

# NYA PEER VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGY



LET US  
BREAK THE  
**SILENCE**  
THAT HURTS!

## PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE IS "INVISIBLE"

Verbal abuse, avoidance, gossip, exclusion, isolation, disrespect and intolerance may be difficult to detect, but this does not mean

## CHILDREN EXPOSED TO VIOLENCE SUFFER

They feel vulnerable, insecure, embarrassed, ill at ease and frightened. They often do not know who to ask for help.

# NYA PEER VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGY

Network of Young Advisors to the Ombudsman for Children

## QUICK REACTION IS IMPORTANT

If violence occurs, we should stop it as soon as possible, intensify work with both perpetrators and victims, strengthen links among institutions and provide

## VIOLENCE CAN BE AVOIDED

The problem of violence can be solved. It is therefore essential to implement the recommendations and raise awareness of the solutions proposed in this Strategy.

## THE FAMILY



## MATTERS

Adequate attention, positive values, a feeling of satisfaction and constructive conflict resolution are the main family "tools" to combat peer violence.



## CHILDREN LEARN IN KINDERGARTEN TOO

Picture books, cartoons and games about topics encouraging collectiveness are the best way to prevent violence from the earliest age.

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## SCHOOLS CAN DO A LOT

Nonviolent communication and constructive conflict resolution should be promoted in every school through school subjects, parents' participation and "mailboxes of trust".



## THE COMMUNITY IS RESPONSIBLE

**THE MINISTRY** competent for education should organise training on peer violence prevention and ensure the implementation of the recommendations.

**NGOs** can contribute to peer violence prevention by organising workshops and get-togethers for adults and children.

**OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN** warn kindergartens, schools and other institutions of the problem of peer violence and encourage its prevention.

Members of the Network of Young Advisors to the Ombudsman for Children should hold presentations and talk with their peers, raising their awareness and encouraging them to react proactively to peer violence.

**THE NETWORK OF YOUNG ADVISORS TO THE OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN (NYA) IS A GROUP OF 20 CHILDREN AGED BETWEEN 12 AND 18 AND COMING FROM ALL OVER CROATIA, WHICH ASSISTS THE OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN IN THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS. BASED ON THE RESEARCH OF THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN FROM VIOLENCE, CONDUCTED WITHIN THE ENYA PROJECT "LET'S TALK YOUNG! LET'S TALK ABOUT VIOLENCE!", THE NYA HAS CONCLUDED THAT CHILDREN ARE AT THE GREATEST RISK FROM PSYCHOLOGICAL PEER VIOLENCE, SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND ISOLATION, WHICH OFTEN REMAIN UNNOTICED BY ADULTS AND IS NOT RECOGNISED AS VIOLENCE BY MANY CHILDREN. THE NYA HAS THEREFORE DESIGNED ITS OWN PEER VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGY "LET US BREAK THE SILENCE THAT HURTS!"**

**WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE?** Psychological violence includes verbal abuse, avoidance of a person, gossip, exclusion and isolation as well as disrespect and intolerance towards a person. In contrast with physical violence, these forms of behaviour are difficult to identify, hence the term "invisible violence".

**HOW DOES A CHILD EXPOSED TO PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE FEEL?** Such a child/young person feels ashamed and very ill at ease, reluctant to report the exposure to "invisible violence" for fear of being retaliated against or ignored by those he/she seeks help from. Children exposed to violence often do not know who to ask for help. School specialist services (which are supposed to provide support to children, in addition to teachers/class masters) often function only as administrative services. There is also a prevailing opinion that reports of violence, even if they are filed, take too long to be resolved and that various services participating in their resolution are not well connected.

**WHAT ARE NYA RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE RESOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM?** Peer violence prevention activities should be implemented at several levels: within the family; in kindergartens and schools and within the wider social community.

**WITHIN THE FAMILY** Children should adopt positive values and acquire communication skills for nonviolent conflict resolution. They should grow up in a family atmosphere that offers a feeling of satisfaction with life and receive adequate attention. Parents should discuss the unacceptability of violent behaviour and constructive conflict resolution with their children within the family. In order to better fulfil the parental role with regard to this area, parents ought to be informed of the diffusion and signals of peer violence as well as of the consequences of children's exposure to it. They should receive relevant information at parents' meetings at school from well-trained teachers and other experts.

**IN THE KINDERGARTEN** The focus should be put on topics that encourage collectiveness and violence prevention – by means of picture books, cartoons and games.

**IN THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL** The topics related to nonviolent communication and constructive conflict resolution should be promoted within various school subjects (Croatian, biology, civic education) and the problem of violence and methods of its resolution should in general be devoted more attention – both in the primary and secondary schools.

As children/teenagers react well to the film medium, they should be shown films that appropriately address the issue of peer violence, which can be edifying for both victims and bullies. Films can be especially valuable if they instruct viewers in constructive methods to resolve the problem and seek help. Schools should organise more activities involving parents' participation. Children should be enabled to talk about the problems bothering them with their anonymity guaranteed, using the "mailbox of trust". These mailboxes should be opened only by school pedagogues and psychologists. There should be more trust in school specialist services, which ought to provide support to pupils and act as a link between families and schools! Secondary school psychology classes should contain topics related to constructive communication. As secondary schools should be preparing pupils for adult life, this can also be considered as preparation for future parenthood (because parents should not be a source of frustration for their child).



## IN THE SOCIAL COMMUNITY

THE MINISTRY competent for education should ensure ongoing training for teachers in work with children and peer violence prevention, and it should also recommend schools to implement all the proposed measures so that they could be carried out on a permanent basis and become part of schools' everyday life.

NGOs could contribute to the prevention of peer violence by organising workshops for adults/parents and children/teenagers, showing films dealing with peer violence and organising meetings to provide children and teenagers with more information about this problem and constructive methods to resolve it.

## OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN

During visits to kindergartens, schools and other institutions, the Ombudsman should promote activities aimed at the prevention of peer violence. In media appearances, the Ombudsman should emphasise the seriousness and importance of this issue and the need for ongoing prevention activities.

## MEMBERS OF THE NETWORK OF YOUNG ADVISORS TO THE OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN

By holding presentations at schools and talking with their peers they should actively engage in raising their awareness of the scope of peer violence, and of psychological violence in particular. They should call upon their peers, especially the silent majority passively observing such violence, to react proactively, providing support to victims and more clearly expressing disagreement with children who consciously or unconsciously engage in some form of psychological violence against their peers.

## WHAT TO DO IN THE CASE OF VIOLENCE?

It is of utmost importance that all actors responsible for taking action in such cases react quickly to stop the violence. It is also necessary to intensify work with both perpetrators and victims of violence, improve links among institutions employing experts competent for acting in response to peer violence and organise parent counselling.

An analysis of all aspects of the Strategy leads to a very simple and clear conclusion: the problem of peer violence can be resolved! All of us, including us children and our friends, parents and institutions, should implement the recommendations and raise awareness of the solutions proposed in the Strategy "Let Us Break the Silence That Hurts!"

