Intervening after a Violent Incident in the School Setting

How to react when dealing with the emergence of new forms of violence

Common Types of Situations in 2023

Ideological polarization around:

- Gender: Misogyny, trans- and homophobia, (misandry sometimes)
- Religion: Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, religious extremism, conflict around religious signs or practice
- From politics: Extreme right, Neo-Nazi, anti-system, conspiracy,
- Language: French/English

Non-ideological glorification of violence:

- Glorification of all forms of violence
- Vindication and identification with mass murderers

In the real or virtual world:

- Threats, intimidation or hate speech online only.
- Violent actions or speech in the school or local environment

How to respond, depending the situation

Urgent situation imminent or actual violence - targeted or mass (mass killing) with a realistic plan and/or preparation: **call 911 or local police**, **ensure safety of all by following school protocol.**

Non-Urgent situation (non-imminent violence): inter-group conflict, hate speech and incidents, threats (online or offline), glorification of violence.

1 In both cases, **take prompt care** of the **emotional safety** of youth, staff, and the school community (reassure parents).

2 **Understand the situation as a school team**

- Understand **each person's perspective** and their view of the others' position;
- Take an interest in the **relational dynamics** between youth and other school actors, to have a global vision of what led to the situation;
- Offer **support** and **listening** to those involved (victims, perpetrators, direct and indirect witnesses) to initiate a conflict resolution process;
- If necessary, formulate consequences, with an emphasis on **re-establishing ties** and collective commitment, avoiding exclusionary measures as much as possible.

Social Polarisation

- **Increased separation of groups** in a society around divisive lines (ethnic, linguistic, religious, ideological, etc.) that may be embodied in several social spheres.

- Can result in a **negative, simplistic, and dehumanizing representation** of other groups.

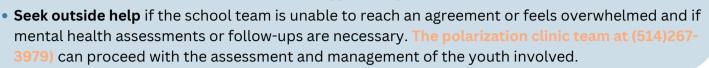- Is **increasing worldwide**, to the detriment of inclusive identities.

Posture

- Demonstrate **active listening, empathy, kindness**, and **respect** to **all** actors involved regardless of their beliefs, values, and points of view and **avoid moralising positions**.

- Make the **difference between a disagreement** and an **aggression**.

- Respect the **confidentiality** of actors.

- Encourage **dialogue** and **social interaction.**

③ Develop an intervention approach by mobilizing the school team
- Elaborate as a school team a **plan** taking into consideration the **strengths and limits** of everyone;
- **Mobilize** internal **strengths** and locally **available** external **resources** (organisations, cultural or religious associations);
- **Formulate measures** aimed at youth, staff, certain classes, parents, the school, the school service center;
- The **approach** must **be co-designed with the actors who will help implement it.** An approach with a unilateral imposition risks aggravating tensions.
- **Seek outside help** if the school team is unable to reach an agreement or feels overwhelmed and if mental health assessments or follow-ups are necessary. **The polarization clinic team at (514)267-3979)** can proceed with the assessment and management of the youth involved.

Pitfalls to Avoid

Screening and Security Approach
- There is no typical profile of people who may support the use of violence.
- Suspicion can reflect our unconscious biases and lead to discriminatory and profiling practices.
- Detection strategies often lead to an erosion of the school climate and increased distrust.

Confrontation
- Further polarizes and diminishes the potential to connect with the youth.

Humiliating or judgmental consequences
- Aggravates anger. Encourage consequences that repair relationships and contribute positively to community well-being.

Exclusion (expulsion and suspension)
- Isolates youth, which can increase anger and the risk of acting out.
- Exclusion and judicialization are often not effective solutions and should be used as a last resort.

> Always take seriously a youth who exhibits concerning behaviours and offer them the support they need.

Next, take care of the school climate

- Mobilize the entire school team to re-establish a **supportive environment and routine** for youth and staff, which helps reduce anxiety.
- Re-establish or maintain the **protective role of adults in school** and avoid that security is embodied only by the police.
- Establish an **alliance with families and their communities** through warm and empathetic communication.
- Establish or **reconnect with** appropriate community and religious **organizations**. They are valuable allies in supporting parties who feel unrepresented in the school.
- Continue to respect the confidentiality of information concerning those involved.