

Community and Interpersonal Violence

- Dr. Kineka Hull: [00:03](#) Welcome to Elevate Youth Programming, a podcast for adolescent pregnancy prevention programs and other youth serving agencies. In each episode, we will discuss best practices, tips, and strategies to strengthen your programming. Each episode will cover a specific topic discussed with experts in the field. Listen along as our guests join me to discuss these relevant topics. I'm your host, Dr. Kineka Hull.
- [00:32](#) In this episode, we set down with Drs. Stacy Sechrist and Stefany Ramos from RTI International to discuss the impact of community and interpersonal violence on youth and APP programming. Dr. Sechrist specializes in capacity building assistance to help communities better identify and provide services to marginalized populations. She also has expertise in the implementation and evaluation of focused deterrence and other violent crime reduction efforts.
- [01:02](#) Dr. Ramos specializes in school-based mental health, school emergency management, violence prevention programs, and resilience after adverse community experiences. Her expertise is in safety assessments and response systems, especially in rural school districts and community organizations.
- [01:21](#) Welcome to the Elevate Youth Programming Podcast, Stacy and Stefany. How are you?
- Dr. Stefany Ramos: [01:27](#) Good. Happy to be here.
- Dr. Stacy Sechrist: [01:29](#) Yes, doing well. Thank you for having us.
- Dr. Kineka Hull: [01:31](#) I am so looking forward to discussing ways that our listeners can integrate a trauma-informed approach and fantastic techniques that address community and interpersonal violence into implementation, policies, and procedures. So, I'm familiar with the great work that you do to impact young people, schools, and communities, but can you tell me a little bit about your work?
- Dr. Stefany Ramos: [01:55](#) My name is Dr. Stefany Ramos. I am a behavioral health scientist at RTI International, and I specialize in community violence prevention and school safety and school emergency planning.
- Dr. Stacy Sechrist: [02:07](#) And I'm Stacy Sechrist. I am with the Justice Practice area in the Violence Prevention and Harm Reduction Program. I've been with RTI since September of last year, but prior to that, spent 14 years in a university setting. And we did work with communities

Community and Interpersonal Violence

broadly focused on research, training, technical assistance on violent crime reduction, and a lot of work on intimate partner violence and interpersonal violence.

Dr. Kineka Hull: [02:35](#) I'm so excited about being able to tap into your collective expertise. I know with a lot of the world events that have been happening with school violence, with human trafficking, working with marginalized populations, I know our grantees are going to be very eager to hear about the information that you have to share. So, let's just jump right in.

[02:59](#) And so the first thing I would like to talk about if we could, is human trafficking. So, I know that there are trainings that individuals can take to make sure that they're well-versed in being trauma-informed and fostering resilience. What are some things that our listeners should know about working with young people who are dealing with human trafficking?

Dr. Stacy Sechrist: [03:21](#) Well, I can start there. I think one thing that's really important for adults and individuals who are working with youth is to understand how to identify. And so, there's a lot of really good trainings around red flags and warning signs of human trafficking, which would be a great place to start. So really knowing what to look for in terms of some of those behaviors.

[03:45](#) One of the kind of interesting things I learned from working with folks in schools is relying on the professionals who have trusted relationships with students in those schools. So, an example I can give you is a school nurse was working with a young lady who came in and was pregnant. And so, she just started asking some questions about the father and the situation. And from that she learned that the father was a much older... He was about 24 years old, and she at the time was I think about 15. So that was a red flag to her, and she knew what to look for. She also learned some information about their relationship.

[04:27](#) And it was through her understanding of knowing what to look for, that she was able to identify that this particular girl was in a trafficking situation. And so, from that, she was able to link this individual with resources and help to get her out of that situation. And from that particular situation, they actually found out that this individual who was her trafficker, who was also the father of her child, was also connected to some other individuals, other young women, young girls in the school. And so it was through that trusted relationship that that nurse had with that young girl that she was working with, and she knew what to look for, that she was able to identify the warning signs

Community and Interpersonal Violence

and say, "Hey, something's not quite right with this relationship," and was able to get her to the resources that she needs.

[05:12](#)

So what I would say is that it's really important to build those relationships with the school staff who have those good relationship with the students and make sure that they know what to look for in terms of red flags and they can identify when a situation is not quite right, and then possibly be that one point of contact who can, if this individual is in a situation where they're being victimized, be that lifeline or that support to potentially get them out.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[05:36](#)

I think that it's one thing that we have to remember is that for a lot of young people, school is a predominant safe space. And so not only their teachers or nurses or counselors, but even us as health educators can be a trusted adult, but we have to be well-trained and well-versed at recognizing signs. And so, you talked about unexpected pregnancy. I know we've had trainings or webinars that we've offered for our grantees that talk about signs to look for as an educator. So unexplained gifts or unexpected new gifts, change in behavior, whether it be more provocative or whether it be ways that they're acting out, which the young person may not have done previously, when it comes to unexplained absences and things of that nature. So just having a good relationship and rapport and keeping a keen eye for the young people that you are actually serving. Are there any other red flags that grantees could look for?

Dr. Stacy Sechrist:

[06:36](#)

I mean, I think you hit on a lot of them. And really, it's knowing the questions to ask and when it's appropriate to ask those questions. So even if you know a red flag or a warning sign, and there's numerous ones of them, it's how do you approach that conversation in a way that's trauma-informed and who is the most appropriate person to have those conversations? And then really importantly, what do you do in response to that? A lot of the work that I've been involved in, people automatically want to jump to, well, let's call law enforcement. Let's get law enforcement involved. And that's not the safest response or the most appropriate response to everyone.

[07:13](#)

So I'm saying all that to really say keep the victim or the survivor in mind and really making sure that you're taking a victim-centered approach. And in human trafficking situations, we know that in so many ways, power is taken away. And so, making sure that whatever the response is something that the individual that you're working with that you're trying to get resources to, that they're really the center of that and that they

Community and Interpersonal Violence

have some control in the decision-making and the next steps of what to do in those situations. And it gets a little difficult when you're dealing with the child, especially because of mandatory reporting requirements, et cetera, but making sure that the individual that you're working with has the control and the say so of deciding what to do. And that can be really difficult to navigate sometimes.

Dr. Kineka Hull: [08:00](#) So as you are, as a listener, thinking about your referral services, who is on your team and who is the best person to respond in the most trauma-informed way to support survivors, please listen to our episode on building a referral network just to make sure that you have everyone already in place before you need to provide support to a young person. Thank you for that.

[08:26](#) So when we think about human trafficking, and we talked about the red flags and what to do to recognize [inaudible 00:08:34] to offer support, what are some ways that our listeners can be supportive to a young person who is a survivor who is in that space? And so I know we have information or links in the resource card for this episode that talks about resilience and being trauma-informed, but what are some ways that we can support survivors as they come back to our classrooms?

Dr. Stacy Sechrist: [08:54](#) That is a great question. Sometimes, and you mentioned this, Kineka when we first started off, school is maybe one of the only safe spaces for youth to come to. So, making sure that that individual, as they come back, not only do they have the supports in place, but making sure that they know they have that trusted person to talk to. So, when we think about ways in which schools are really powerful and could really step in is thinking about how to build those protective factors. And so we talk a lot about reducing risk factors, but a lot of times those are things that schools or programs that youth are involved in that they're less capable of fixing. So, a lot of times risk factors are sometimes things that come with an individual when they come to your school or come to your program. So, think about ways to really build those protective factors.

[09:43](#) And so one of those key protective factors, and the CDC has a whole list of protective factors and risk factors associated with violence, but one of those is really having a supportive and trusted adult to speak with. And so really thinking about ways that students who have experienced violence can come in and feel supported and have that trusted person that they can talk to, because a lot of times that person might not exist outside of that school setting, so it might be one of the only safe spaces where they could get that.

Community and Interpersonal Violence

[10:12](#)

I think the other thing that schools can really think about is changing norms. So, schools are just one piece of the larger ecosystem that individuals interact with. And so, the school can think about themselves even as an ecosystem and how they can think about how they're communicating or messaging about violence. They can think about the communication that they have with staff about what's important. Again, red flags, education, and thinking about what's acceptable behavior and not, and that goes for students and staff.

[10:44](#)

And so really changing the narrative and the norms and the culture within that school system or that school setting can be really powerful and can really not only be supportive to students who are survivors, but also be important in terms of helping individuals who may have experiences, feel open and trusting of adults that they can come and talk, because the messaging and the narrative is there that the school takes this seriously, and also help to change the norms amongst the student population. And we can get to this later, but amongst the staff about what is acceptable behavior and what is not. And so some of that could really go a long ways in terms of reducing the potential for violence and bullying and all those kinds of harmful behaviors that happen in school.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[11:25](#)

I love a good narrative shift and a setting of norms. And so, I hate to differentiate the two because human trafficking is a form of violence, but I want to talk about some additional forms of community violence. So, we know that there have been a lot of world events around active shooters and things of that nature. And so, a lot of times our listeners or grantees are coming into schools that may already have a protocol or policy or procedure and trying to understand where they fit into that grand scheme of things. Or you may be a school or a educator who's listening and you feel like your policies and procedures could be refined. And so I kind of want to dig into that a little bit and kind of hit on what you said.

[12:14](#)

Young people are coming to us with certain adverse events, whether it be in the neighborhood, whether it be familial or lifestyle. And so, some of those things we can't necessarily control, but we can provide a safe space or have some type of policy and procedures to support the survivors of these things. And so, what are some things that our listeners should think about when it comes to gun violence and active shooters?

Dr. Stefany Ramos:

[12:44](#)

Well, y'all are speaking my language in terms of prevention and systems. That's right on target. But I'm hearing two different things. And this comes up frequently in my work, both in

Community and Interpersonal Violence

schools and in the broader community space of community violence.

[13:00](#)

So there's one aspect to look at that is how to handle threats and a threat of something like a school shooting that seems like we're seeing warning signs and that may be eminent, like how to deal with that. And then there's a broader setting of community violence. So we want to just first define what community violence is. Community violence is really, is an act of interpersonal violence that is committed in a public space, like an assault or a shooting. But we're usually talking about it as an accumulation of violent acts that happen frequently when we say community violence. And so it's important for people who work with youth to know that community violence disproportionately affects youth and young adults ages 10 to 34, and research shows that about 60% of children in the US are exposed to community violence, so over half. And that violence is the leading cause of death and non-fatal injuries among adolescents and youth.

[14:05](#)

So even for youth who don't experience violence directly, the consequences are severe, and they're coming to school and to other organizations with those experiences. So, what it does is it prevents people from going outside, interacting with other community members, participating in activities that promote general wellbeing, like just playing with friends in the park. And all of that causes chronic stress and trauma. And we also know that studies show that youth who experience high levels of community violence have poor physical and mental health outcomes. They experience academic difficulties, behavior challenges, and also self-directed violence.

[14:50](#)

So for adults working with youth in these situations, it really helps to understand, I think what Stacy's mentioned. And you also have a previous podcast that focuses on trauma informed care. So, it does take some knowledge building and understanding of trauma to recognize that and help support all the students that you're working with.

[15:10](#)

Then there's the other side of how to recognize warning signs of a specific event. And we can talk a little bit more about this later in the policies and procedures piece, but having a behavioral threat assessment policy and procedure in place ahead of time is really important. So, you already have something to follow when you recognize one of those warning signs.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[15:34](#)

That's good information. I think we do lump that together, but though I think it's great to make that distinction. And I like how

Community and Interpersonal Violence

you said the red flags for everything we've talked about so far. Are you being mindful? Are you watching? Are you planning? And if something does happen, do you have a policy, procedure, or mechanisms in place to protect youth and support youth and make sure that you're also supporting the survivors of that event?

[16:03](#)

As we think about community violence in that dichotomy, the threat and then the response, is there anything that youth serving providers or schools should think about in addition to the red flags? So, I know a lot of times we're able to pick up on hard distinctions and sometimes miss some subtle signs of some things that may be brewing as a threat. Are there any things that you can think of that might be good things to be mindful of, just to raise our awareness?

Dr. Stefany Ramos:

[16:40](#)

We know from research on threat assessments in schools or threat assessments in general, that there are no specific characteristics or types of students that are more likely to commit violent acts. So, one of the best practices in threat assessment policies is that it's not a system of profiling. So you're not looking out for any one particular type of student, because any type of student can be in a situation that would lead them onto this path. But what you're describing is exactly what you are looking for. It's the changes. If you know the student well and you have that connection and someone, an adult in the student's life recognizes that this child is not acting the way that they normally do, that is the red flag.

Dr. Stacy Sechrist:

[17:33](#)

I would add to that, and I think it's a great question, Kineka. And just one behavior or one change in and of itself is not going to be an indicator that something's going on here. And I'm thinking of it as the side of a child who may be potentially experiencing some sort of victimization, but it's really that constellation of behaviors. And like Stefany said, sudden changes in behaviors where you have to take into account the entirety of what the person is presenting with. And so really looking at some of those behavioral indicators and going back to human trafficking, thinking about some things that teachers and/or school personnel could be looking for, absences, shifts in grades and those sorts of things, but also showing up with gifts or new clothing or things that the individual probably wouldn't have the material means to get themselves, which all of a sudden have appeared.

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Changes in the way that they dress or their style. Maybe sudden isolation or withdrawal from activities that they used to be involved in. Not being able to account for their whereabouts, or

Community and Interpersonal Violence

seeming timid or afraid to share details of relationships with you as you start to talk about them because there are things that they feel that they need to hide. Or in cases of human trafficking, things that their trafficker has told them. Or in cases of IPV, intimate partner violence or familial violence, things that their abuser has told them that they cannot share or there will be consequences.

[19:08](#)

So all of those behaviors are kind of a constellation of the bigger picture. And so, I think in terms of adults working with students or with kids, being able to identify those is really being able to understand how does that fit into the larger picture of what I know about this student or what I know about this child. And then being able to, kind of like Stefany talked about, knowing when to, or what questions to ask, first of all to follow up on some of those red flags, but then knowing what to do in response. So, what is my best, most trauma-informed way of engaging with this individual if I do think that there is something bad going on that I need to intervene with?

Dr. Stefany Ramos:

[19:48](#)

I think the key to that also is making sure that every student that you're working with does have some kind of connection to an adult and fostering an environment that promotes those kinds of relationships and connections within your organization.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[20:06](#)

I like that. I think that's two important shifts, the difference in community violence, threat and response. And also when it comes to human trafficking, I feel like a lot of times people think of, and I hate to use the word extreme because all of it is victimizing, but we think of someone who is physically taken, transported somewhere, and sometimes don't appreciate the nuance of young people who may be trafficked in place. And so I feel like a lot of times we say, "Well, oh, they're still coming to school," or they're still doing things and don't quite understand those nuances, so thank you for saying and shedding some additional light on that as well.

And so, a lot of our listeners are serving populations that include marginalized groups. And so, when we think about the community violence that may happen or be more prevalent in certain communities, what are some things that we need to be mindful of when we're working with marginalized populations?

Dr. Stefany Ramos:

[21:10](#)

So marginalized populations are disproportionately impacted by community violence, and that's because of our long history of racist, sexist, gender, heteronormative policies at every level, federal, state, and local. And that can be really overwhelming for people to understand, much less try to think of ways to

Community and Interpersonal Violence

change those longstanding institutionalized norms that are built right into our systems. It's very easy to get stuck or lost or get cynical about it.

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There are things that we can do, and we can use what we know to our advantage. So, we know that violence can be and has been prevented. So, there is always hope. And we know that organizations operate in a complex system, in multiple systems, and that community violence or a lack thereof, is not an outcome of any one individual program. Community violence is a pattern of behavior that is produced by the way that the components in that system interact and change over time.

[22:19](#)

So what does that mean for an individual organization? So, it means that there's two levels that you're working in, and one is the individual level with the children. And it's very possible to make a difference in someone's life and even change the life trajectory. So, I myself can name a couple of organizations that changed my life. So, you can choose to set your focus there, and that's okay. But if you want to make a broader, long-lasting change, which is the mission of many youth facing organizations, then you have to pay attention to the second level, which is working with other organizations in that system. Because as I mentioned, it's those interactions that produce the levels of community violence that we are seeing.

[23:03](#)

So if you're looking to improve the services and meet the needs of the youth and the community as a whole, then you have to recognize that it is not possible to do that in isolation. But if we work together, then we can start to make progress and adapt quickly as new needs arise. So even if the goal of your organization is not specifically to reduce violence, if community violence is a problem in the area that you work in, which is most places, it's still important to acknowledge that you are a part of the community's ecosystem and have a role to play, especially in the field of prevention. Because many of the risk factors that Stacy mentioned before, the outcomes that we focus on have the same root causes and pathways.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[23:48](#)

Absolutely. That is so important to remember that our emphasis for a lot of our grantees is pregnancy prevention. But like you said, all of these things are intertwined. And so, we spend a lot of time with adulthood preparation topics that build on resiliency and boundaries and healthy relationships and some other things that can help combat some of the experiences that youth have to increase their protective nature against some of the things that they encounter. And so I feel like that's very important for us to realize that even though our focus may not

Community and Interpersonal Violence

be violence, we do talk about intimate partner violence, but our focus may not specifically be community violence prevention by looking at the young person from a holistic lens and how our agencies and our essence individuals fit into this ecosystem that we can help chip away at some of the things that we may see. I like that lens.

[24:53](#)

Stacy, is there something you wanted to add?

Dr. Stacy Sechrist:

[24:55](#)

Yeah. So, as you and Stefany were talking, it reminded me of a resource that the CDC has out called Connecting the Dots. A lot of folks are probably familiar with it. So, it's a document that basically talks about risk and protective factors. But visually it lays out risk and protective factors at various levels for both victimization and perpetration. And when you see the dots, in other words, when you see how one protective factor may prevent this type of victimization, and it's several types of victimizations and several types of perpetration, it speaks to exactly what you said. And that's all based on evidence.

[25:31](#)

So it's suggesting that if you impact, let's say this one risk factor, you're going to actually have the likelihood of preventing multiple type of victimization and also multiple types of perpetration. And so, I think that's a good resource for your listeners to know about, first of all, and it's a great visual, and it talks about the different levels of impact. So, we've got the individual student or youth level, then we've got the social level and about relationships and connections, and then we've got the community level. So, it's a really good resource to look at. But then also thinking about prevention, and we hear this term, hurt people hurt people. And so, thinking about ways to intervene-

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[26:12](#)

And break the cycle.

Dr. Stacy Sechrist:

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... early is also a way to prevent future, not only victimization, but future perpetration. And so I think when individuals think about just one behavior or one interaction that they may have with an individual, it's really important to think about how important that is in terms of the long-term impact, not only for that individual, but the subsequent individuals in that person's life that they're going to be exposed to, and also how it may affect their lifetime trajectory. So being able to identify that one kid in your classroom or that one kid in your program has huge implications. And so, I think everything that we're talking about, I just wanted to put it into that context about how everything is so connected and how that one interaction point with that one trusted adult could really be so meaningful in terms of changing

Community and Interpersonal Violence

things in that one individual's lives as well as others that they interact with.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[27:04](#)

I love that. I love a good visual. I love that resource. It sounds fantastic. So, listeners, look for that Connecting the Dots link on our resource card.

[27:13](#)

I feel like everybody can think back to one person who had a positive impact on them, whether it be a teacher or some other trusted adult, and I think that's what prompted me to go into education. Well, one, my mom is a teacher. She's a retired exceptional children teacher, and her mantra was always, "Don't go into education," when we were growing up. But I was like, "Oh yeah, I don't want to be a teacher. I see how your evenings and weekends get spent." But I saw the hard work and the passion and the care that she had for her young people, and that's what drew me to higher education for 20 years. I actually enjoyed it. I still enjoy the connections I have with young people, the baby showers. I'm feeling a little old now that the babies are having babies. And so, I just love it, the wedding invitations.

[27:59](#)

And they still reach out and say, "You know what? When you did this in the class or you saw me or you responded to me, or you provided an opportunity for me, that made a difference." And so, I just really feel like I can pinpoint one person. And so, I want to give a shout-out to Ms. Vanessa Jacobs, who was my high school biology teacher at Smith High School in Greensboro, North Carolina, who worked with a little girl who had ADHD and gave me extra special projects that turned me into the scientist that I am today. So hi, Mrs. Jacobs, thank you for being a great teacher. So, thank you for that information.

[28:36](#)

So that's a lot of things to think about and to know. So, let's translate that into action. And so that's one thing I like about this podcast is we need some things that we can take from this conversation and run with it. And so, let's talk about ways that grantees can increase their knowledge on all these topics that we discussed. So, let's start first with emergency planning and responses to community violence. What are some things that grantees can do?

Dr. Stefany Ramos:

[29:06](#)

I think you mentioned before, there are individuals that are working so hard but aren't sure where else to turn to or where else to look, right? Because looking at the connect the dots visual, there are so many risk factors and there are so many protective factors, and you cannot address them all by yourself as an individual or as a single organization.

Community and Interpersonal Violence

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So one of the things that I think is important to do is to understand what is going on in the community. You know what you're doing or what you want to do, but what is everybody else doing? And unfortunately, right now, it's rare to find a local resource that has all of that information together. Even local governments don't fully understand the comprehensive list of programs that are happening, especially at a community level because communities are themselves engaged, and they are looking at problems that are coming up. Everything happens so fast. There are new types of violence emerging all the time, and they're trying to make change. They're not waiting for a city person to come in and help them. They're already doing things. But it's not likely that people know all of those types of things that are happening.

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So it's still right now on an individual organization to do a little bit of work and to find out themselves what is happening, to reach out to schools, other organizations, local city agencies, to understand who is doing what, and to see how they can fit into that. Or maybe they can adapt their programs to be a little bit more effective, or to help in a slightly different way that's going to fit in to all the other resources that are available to that student.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[30:59](#)

I like that. One thing my dad used to always say is know your partners and know your competition. And so, part of that goes back to the continuity of services, having a good referral system, looking at gaps or things that your organization may not be able to provide and aligning yourself with an agency who can provide those things.

Dr. Stacy Sechrist:

[31:22](#)

I think maybe we could touch on trainings, not to recommend any specific ones, but thinking about what the evidence at least tells us about good trainings. So, if you were going to implement, let's say, a required training for your staff, for example, not only is it important to just provide information about a topic, but it's really helpful to build skills around what to do or to do better.

[31:48](#)

So for example, if we think about trainings for youth around healthy relationships, for example, so not only is it enough to explain, here's examples of what healthy relationships are, here's red flags of unhealthy relationships, but to also build skills around how to be in a healthy relationship yourself, and how to set boundaries and how to talk to individuals in the event that you find yourself in an unhealthy situation. So what we know about good trainings is that not only do they give information, but they also build skills around how to either do

Community and Interpersonal Violence

something better or avoid situations. And so that's a really practical part of good trainings.

[32:28](#)

And it's also important to think about evaluating those trainings as well. In other words, now we think about the day where everybody's taking remote trainings and online trainings and those sorts of things. What are ways to evaluate really how effective those are, thinking of ways to build practice-based or skills-based training into those types of programs, and then doing knowledge or skills assessments before and after to see the impact of those trainings, and then measuring outcomes that you would expect to be related to those trainings after the fact. So if you give a training on educator sexual misconduct, for example, after the fact, do you see reports go up? And that's not necessarily a bad thing, right? So, while you think that you're giving a training to prevent something, if you start to see reports increasing, uh-oh, all of a sudden, has this training led to greater incidents of sexual misconduct in the school? No, not necessarily. It's just now that people know what to look out for, now they know what to look out for to report it.

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So think about outcomes of trainings or any kind of practice that you're implementing in terms of what would you expect to be the outcome of that, and then how to interpret or evaluate what that really means in the context of the intervention or the training that you just provided.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[33:46](#)

So just being cognizant of everyone in your community. And so like you said, that may be the school, it may be healthcare professionals, it may be community organizations, boys and girls club, YMCAs.

[34:00](#)

I remember being a grantee and providing implementation services, and that was one thing that I always found the most challenging, but rewarding is having a community advisory board where everyone will sit down and say, "Hey, this is what I bring to the table. What do you bring to the table? How can we partner to make sure that everyone who can touch this child or who needs to touch this child or this family," because sometimes we talk about this community approach, "how do we as a village surround not only this child but this family to make sure that we are providing some kind of services?"

[34:38](#)

Because a lot of times when we're dealing with marginalized populations, we're dealing with first generation students, depending upon what that context may be. We all know that parents are a great resource for the young person, but sometimes parents will say, "I just don't know. I haven't been

Community and Interpersonal Violence

exposed. No one taught me. I don't know where to look." So, a lot of times children are providing information to their families, and then other times family are providing information to their young person. So, making sure that we are fostering that two-way communication within the home, but also within the community.

Dr. Stacy Sechrist:

[35:12](#)

Yeah, I was just thinking in terms of really thinking about how to be proactive rather than reactive. And so, thinking about how policies, having good policies in place and a review of policies is probably a good first step. So, review what you have in terms of... For example, we've had a project where we did a survey of schools and districts to see what policies they had in place and what they thought they needed help in. And some of them had policies, for example, for human trafficking or cases of child abuse, but maybe not policies on other things in terms of how to respond. But what policies will do is really lay out expectations in terms of what will happen if a certain incident is uncovered or discovered, or if a certain behavior is committed by teacher or staff, or if information comes forward. So really making sure that everyone knows what to expect when a certain incident or certain situation happens, but also knowing that there is a process to follow.

[36:18](#)

For example, if we have a case of educator sexual misconduct, for example, we'll use that since I've been working around a project kind of in that area. But what's really important is that if you want to address an issue, and we'll just say educator sexual misconduct, first of all, you're probably going to want to put in some training, some awareness programs. But as people start to become more aware of a problem or a situation, you can expect it to be uncovered or to be reported more.

[36:45](#)

And so where a school or a program could really get in trouble is not having a good response system in place to respond to those incidents. Again, using just this example of educator sexual misconduct, what is the investigative procedure looks like? Who is responsible for that investigation? What could a teacher who might be accused expect? What could someone reporting this behavior expect? What are mandatory reporting laws around this? So how does your school's policy, for example, intersect with legal requirements and legal statutes? And then thinking about making sure that that process that's in place is followed because everyone's paying attention. So that sets the tone-

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[37:25](#)

The tone.

Community and Interpersonal Violence

- Dr. Stacy Sechrist: [37:25](#) ... and that goes back into the narrative. So, in other words, if a situation is happening that shouldn't, and the response is not followed and nothing is done about it, that of course sets the tone that this kind of behavior is acceptable, that the school's not paying attention. So, if you have policies in place and people are expecting a response, make sure you follow through, and that that's communicated back out. And then I think policies also help with common definitions too. So, if we're talking about a certain type of violence, whether it's human trafficking or educator sexual misconduct policies, help define the behavior, what are we talking about here? And everybody has a common set of definitions to work from, and then you can start to put training and prevention programming around that and build your response.
- [38:07](#) So I think it's really important to think about setting up policies, how to be proactive, and then in terms of thinking about what those responses to be, I just wanted to highlight, bring in the voices of the students, and the youth that you're working with. So what are they experiencing?
- Dr. Kineka Hull: [38:22](#) Absolutely.
- Dr. Stacy Sechrist: [38:22](#) And then what do they want? What sorts of supports do they think that they need in order to help them? And so, we can't forget to bring in the individuals who are most being impacted not only by victimization or violence, but who are being impacted by the responses. And again, making sure that we're bringing in the things that are going to be most useful for them, but also give them that voice and give them some power in deciding if this is going to happen, how can I be involved in that in ways that are really going to feel good to me and be most impactful for me.
- Dr. Kineka Hull: [38:53](#) Thank you both for that. This has been such great information. And so, let's take this action step one pace forward, and think about how to turn that into a policy, a procedure or protocol. What are some best practices to make sure that we have things in place to make sure that we are supporting young people?
- Dr. Stefany Ramos: [39:17](#) Using schools as an example, for youth serving organizations, there are three main policies that most schools are going to have in place. So, one is the emergency operations and procedures. Those are often required by state law of schools, not of organizations. And those cover what to do during an emergency. So, think of a school shooting. So, something happens, the document will have everything that staff need to know to go into lockdown or a shelter in place. And sort of what

Community and Interpersonal Violence

Stacy was describing earlier of how local law enforcement is involved in that process. Who shows up where? Where do you move students to be safe and things like that.

[40:03](#)

Then there's behavioral threat assessment procedures, which are meant to prevent emergency situations like that. So if you get to a school shooting, your threat assessment procedure has not worked, right? And so, the threat assessment process is meant to address the warning signs that something specific might be coming. So, it's not a general process for students that have behavioral challenges and you know they need support, but you're not sure what to do with them. A threat assessment procedure is for something specific. So, someone made a comment that made someone else, either another student or a staff member feel unsafe and that they were going to be harmed, and that's when the threat assessment procedure would kick in. And there are some really good research out there on what a good threat assessment looks like.

[40:58](#)

And generally you're going to document what happened if you have good trauma-informed procedures, to interview everybody involved so that you're not re-traumatizing either the student who was threatened or the person who did the threatening, because like we talked about before, those things don't come out of nowhere. It's not an isolation, and they may themselves be experiencing trauma or some sort of violence. So, you want to be able to get the information in a trauma-informed way and then assess whether the threat is what they call transient. So, it's really not serious. It was a joke or said in passing or just in a fit of anger, but it's not something that the student really meant. And usually when that happens, you'll notice that the person who made the threat is very remorseful or really doesn't understand what the severity or the consequences of what they said or how it made the other person feel.

[41:58](#)

And then you go up the chain from there to substantive threats where there really was intent to threaten another person. And then to the most serious substantive threat where you find that that person who made the threat has concrete plans to carry out that threat. And those are the things that make the news, that make the headlines where we find out that someone who is involved in some school violence had a manifesto or posted stuff on Facebook, those made the headlines, but they're really not as common as the media would make them out to be. But you still need procedures in place to address those things. And all the less severe instances that happen before you'll get to

Community and Interpersonal Violence

something that serious, again, focusing on preventing getting to that level of emergency.

[42:50](#)

And then the third type of policy is your broader prevention policies that really describe rules about the school environment and school climate. So, some of those are going to be very focused on safety and physical requirements. So things like having cameras in certain places, having a visitor policy, eliminating dark or isolated areas in the building. And some of them are going to be more about people and interactions and building the school climate. So, things like social-emotional development programs or life skill programs, continual professional development and training for staff around trauma-informed care or adverse childhood experiences. So that's a lot to think about, and it's best to take each of those one at a time, I think.

[43:41](#)

And often in my work when I'm talking to school staff, they don't really make distinctions between any of those in the day-to-day work with the students. So, it sort of doesn't matter to them whether something falls into this type of policy or this type of policy. They're concerned with just working with the student and meeting the student's needs. But it is important at the organizational level to think about those things and have those procedures in place ahead of time, so you're ready to respond. But also having standardized procedures helps to reduce disparities. So, there is research that shows that having behavioral threat assessments reduces racial disparities and disciplinary outcomes like long-term suspension. So, there are a lot of benefits to taking the time and thinking about these things and really codifying them into formal policies ahead of time.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[44:36](#)

That's a lot of good information. And so, as you said, schools sometimes have a starting point or a template. They always are fine-tuning and finding ways to be more supportive and better. But for our listeners who may be a small agency who may not have always the resources, whether it be personnel to put towards developing this or the things that you mentioned, which are a great idea, so I'm sure they'll say, "Hey, I can start working on some of these things," but what are some things that could help them get started or help them think about that if they're doing certain things from scratch?

Dr. Stefany Ramos:

[45:10](#)

Yeah. There are actually a lot of great national resources. So one is there's guidance for developing emergency operating plans from the federal emergency management agencies. So those actually originated from FEMA and have been adapted to

Community and Interpersonal Violence

schools and other organizations. There's also a lot of good information on threat assessments and how to start that process at the National Center for School Safety from the BJA. There's also a lot of good resources from the CDC and the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control about preventing youth violence and the types of policies and procedures that are helpful for that.

[45:53](#)

If you are an organization that doesn't have the resources to put together your own training or apply for grants to get a study together to try to develop something, again, in the spirit of understanding that you are a part of a larger system, reach out to the organizations that you work with or that you know that your youth have access to or also are able to use.

[46:23](#)

So again, looking at schools, they're not going to be able to share their emergency operation plan with you. Those are kept very confidential, so they can't be used for the wrong reasons. So, everybody doesn't know what they're going to do in case of an emergency. But they would be able to share with you their approach to a threat assessment or their approach to positive school climate. And you can take that, and to the extent that you can mimic or incorporate or compliment what they are doing. So, for example, a lot of schools use positive behavioral interventions and support systems, PBIS. And so, if you know that the youth that you work with are familiar with that sort of system and the incentives for behavior, you can take that on. And so that would be sort of an easy transition for both the organization and for the youth that you're working with.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[47:20](#)

And we've also been focusing a lot on trauma-informed care and resiliency to say if a young person is coming to your session, as Stacy said, they're coming with all of these other things that impact your ability to inform them on the things that you're trying to say that are competing with their time and their attention for your programming. This young person that's coming to you nuanced, right? This is how you respond, this is what you look for. This is how you protect young people and how you protect your staff. And so how do you do certain things? So no, I feel like this was good information.

Dr. Stefany Ramos:

[48:00](#)

Yeah, no, I mean, it's so scary to think that something like that may happen in your neighborhood or in your organization. And it's impossible to predict, right? You can't know what someone is coming in with that day and know what's going to happen. Again, that's why so many of my answers revolve around focusing on prevention and everything that you can do to just generally promote wellbeing for that person, for the youth in

Community and Interpersonal Violence

your community, because that is what's going to avoid those situations. But again, you cannot do that alone. I mean, the organization is going to have a specific goal and are going to be held to very specific outcomes, but that's not enough. I think, as you said before, take a holistic view of the student.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[48:51](#)

But that's the hallmark of public health. I think that's sometimes what we get away from with fancy interventions or fancy ways to do things, right? Prevention is our strong suit. Being proactive instead of reactive is our strong suit. And so, we can be as snazzy as we want to be with some of our implementation and our methods, but our bread and butter is prevention. And I think that whenever we start thinking about how to best serve young people and how to be more effective and efficient with our jobs, we slide back to our bread and butter. Now, what is your policy? What is your training? How do you reset if you deviate? How do you pivot? What is your plan? Is everybody understanding, on the same page and aware of that plan? So, if something happens, you can say, "Ah-hah, this might have happened because you deviated from the plan."

[49:47](#)

Or two, okay, we need to refine this plan because the world is constantly changing. Professionals and young people are constantly changing. Or we protected ourselves because we stuck to the plan, and we were able to support youth and survivors because we stuck to the plan. And so, I like that. I feel like policies and procedures, sometimes people think of those and the investigations as being punitive, but they're not. If so, we have a clear definition of what we're looking for. We have a clear response, we have a clear path forward, and we're doing it together to make sure that everybody is protected. So the young people that we serve, that's our primary audience, making that they're supported and that they're thriving, but also for our staff, making sure that you're properly trained and equipped and feel equipped to do your job, and making sure that you understand the ramifications of actions or the ramifications of lack of action, and everybody just has a clear understanding on how to best do what it is that we do.

Dr. Stacy Sechrist:

[50:56](#)

And it's important too when we talk about community violence is understanding what the kids that you're interacting with, what they've experienced. In some communities where we know community violence is really concentrated in some disadvantaged areas. And so, there are kids living in certain neighborhoods who are going to be more likely to be exposed to gun violence, feel unsafe, walking to school, feel unsafe going outside. And so, when that kid comes into your classroom or into your program, they're bringing all of that with them. And so

Community and Interpersonal Violence

sometimes you may not know if there were gunshots that went off last night, or if that child may have witnessed something horrific on the way to school, and that might manifest itself like Kineka, you said earlier, into misbehavior in the classroom.

[51:43](#)

So instead of jumping to the conclusion that, "Oh, well, this is just a bad kid and I don't know what to do with this kid," how do we account for the full context that young person is coming in with? And it's really difficult and that there's so many pieces of information, and how do you share information across systems, especially when we're talking about young people, in ways that everybody can be knowledgeable about that student's experiences and-

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[52:12](#)

Supportive and proactive.

Dr. Stefany Ramos:

[52:13](#)

And one of the key things you can do is to know those sorts of things are going on in your community. And a lot of the times that stuff is posted by local city government somewhere. Or I know in Durham here where I live, there's a weekly message to the community that goes out that has information about the shot spotter and data that they are giving out to the community. But it takes time and a lot of energy to stay tuned to that and to just constantly make sure that you're going back and checking in with the community and really getting to know the area that you're working in.

[52:54](#)

And sometimes what happens with organizations that work with schools, but that are outside of schools is that there's a lot of well-intentioned people, but they're not quite from the neighborhood that they're working in. So, they don't understand what the student's life is like. They don't understand the daily experience of living there, and they don't understand the assets and the resources that are already available for them to take advantage of. So, it's just so important to really emerge yourself in the community, in that culture, and make sure that you take the time to do that if you really want to be effective.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[53:31](#)

So thank you both for being a guest on this podcast. The information that you have provided I know will be invaluable. As a wrap up, I'm going to ask that you would tell me one key takeaway that you would like listeners to leave this episode with.

Dr. Stacy Sechrist:

[53:50](#)

My one big takeaway was be proactive, not reactive.

Community and Interpersonal Violence

- Dr. Stefany Ramos: [53:54](#) One key takeaway is that you can support youth who are experiencing community violence by listening and by being an engaged community partner in the effort to address the root causes of community violence and other negative outcomes.
- Dr. Kineka Hull: [54:07](#) Creating safe and supportive trauma-informed spaces for all young people is essential in providing youth-centered programming. It's especially important for organizations to think about how to be proactive and trauma-informed before they are faced with the situation of supporting youth. Make sure that your policies, procedures, definitions, and things are well established and well known throughout your agency, as well as with your young people. With trauma informed care as a priority, it can help program staff support youth in positive and developmentally appropriate ways, while allowing youth to set a pace for growth that works for them.
- [54:51](#) This has been another episode of Elevate Youth Programming Podcast with Drs. Stacy Sechrist and Stefany Ramos. We hope this episode enhances your ability to make a positive impact for youth. Thank you for listening.
- [55:09](#) If you enjoyed today's conversation, be sure to like and follow Elevate Youth Programming on your podcast platform of choice. For information on today's topic and resources in adolescent pregnancy prevention, visit The Exchange at teenpregnancy.acf.hhs.gov. The Elevate Youth Programming Podcast is funded by the Family and Youth Services Bureau. The content in each episode is not the opinion of FYSB, nor is training and technical assistance contractors. I'm Kineka Hull, and this has been another episode of Elevate Youth Programming.