iterations of ranking and prioritization of their ideas. Using EMS, they collaborated to pick their best ideas and recommendations under several categories. Some ideas may appear in more than one category.

2.1 The Student and Violence

The students selected the following ideas from among hundreds that they generated during the brainstorming sessions, grouped them for the first category: The Student and Violence, and then ranked them in order of importance. Their top-ranked ideas are presented here and were then used as a basis for one or more student essays that appear in a separate paper. (See References)

1. We can’t keep on devising better ways of protecting ourselves. We would soon be each in our own cocoon and lose all social contact and respect for each other. We have to deal with violence by making violence unacceptable in society.

2. Keep your own morals and respect your peers. Resist peer pressure.

3. Think before you act.

4. Set good examples in both school and personal life.

5. Don’t be afraid to tell parents and authorities if something is happening or is going to happen. Preventing an act of violence is not ratting out on someone; it is keeping them from making a mistake.

6. If someone talks about hurting others, then assume they are going to hurt others…and tell someone like your parents or a teacher.

7. Avoid being racist, sexist, etc.

2.2 Parents and Violence

The second category was Parents and Violence. Their top-ranked ideas for parents are presented here and were used as a basis for two student essays that appear in a separate paper. (See References)

1. The main responsibility rests with parents. A family can (and does) influence the values of the children it raises. Students should be encouraged to exhibit ethical behavior, and to pursue appropriate life styles. This is the parents’ primary role in life. Parenthood is a tremendous responsibility, and it must not be taken lightly.

2. Parents can make a big impact on kids. If parents would teach their kids self-control and build good moral foundations in them, violent acts would be fewer in number and society would benefit greatly.

3. There needs to be a more positive influence on children starting when they are very young. There is so much on TV and other media sources that can influence a very young person (3 or 4 years old) to think that it is not a big deal or is something that is tolerated. I think parents need to have more positive things for little people and try to cover up the bad things.

4. Teach kids how to respect other people. Teach how to cool off when you’re angry and not to take it out on any living thing or do anything violent. Anger is not the time to act.

5. Pick your battles very carefully. Small issues should not become big wars. Discipline should be used on a consistent basis.

6. Children mostly respect their parents while still very young. If taught at an early age by their parents the difference between right and wrong, and good and bad, then maybe the children can grow into responsible and responsive teens.

7. Get morals back into teenagers’ lives

2.3 Teachers and Violence

The third category was Teachers and Violence. Their top-ranked ideas for teachers are presented here and were used
as a basis for two student essays that appear in a separate paper. (See References)

1. Teachers need to be aware of all motives of violence and keep an eye on students to watch for warning signs. All people associated with the students need to take an active interest in the student's life and activities and promote staying away from drugs and alcohol. Students should be encouraged to learn about violence and monitor their actions and those around them.

2. Teach good character and morals in the classrooms and encourage self-control

3. Teachers ...need to have more positive things ...and try to cover up the bad things. There is so much on TV and other media sources that can influence a young person...

4. Don't treat odd-looking teenagers (i.e. multicolored hair, odd make-up and clothing, etc.) any differently than you would a "normal" looking teenager. They probably look as they do as a sign of rebellion. Acknowledging their difference only encourages and furthers this rebellion.

5. Teach responsibility

2.4 Schools/Administrators and Violence

The fourth category was Schools/Administrators and Violence. Their top-ranked ideas for Schools/Administrators are presented here and were used as a basis for a student essay that appears in a separate paper. (See References)

1. Violence in schools - first thought....murder, shootings, etc....I just remembered acts of violence such as rape by school employees.... Background checks should be strict as well as strictly enforced

2. Immediate expulsion from regular school systems of anyone participating in a fight or other violent activity. It seems to work here, as I have seen no fights during my time at the school.

3. Reward good behavior with added privileges and respect. Make the persona of a 'good kid' desirable. Currently, it is anything but.

4. Avoid being racist, sexist, etc.

5. Teach good character and morals in the classrooms and encourage self-control

6. Create good environments for kids to learn

7. Don't treat odd-looking teenagers (i.e. multicolored hair, odd make-up and clothing, etc.) any differently than you would a "normal" looking teenager. They probably look as they do as a sign of rebellion. Acknowledging their difference only encourages and furthers this rebellion.

8. Severe consequences for guns and other deadly weapons

2.5 Law Enforcement, the Community, the Media and Violence

The fifth category was Law Enforcement, the Community, the Media and Violence. Their top-ranked ideas for Law Enforcement, the Community, and the Media are presented here and were used as a basis for a student essay that appears in a separate paper. (See References)

1. If "kids" commit crimes, such as murder, rape, arson, etc., don't be afraid to punish or try them like adults. A message must be sent that these crimes have harsh, undesirable consequences and kids will not get off easy because of their young ages.

2. I think whole neighborhoods and cities should get involved in preventing school violence because even if we pour every thought out onto the computer, it doesn't make any difference outside this room- "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

3. Society needs to take violence more seriously. It can't just be something that a few kids in Alabama brainstorm about on computers.... though it is a wonderful start. The whole nation needs to brainstorm and decide what kind of children they want to raise. Violence is in the media and everything else.

4. Go to elementary schools and talk to the students (mainly kindergartners and 1st graders because they look up to police officers) about violence and how it is bad and ways to prevent it

5. Being a present force in the community is a very important part of fighting crime. If cops can get out of the car and back to walking the street in greater numbers the sheer presence of the men in blue can deter crime before it starts. This kind of presence is especially necessary in schools, but it should not be an intimidating force.

6. The emphasis on society needs to be changed from the heroes being the people who are
stronger or faster or tougher. Those are worn out remnants of a bygone age. Today's social structure needs to emphasize compassion, intelligence, and contribution to society.

7. Students have several motives that make them resort to violence. One is the media. Violence is in movies everywhere, television programs depict violent behavior among young people, and music talks about violence and the wild rhythms and loud noises are enough to make anyone go insane.

8. More community opportunities for organized group socializing of youth (like sports, special interest clubs, etc.)

2.7 Is Violence Inevitable?

The students brainstormed the question, “Is violence inevitable?”. The resulting ideas are listed below under the headings “Violence is inevitable” or “Violence is not inevitable”. These ideas were not ranked.

2.7.1 Violence is inevitable.

Some people are going to be violent and nothing can be done about it

Violence is ingrained through thousands of years of evolution. Human nature can’t be changed on a whim.

Violence has become a way to gain power and people naturally want to have power

As long as outside forces such as gangs, drugs, and abuse exist, violence will be inevitable.

Violence is inevitable when there is no other solution made evident to the offender

Violence has always been human nature and if a person is provoked to the point of violence, then violence is inevitable

There is present in the nature of every human being a savage, wild side that is hidden, but with our society degenerating as it is, the savageness will emerge eventually

There is nothing that we can do to eliminate violence - even people who are trying to stop violence have violence in their human nature

2.7.2 Violence is not inevitable.

There is a way to teach self control at an early age, whether it is in school, church, or the home and that could prevent a great deal of violence

Nothing is inevitable. Our society can correct its internal wrongs if we are willing to devote the time, resources and concern that will be necessary.

If people can change their thinking about other people, violence is not inevitable

People can learn to control themselves.

Violence can be avoided if there is enough self-control to walk away or not provoke things

Violence isn’t inevitable because not everyone is violent.

Violence would be nonexistent if everyone had self control

To say that we can eliminate violence is questionable... to say that we can reduce violence is reasonable. Violence is not inevitable because if we can reduce violence, we can contain violence.

2.8 Lateral Thinking about Coping with Violence

The facilitator shared an example of lateral thinking with the students about a hotel in London that was first class except for its terribly slow elevators. There were many complaints about the elevators and few complaints about anything else. A study showed that the cost of replacing the elevators in the ancient building would cost more than the value of the building and thus was not feasible. A consultant who practiced lateral thinking asked the owners what they wanted to fix - the slow elevators or the complaints? Hearing that the complaints were the real problem, the consultant recommended installing mirrors in every elevator lobby. Complaints dropped to zero because patrons began using the mirrors for whatever purpose they deemed appropriate and stopped noticing how long they were waiting for the elevators.

The students were encouraged to use similar lateral thinking techniques to think of non-traditional approaches to solving school violence. In approximately 10 minutes they had generated 113 discrete ideas. Some of them reflected traditional thinking, but a number of them are noteworthy examples of lateral thinking. Here are some of their best examples:
Teach character in school and not a “two-minute thing” every day.

Have a prisoner that was charged on violence come in to schools and talk to the kids about what he did wrong

The hotel did not solve the elevator problem...they solved the complaint problem.....We don't need to solve the violence problem...we need to solve the cause of the violence.

Say 'Hi' to lots of people every day

Treat violence as a "character flaw" and deal with it rather than alienate it

Students can be taught when to intervene and when to report a problem

Ask a person who is violent if they really like being a violent person...they may not know how to stop being violent

Family values MUST be taught early in life to set what is right and wrong

Part of each week's curriculum would be a class in relationships

In school suspension should be like a forced labor camp. Make it really undesirable.

We've got to control anger because angry people don't learn

Make school a privilege, not a right

Go back to using stocks and public thrashings

Everyone, including teachers, have to say 'yes, sir' and 'no, ma'am' or just 'yes' and 'no' (if you can't tell the difference).

2.9 The Causes of and Ways to Avoid School Violence

The students brainstormed the idea, “Project yourself into the year 2020. There has been no school violence for an entire year. What are some of the things that happened or were changed to cause a move from the high level of violence in 1998 to no violence in 2020?” The students then categorized the ideas and ranked each category.

2.9.1 Top 10 causes for violence

1. Students have several reasons they resort to violence. One is the media. Violence is in movies everywhere, television programs depict violent behavior among young people, and music talks about violence and the wild rhythms and loud noises are enough to make anyone go insane.

2. Easy access to guns or other weapons

3. Easy to commit an act of violence if there are no punishments

4. Lack of ability to cope with society and emotions.

5. Dysfunctional family

6. Psychological disorders

7. Morality has degraded in all aspects of life: Television, music, and even schoolteachers.

8. Conflict with teachers

9. Not knowing how to cope with a situation...seeing violence as a means of dealing with it and getting away with it

2.9.2 Top 10 ways to protect yourself against violence

1. Avoid arguments and situations that could end up in a violent conflict

2. Have respect for other people and let them know it. Then they will have the same respect for you.

3. Walk away

4. Avoid being racist, sexist, etc.

5. Don't take everything personal or offensive. The person who is talking about "mamas" is just insulting his own intelligence. Just ignore it and go on. Remember: in a fight, a bystander cannot tell which one is the fool.

6. Do to others as you would have them do to you

7. Don't go to places where violence is often committed

8. Say no to drugs

9. Learn how to "let the other person win" when something doesn't really matter - break the "everybody wants to be a cowboy" macho mindset

10. Make sure people know that you are not a violent person, and don't condone violent activities. Most of the time violent people will seek out other violent people. Also, if someone tries to "bully" you, "Turn the other cheek." If you don't resist you won't be any fun, and they'll stop bothering you.

2.9.3 Top 10 ways to avoid violence

1. Have self control in all situations

2. Think before you act

3. Accept other people's views and opinions

4. Talk through situations people hear this all of the time, yet it actually works.

5. Know when it is time to walk away

6. Be sensitive to the other person.

7. Don't provoke

8. If you are mad, go somewhere to cool off, know your emotional state

9. Give an angry person room to cool off...

10. If you experience something, talk about it. Don't hold in your emotions. You become a time bomb waiting to go off.
2.9.4 Top 9 ways to prevent violence

1. Focus on the offender with quick and sure actions. Don’t make rules for the whole. That makes everyone suffer for the faults of the few and causes more anger.
2. Better gun control
3. Higher consequences for guns and other deadly weapons
4. Teach kids how to respect other people. Teach how to cool off when you’re angry and not to take it out on any living thing or do anything violent. Anger is not the time to act.
5. Get morals back into teenagers lives
6. Provide opportunities for dealing with anger instead of acting out violently by making counseling readily available.
7. Immediate expulsion from regular school systems of anyone participating in a fight or other violent activity.
8. Report any comments by other students to responsible individuals. Most acts of violence in school have been talked about by the individual that commits the act.
9. More community opportunities for organized group socializing of youth (like sports, special interest clubs, etc.)

3.0 Summary and Observations

[Editor’s note: for consistency with the remainder of this report, student comments taken directly from the Teen Think Tank session material are italicized.]

This section is a synopsis of the students’ findings about school violence. It contains a number of student comments taken from the Teen Think Tank sessions, some of which have been edited slightly for clarity. It also contains a number of adult observations and recommendations concerning the actions and comments of the teen participants.

3.1 A Plea from the Students…they want to be heard

“…I hope you examine our work carefully…I think you will find it useful.” Mark S, Age 15, Male, sophomore

“All we need is a chance to have our ideas heard…” Julie T, Age 15, Female, sophomore

“I’m glad that finally the students were asked about their opinions on this subject.” Crystal V, Age 16, Female, Junior

Other comments from the students:

- To say that we can eliminate violence is questionable… to say that we can reduce violence is reasonable.
- School should be a place where children can escape violence.
- The emphasis on society needs to be changed from the heroes being the people who are stronger or faster or tougher to those who are compassionate, intelligent, and who contribute to society.
- Make the persona of a “good kid” desirable.
- Reward good behavior with added privileges.
- Violent students often feel rejected. A teacher simply offering a kind word or smile could make them feel accepted.
- Teachers should take time to greet students as they enter the room, and get to know students personally.
- The consequences for bringing deadly weapons on school grounds should be swift and severe. Mandatory immediate expulsion for actions characterized as violent.
- Learn how to “let the other person win” when something doesn’t really matter - break the “everybody wants to be a cowboy” macho mindset. Remember… in a fight, a bystander cannot tell which one is the fool.

3.2 Attitude toward Violence

“Approach violence as a character flaw and deal with it.”
“Don’t presume that violence is inevitable.”
“To overcome violence, we must confront it, not escape it.” These were comments from the students. They felt that approaches that build higher walls and better metal detectors are, as one student put it, “…straight out of Lord of the Flies.”

3.3 Morality and Values

- The students think that it is within the scope of the school to teach morality and values based on societal mores, but without religious overtones. Violence is wrong in any culture. Stealing is wrong in any culture. Telling the truth and accepting responsibility for one’s actions are right in all cultures. They feel that students need to learn there are some absolute values that have certain consequences if they are ignored or abused.
- The students feel that all students should be taught to respect the rights and values of others. One family may have values that are different and that must be respected. This matter should be taught primarily in the home, but the school and community should share in this important responsibility.
In lieu of the family, teachers can have a tremendous influence in helping students see the worth of character and values. The student who learns that hitting someone is wrong in second grade will be less likely to really hurt someone in high school.

3.4 Respect

The students feel that the lack of respect between teachers and students is a primary source of the frustration that leads to violence. If the violent offender felt respected, appreciated, and accepted by teachers and peers, the frustration that leads to violence might be mitigated.

Teachers are encouraged to take the time to show respect to their students.

- Stand in the doorway and personally greet every student, every class, every day.
- Administer discipline evenhandedly without regard to grades, athletic prowess, or style of clothing.
- Be courteous to students; be receptive to their questions and ideas.
- Let students be individuals rather than forcing them into a mold.

Schools are also encouraged to deal with the respect issue...

- Expect courtesy consistently from all faculty and staff toward students.
- Remember that students are the reason for having schools, not the curse of the profession.
- Sanction or remove teachers who disrespect students.
- Keep score. Don’t insult students by creating superficial incentives such as “satisfactory”. If a student fails, have a plan for helping him deal with it and recover.

Students were no easier on themselves...

- Don’t put people down because of their attire.
- Don’t make fun of or talk down to others.
- Remember that teachers are human too and may have lots of pressures that the students may not know about.
- Never, ever disrespect a teacher.

3.5 Discipline: Be Strict...but be fair

The students were unanimous in encouraging punishment to be appropriate, immediate, and directed at the offender rather than all students. They agreed that removing disruptive students is necessary for the learning process to continue.

However, they suggested that if a student is removed from a classroom, he should be sent to a trained counselor for assistance in dealing with his behavior. If it is necessary to punish a student, they wanted the punishment to be memorable.

- Serious violence, racism, or sexual abuse absolutely cannot be tolerated. Offending students should be punished to the extent of the law and offending teachers should be fired.
- Develop discipline programs that focus on the offender, not the student body as a whole.
- The students want the community to enforce the laws that fit the crime. If a student commits a violent act, they should quickly learn that attending school is a privilege, not a right. Remove the offenders from the environment immediately.
- Discipline program should be started early. Use the court system to hold parents responsible. Expect good behavior from parents, kids, teachers, etc.
- Develop consistent expectations for good behavior, not rules for dealing with bad behavior. Expectations can be uniform, rules cannot. Some schools require hall monitors, others do not. The plan should shift attention to rewards and privileges for good behavior rather than the rules for bad behavior.

How is discipline related to violence? The students suggest that frustration, aggravated by unfair discipline and lack of acceptance and respect contribute greatly to the likelihood of violence. They do not ask for anyone to be coddled, but to be dealt with firmly and fairly.

3.6 Goal setting and Life Style

A student who has gone through the process of identifying and developing realistic life goals; and who has mentally committed himself/herself to achieving those goals, will be less likely to commit acts of violence.

- If the conception of what is popular could be altered to condemn violent and amoral behavior, then violent acts committed by students would decline rapidly.

3.7 Self Control

The students are confident that self-control is the ultimate solution to violence. If each person has his own life under control, the issue of violence in society will be moot. Self control is another issue that is best taught in the home by word and by example.

- Students should learn to walk away from a violent situation.
- Students can learn techniques to “cool off” when they are angry.
- The community could offer classes in self control for parents and students.
3.8 Parents

There is no doubt among the students that parents should bear the greatest role in preventing teen violence by teaching their children morality, character, and family values. In addition, the parents should work closely with the schools to ensure their children receive the best education as well as respect, encouragement, and opportunity from the school.

Parents should teach their kids at a young age that violence is not the answer and that good moral and ethical standards are. Another thing that parents must do when raising their kids is to teach them to respect others.

3.9 Teachers, Schools and Administrators

The teacher exerts tremendous influence on students. However, to teach ethics and morality, the teacher should set the example.

- Teach character in school, and not just as a two-minute thing every day.
- Consider behavior modification techniques such as bringing a convicted prisoner to talk to students or showing gross pictures of the result of crime and violence.
- Part of each week's curriculum would be a class in relationships. A student stated, “We've got to control anger because angry people don't learn”.
- Institute programs that get people involved in extracurricular activities. Give school credit for playing community sports, drama, fine arts, music, etc.
- Hold required workshop for teachers in which they are taught how to be respectful to students while maintaining authority in the classroom...
- Teach morality and ethics in a non-religious context.
- Train teachers and students in conflict resolution.
- Look for new “heroes” in the school environment. The emphasis in society needs to be changed from the heroes being the people who are stronger-faster-tougher to those who are compassionate, intelligent, and those who contribute to society.
- Eliminate problem teachers and administrators. Nobody should be beyond scrutiny.
- Perform evaluation of every teacher every year with input from parents and students. Rate the teachers’ competence for teaching, discipline, creativity, respect, etc.

We are not cave men, worshiping the biggest and strongest among us. It is time we quit acting like it. Society and the school system should shift the focus from popularity contests and athletics to intellectual competitions and academics. Academics are much more important than sports although all the glory goes to the athletes.

3.10 Counselors

Enough was said about counselors to warrant a separate topic in this summary. Generally, the students do not feel comfortable talking with school counselors. They are seen as “college counselors” or someone who would talk about student problems to the rest of the school. They feel that counselors should be trained in dealing with issues rather than just handing out punishment. One student said, “Ask a person who is violent if they really like being a violent person. They may not know how to stop being violent”.

- Counselors have to be trustworthy.
- They should be trained in counseling techniques.
- The school should consider peer groups led by mature students to deal with acceptance issues.
- Counselors should deal with each situation individually rather than having blanket rules.
- Counselors can recommend appropriate community services.
- Counselor should get the parents involved.
- A trip to a counselor might cause an IEP to be started for that student.

Repeatedly, the students said that one who hears someone talking about committing violence must report it to the school. Students can’t or won’t report violence if they don’t trust the counselors.

3.11 The Community and Law Enforcement

The students want communities to accept the responsibility for dealing with violence. When a crime such as murder, rape, arson, or theft is committed by a young adult, one who is old enough to think actions out for himself, he should be tried and punished as an adult. “Adult” crimes require the appropriate punishment, otherwise the incorrect message is sent to the offender. When only sent to a detention center, or not punished at all, then the young adult thinks he can ‘get away with it,’ and may repeat the offense.

- Law enforcement officers could go to elementary schools and talk to students about violence...
- The communities can build and sponsor safe teen activities, neighborhood clubs, youth sports, drama groups, concerts, children’s theaters, festivals, and youth orchestras. The communities could work with the school so that the students might receive school credit for participation.
The community could support workshops for parents so they can learn about how to cope with issues in the home.

“Have a national teen task force on school violence--the possibilities are endless.”

Society needs to take violence more seriously... whole neighborhoods and cities should get involved in preventing school violence. If communities and schools take an active part in leading kids toward nonviolent behavior, then school violence will decrease.

One adult observed: “Parents are too busy, many teachers are fearful - of students, violent acts, lawsuits, etc. - and students feel they have become anonymous captives within a highly ‘de-personalized’ public school system.”

If parents and teachers would apply a mixture of tender loving care and “tough love”, on a regular basis, perhaps students would have their “sense of self worth” restored and some of the frustration that often leads to violent behavior would be dissipated.

4.0 References

Credits
The teenagers deserve the most credit. They did the real work and provided the creative and innovative content of the report. Their commitment, dedication and enthusiasm for this project generated an abundance of emotional energy to drive the project to completion.

The parents who remain anonymous also contributed much time, effort and support for this project. Without their involvement, the Teen Think Tank project would have been impossible.

Acknowledgments
The organization, which provided the use of the meeting facilities, the networked computers, and the GroupSystems software, has asked to remain anonymous. The responsible parties have endorsed and applauded the efforts of all who were involved in any way with the Teen Think Tank project. However, due to extenuating circumstances and business implications, they prefer to avoid any publicity associated with the project.

About the Teen Think Tank Project Manager
Brice F. Marsh is a Senior Computer Scientist and an Electronic Meeting System (EMS) Specialist with Computer Sciences Corporation. During the 37+ years of his professional career, he has also served as a high school mathematics teacher; a systems engineer with IBM; a director of information systems for a manufacturer/distributor of food products; and as vice president of a telephone company. Since 1992, he has been instrumental in the introduction of the first GroupSystems electronic meeting system facility in his company. In 1995, he was responsible for introducing EMS at NASA, and he has presented white papers about GroupSystems and EMS at numerous international conferences and workshops. Mr. Marsh also serves as an independent consultant for EMS and in other applications of computer-supported collaboration.

Mr. Marsh is a Certified Professional GroupSystems Facilitator and Instructor; and he is a member of the International Association of Facilitators. He serves on the Industry Advisory Board for the National Science Foundation’s Research and Development Program at the University of Arizona. He holds a BS degree from Auburn University.

References – Other papers from the Teen Think Tank on Violence

[ Copies of these papers may be requested from Brice Marsh, (256) 544-4417, or by e-mail at bmarsh@csc.com, Brice.Marsh@msfc.nasa.com, or Bricemarsh@aol.com ]

TTT/V Paper #1: Student Essays about Violence in Schools...from the 1998 Teen Think Tank on School Violence

The students gleaned more than 400 ideas from the Teen Think Tank project and organized them into seven topics. In this paper, there are one or more student essays based on each of these topics.

TTT/V Paper #2: Testimonials about EMS from the Participants of the 1998 Teen Think Tank on School Violence

The participants share testimonials about EMS and other comments about the 1998 Teen Think Tank on School Violence.

TTT/V Paper #3: Complete, Unedited Brainstorming Results from the 1998 Teen Think Tank on School Violence

During the think tank, the students participated in seven brainstorming exercises concerning violence in schools, and they generated more than 800 different ideas.

The results are presented here in the order created by the students. There are some duplicates and some restating of ideas. This is attributed to similarity of thought processes, and not to mimicking another’s comments.