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“I despair. What’s the point of teaching adults when nothing changes and their kids are going to have the same problems?”

For Adult Literacy Practitioners

One of six info sheets about the effects of violence on learning

- ✓ Learn more about how violence affects learning.
- ✓ Identify approaches to program delivery that promote more effective teaching and learning.

Dealing with the impact of violence on learning is not as difficult as you might think. It may transform some of your most frustrating challenges, and lead to more success for everyone.

Your journal might say ...

“I can’t bear it. I listen to Jo as she talks to her kid and I don’t know what to do. She is so angry with him and I saw her whack him the other day. We have a policy of no hitting at the school and I worry if she’s really hurting him. Should I report this to children’s services? But I don’t really believe it will help anything.

I listen to the parents in the program talk about their kids and it’s clear they are having many of the same problems in school that their parents did. Many of the learners are really worried about this. They so want their kids to do better than they did. What on earth can we do to make a difference? Will anything ever change?”



But did you know ...



- ① If a person is in a tough place now, or their parents were abusive, hurtful, or neglectful, it is very hard for them to develop the capacity to give children the positive environment they need. Parents can have complicated emotions when their children have opportunities that they didn't have, especially when the children still complain, misbehave, or get into trouble.

Sometimes parents are unhappy when children receive attention – such as in a literacy program that parents may feel belongs to them. And this can happen especially if parents have had few places in life where someone gave them attention and valued them.
- ① Educators often insist that parents help their children learn. But parents may avoid helping if they're afraid they don't read well enough, aren't smart enough, or when their children's schoolwork brings up bad memories of their own experiences. They may 'forget' and do nothing. Or they may get angry with the child, as if it is the child's fault that the parent is afraid of being unable to help, feeling stupid, being shamed, or remembering past pain.
- ① Many parents may be afraid for their children. Living in poverty increases the dangers that children will get sick, be hurt, join gangs, get into trouble with the law, or be taken away by children's services. These fears may lead parents to be desperate to get their children back in line quickly when they misbehave - especially parents who have a disability, who have experience with the psychiatric system, or who are subject to racism or other oppression.
- ① Bearing witness to violence can be draining. Practitioners can easily lose hope for humanity when they pay attention to the dreadful things that happen in this world. But putting your heads in the sand to avoid the pain may be equally exhausting.
- ① Practitioners need to find a balance between paying attention and acknowledging the evil that people perpetrate, and avoiding relentless attention to every detail. Practitioners need to recognize that humans have a capacity not only for evil but also for great generosity and kindness. For many practitioners, holding onto hope is important to balance the despair.



- ① Literacy practitioners are surrounded with people who struggle with difficult circumstances. Practitioners all work with limited resources and may find it hard to believe that change is possible. The system can feel utterly impenetrable and practitioners may slide, without consciousness, into blaming the individuals in front of them. You may think, “Why don’t they bother to read to their children?” or some other critical thought. You need places to take those feelings - to give yourself and others a reality check, and avoid becoming bitter and despairing.
- ① All or nothing is so common a consequence of trauma that it shapes much of society. It can lead practitioners to believe that if they don’t see the full success they hoped for, there is only failure. Practitioners need to recognize incremental change - the middle ground - to avoid burnout and despair.

What Can I Do to Help Everybody Learn?

1. Support parents to help their children.

- Create a group or occasional gathering for parents to talk about the challenges of parenting. Make it OK to talk about complex feelings if they are present.
- Help parents to learn how to spark and support their children’s learning and avoid discouraging or shaming, and putting out the learning flame.
- Create children’s programming and model supportive ways to engage with children’s learning, and use good boundaries and gentle discipline.

2. Hang on to a belief in the future and the possibilities for change.

- Look for opportunities to explore ‘middle ground’ and help learners, volunteers, and staff move out of ‘all or nothing’ ways of thinking. People may not be perfect parents, teachers, or learners - but they aren’t dreadful either. Over time practitioners can learn to notice and record small increments of change. Practitioners and learners can map the change in some fun way - a collage, a graph, or a journal to show the change over a week, a month, or a year.
- Try not to look to learners’ success to help you feel good about your work. They have enough to do! Look for other places where you can be ‘fed’.





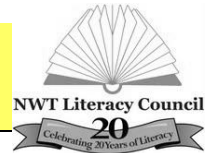
- If appropriate to your program you could hold a dreaming dreams party. Create a playful and fun time to explore dreams for children, self, the world, to live in peace.

3. Increase the circle of people that can deal with the impact of violence on learning.

- Teach other practitioners, tutors, and learners to address the impact of violence on learning.
- Create or join a network of practitioners in your region – to acknowledge and deal with the impact of violence on learning.



More Information



Go to www.learningandviolence.net

- [Making Changes](#) - ideas on how to work towards community change.
- [Dreams of a different world](#) - how intervening in cycles of violence might help to create change.
- [Learning to teach](#) - resources to help you teach others about how to address the impact of violence on learning.

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