

PROJECT CSI: SECURE SCHOOLS



Code of Silence Intervention

“A simple easy-to-implement leadership curriculum that is specifically designed to prevent incidences of school violence.”

Program Overview

PROJECT CSI: SECURE SCHOOLS

Code of Silence Intervention

“[We must] develop cultures within schools and institutions of higher education that promote safety, trust, respect and open communication...create environments conducive to seeking help and develop culturally appropriate messages to de-stigmatize mental illness and mental health treatment.”

-Report to the President on Issues Raised by the Virginia Tech Tragedy

PROJECT CSI: SECURE SCHOOLS is a simple, easy-to-implement leadership curriculum that is specifically designed to prevent incidences of school violence.

As a result of well-known school violence tragedies like Columbine and most recently Virginia Tech much attention has been drawn to the exploration of what could have possibly been done to prevent such tragedies.

One of the most common themes gleaned from the research surrounding such heinous acts is that there were many early indicators that the perpetrators had a predisposition towards violence and had also made explicit threats to harm others. Furthermore, many individuals in the community (including parents, teachers and students) were aware of these indicators.

In the document published in June, 2007, *“Report to the President on Issues Raised by the Virginia Tech Tragedy,”* written by Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael O. Leavitt, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings and U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, one of the key findings was that improved awareness and communication are key to prevention. The report cites,

“...tacit ‘codes of silence’ that may impede identifying and responding to those in crisis. Students may know of someone in need or someone who has made a threat, but frequently they do not share that information with individuals who can take appropriate action.”¹

Whether due to fear of reprisal, ridicule or ostracism, it is critical that these “codes of silence” be broken so crucial information can be delivered to those in the school or community who can prevent such incidences from occurring. It is these ‘codes of silence’ that **PROJECT CSI: SECURE SCHOOLS** explicitly aims to undermine.

We believe that “when it comes to preventing violence at school, kids who know something about a plot are often the first line of defense².” More than teachers, support staff, school resource officers, or even family members, it is students who are most likely to be privy to information about their peers who are predisposed to violence and need mental health assistance.

School safety expert Wolfgang W. Hilbig writes, “Historically, students have been loath to ‘tattle,’ ‘rat,’ or ‘narc’ on their peers -- especially in secondary grades when social acceptance often overrides the urge to do the right thing. Added to that reluctance is a fear of violent retribution for turning someone in that is probably more real today than ever before.”³

As a result of these deeply entrenched psychological barriers to breaking the code of silence **PROJECT CSI: SECURE SCHOOLS** gives students practical, yet effective tools to break through this potentially paralyzing fear in order to “do the right thing” and speak out when they are aware of a problem.

PROJECT CSI: SECURE SCHOOLS provides fundamental tools to subvert future tragedies by training students to:

- Become as aware as possible of the potential for violence amongst their peers and/or self-inflicted violence (cutting, suicide)
- Consider the potential risks of their own and others’ behavior on as wide a social radius as possible
- Make smart, ethical decisions based on these potential risks
- Make the ‘switch from snitch’ by developing courage necessary to break through of fear of reprisal or ridicule
- Participate in creating a culture of honesty, accountability, and ethical decision-making
- Take action and speak openly and freely with adults who can intervene and help
- Contribute to developing a school culture that “promote[s] safety, trust, respect, and open communication”, and to help “create environments conducive to seeking help and developing culturally appropriate messages to de-stigmatize mental health illness and mental health treatment.”⁴

Program Logistics

PROJECT CSI: SECURE SCHOOLS is designed to be delivered by a Student Assistance Counselor (SAC) or similar support staff, and/or a School Resource Officer (SRO). This is very important because it creates a linkage with the most “responsible and appropriate individuals with whom to share concerns”⁵. Placing the schools SRO and SAC in the classroom delivering these lessons with students provides another way for these two very important members of the school community to expand their already crucial role and strengthen their relationship with the student body.

The SRO/SAC will then deliver the **PROJECT CSI: SECURE SCHOOLS** to the school Freshmen in three succinct but poignant lessons. The lessons are designed to be delivered approximately a week apart in a classroom setting.

¹ *“Report to the President on Issues Raised by the Virginia Tech Tragedy,”* by Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael O. Leavitt, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings and U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales

² *“How Students Can Break the Code of Silence,”* by Stacy A. Teicher, *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 19, 2006

³ *“Breaking the Code of Silence,”* by Wolfgang W. Hilbig, *American School Board Journal*, March 2000

⁴ *“Report to the President on Issues Raised by the Virginia Tech Tragedy,”* by Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael O. Leavitt, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings and U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales

⁵ *“Report to the President on Issues Raised by the Virginia Tech Tragedy,”* by Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael O. Leavitt, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings and U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales

Executive Summary

*PROJECT CSI: SECURE SCHOOLS

Code of Silence Intervention

PROJECT CSI: SECURE SCHOOLS is a simple, easy-to-implement leadership curriculum that is specifically designed to prevent incidences of school violence.

Program Highlights:

- The program is simple and easy-to-implement: it consists of only three simple yet effective lessons
 - Because students are the first line of defense in preventing school violence, every student in the school receives the **PROJECT CSI: SECURE SCHOOLS** training upon their entry as freshmen.
 - Teaches students how to break through the toxic 'code of silence' that so frequently allows heinous violent acts to occur.
 - Consider the potential risks of their own and others' behavior on as wide a social radius as possible
 - Teaches students to make decisions based on a proprietary Ethical Decision-Making Model (K.N.O.W.)
 - Make the 'switch from snitch' by developing courage necessary to break through of fear of reprisal or ridicule
 - Fosters a culture of honesty, accountability, and ethical decision-making
 - Take action and speak openly and freely with adults who can intervene and help
-