

Preventing School Violence Needs to Start at Young Age

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By the time a child enters third grade, it may be too late to change behavioral issues that could lead to more serious problems later in life, including violent and aggressive behavior. A University of Missouri professor discusses the importance of proactive prevention of behavioral problems at an early age in her new book *Implementing Positive Behavior Support Systems in Early Childhood and Elementary Settings*.

“It is clear that there is a link between significant problem behaviors seen in young children and more serious patterns of problem behaviors later in children’s lives,” said Melissa Stormont, associate professor in the College of Education at MU. “Families, schools and communities have a window of opportunity to make a significant impact on children’s social behaviors.”

In her book, she reports that the number of children coming to school without necessary social skills is increasing. As many as one in five students displays disruptive behaviors in the classroom to the point that intervention is necessary. According to Stormont, the typical response to problem behavior is reactionary and punishment-oriented. However, this approach only works to reinforce the negative behavior.

Often children enter school environments without the social skills that teachers expect. What a child learns at home as appropriate behavior varies from family to family. By implementing proactive, positive behavior support systems early in a child’s education, 80 to 85 percent of the students will respond positively. If the remaining students are

identified early, they can get the special attention they need, according to Stormont.

“The urgency to develop appropriate patterns of social behavior among young children simply cannot be emphasized enough. Educators need to have an understanding of this urgency and the tools for responding,” Stormont said. “Teachers should not make the assumption that students ‘should know by now’ how to act. Rather, teachers should be proactive in guiding children and reinforcing positive behaviors.”

Implementing Positive Behavior Support Systems in Early Childhood and Elementary Settings was written by Stormont, Timothy J. Lewis, associate dean of graduate and international studies in the College of Education at MU, and MU doctoral students Rebecca Beckner and Nanci W. Johnson.

Source: University of Missouri

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