

BBYD: WORKSHOP

Encouraging Safe Schools & Supportive Learning Environments

OBJECTIVES

- Recognize new and continuing potential sources of stress that create barriers to learning
- Exchange strategies that enhance healthy academic, psychological, and social development
- Share resources that help young people manage emotions, resolve conflicts nonviolently, and respect differences

Opening: (3 minutes) Welcome message, Introductions, Agenda in brief and pre-viewing ideas.

Before Viewing: (15 minutes) Review some local accomplishments that help to ensure that schools are safe and supportive. Review warning behaviors seen at school of youth depression & violence.

During Viewing: (3 minutes) Ask viewers to note particular scenes in the play that represent warning behaviors that can lead to violence or self-injury. Note that “framing” can bring focus to critical problems. It also can raise questions about behaviors that fall outside the frame that should be addressed. Also note where supports systems could have made a difference. Ask students in the audience to reflect on “frames” or scenes of isolation and where they see similar behaviors on a daily basis.

Post Viewing: Large Group Discussion: (40 minutes)

1. **Creating Stable Environments:** How does the typical high school pecking order fit in to this story? Can or should anything be done to change this? To what degree can individuals, groups, and communities become effective agents of change so fewer students are outsiders?
2. **Handling Emotions:** Josh's sarcasm and many other coping behaviors protect teens from being hurt. Identify other examples in the play and around campus, and suggest what adults and peers can do to minimize defensive actions or behaviors.
3. **Weighing Zero Tolerance:** What are the strengths and weaknesses of “zero tolerance” as public policy? What would work as an alternative?
4. **Cracking the Code of Silence:** How pervasive is the code of silence in our schools? In what ways can teens and adults work together to break this code in order to promote adolescent well-being? What are some powerful practices that get across that keeping silent is wrong, that help is available, that suicide is never an answer, and that peers must look out for one another?
5. **Bullying:** Though the play doesn't portray Josh as specifically bullied, how can bullying inspire violence in students? Hurtful situations can create tough decisions. Where should students turn for help in sorting things out and making good choices?

Small Group Sessions: (30 minutes) After a quick break, form small and varied groups of 8 to 10 persons. Cast members and student leaders will be the discussion leaders and take notes. Imagine that your school will be featured in a sequel to *Bang Bang You're Dead*. Compile a checklist of recommendations that could be put in place to reduce stress here and provide a safer, more nurturing learning environment where reductions to current levels of bullying, violence, and adolescent depression are likely.

1. **Make Schools Safe:** List ideas that minimize distractions and hazards. What specific improvements are needed in building design, security techniques, and cleanliness?
2. **Support Learning:** Considering changes needed, discuss what measures could create a more positive climate for learning and for developing each student's sense of belonging and academic success?
3. **Meet Diverse Needs:** What can be done to accommodate diversity? What specific ideas would improve schooling for those who learn easily, for those who need extra support, and for those who are chronically antisocial?
4. **Continuously Improve:** What policies, standards, assessment techniques, and resources could be revisited in order to improve the quality of education?

Reassemble in Large Group: (15 minutes) Reconvene the large group. Cast members & discussion leaders will compile the notes and suggestions taken and put them together into related categories. Determine if the list can be prioritized to show the highest concerns, perhaps based on audience applause? The lists could then be turned over to appropriate administrators, agencies, etc. A final document could be posted in the auditorium lobby and on the theatre/school web site. Ask one person from each agency to report the findings to his or her agency head for a decision as to whether or not interagency or intra-agency follow-up is needed.