

Nonviolence as a Foundation for Youth Work Practice

Graeme Stuart
Family Action Centre
The research

- A review of literature on youth work and nonviolence
- A state-wide telephone survey of 60 youth workers in New South Wales to obtain a broad overview of current practice and issues needing further exploration
- In-depth interviews with 15 youth workers and 20 young people
- The development of a model of nonviolent youth work practice
- Two focus groups with youth workers to obtain feedback about the results and the draft model
- Refinement of the model based on feedback from the focus groups

Principles of Nonviolence

- Nonviolence is a way of life
- Violence is rejected as a means of control and resolving disputes
- There is an active commitment to peace and social justice
- The means are consistent with the ends
- Power is understood as arising out of relationships

Principles of Nonviolence

- There is a profound respect for humanity
- Actions are based on love
- There is a commitment to truth and openness
- Spiritual beliefs and qualities are valued
- There is a willingness to accept suffering in order to create change

Nonviolent Youth Work Practice

- Be committed to nonviolence in all you do
- Develop a reflective work practice
- Build professional, caring relationships

- Focus on power-with
- Be committed to social change
- Apply principles of social justice

Nonviolent Youth Work Practice

- Ensure there are adequate, appropriate staff and resources
- Negotiate clear expectations and boundaries
- Create a positive environment
- Respond to behaviour nonviolently
- Facilitate informal education

Questions to consider

- In what ways do you practice nonviolence at work and in your personal life?
- How do you show you genuinely care for and respect the young people you work with while also setting limits to your relationships?
- How do you meaningfully involve young people in your service, particularly decision making?
- Do you maintain a passion for social justice?

Questions to consider

- In what ways do you support broader social change campaigns?
- Do you challenge policies, work practices and attitudes that contribute to injustice, violence, or marginalisation?
- In what ways do you focus on *power-with* rather than *power over*?
- How do you help create a positive environment in your youth service?

Questions to consider

- How do you respond to inappropriate behaviour (including violence and discrimination)?
- How do you avoid attempting to control the behaviour of young people through coercion?
- Do you only use exclusion when the safety or wellbeing of others is genuinely at risk and exclusion is a last resort?
- Do you assist young people to develop skills, experiences and knowledge through informal education?

Contact Details

Graeme Stuart
Family Action Centre
University of Newcastle
Callaghan 2308

Phone: (02) 4921 7241
graeme.stuart@newcastle.edu.au