



Evaluations of Two Violence Prevention Programs for Youth Show Little Impact

Dissemination and replication of violence prevention programs

SUMMARY

Few youth violence prevention programs have evidence demonstrating their effectiveness. This project sought to evaluate the effectiveness of two existing programs. From November 2006 through May 2011, the University of Colorado at Boulder's [Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence](#)¹, through its [Blueprints for Violence Prevention](#) project², replicated two violence prevention programs on the Blueprints promising programs list. One program, the [Good Behavior Game](#), is for first and second graders; the other, [CASASTART](#), targets adolescents aged 11–13.

The Two Programs

The Good Behavior Game is a classroom management strategy to improve aggressive/disruptive classroom behavior and prevent later criminality. Thirty-six first grade teachers with 859 students in 13 Colorado schools participated in the evaluation for one year. Half of the classes were randomly selected to use the Good Behavior Game and the other half assigned to a control group that did not. Evaluators collected data at the end of first grade and at the end of second grade about classroom activities and student behavior and ability through classroom observations and interviews with teachers.

CASASTART seeks to reduce the exposure of adolescents in high-risk environments to drugs and criminal activity through eight required components (e.g., case management services and after-school activities). Twenty-one schools in seven cities replicated CASASTART, most for two years, with 364 students participating initially and 272 students (74.7%) at the end of the program. About half of the students were randomly chosen to receive CASASTART and the other half placed in a control group. Evaluators collected data on problem behaviors and outcomes through face-to-face student surveys

¹ A research program of the University of Colorado at Boulder that assists groups committed to understanding and preventing violence, particularly adolescent violence.

² This project identifies outstanding violence and drug prevention programs that meet a high scientific standard of effectiveness through systematic and continuous reviews.

and review of school records at the beginning of the program and at the end of years one and two.

Key Findings

- The Good Behavior Game had few positive effects and some negative effects.
- Overall, CASASTART showed few significant effects on behavioral outcomes, and it may be detrimental to females.

Significance of the Project

The evaluations of the Good Behavior Game and CASASTART failed to provide sufficient evidence for the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence to classify these programs as model programs (which are ready for widespread dissemination nationally). Researchers expressed the need for caution when using these programs.

After the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence completed the evaluation, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University discontinued CASASTART. Blueprints for Violence Prevention at the University of Colorado removed CASASTART from its list of promising programs.

Funding

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) provided a grant of \$2,052,073 to support this project.

CONTEXT

Youth violence in America is a major problem. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that:

- Homicide was the second leading cause of death in the United States for adolescents (ages 12–19) in 2004.³
- Nearly 13 percent of high school students had been in a fight on school property and more than 6 percent carried a weapon to school in 2003.⁴
- Nearly 1.25 million violence-related injuries occurred in children and adolescents (ages 1–19) in 2004–2005.⁵

Although it's widely perceived that little can be done about youth violence, if a violence prevention program has demonstrated effectiveness, disseminating it should lower rates

³ http://www.cdc.gov/Injury/publications/FactBook/Injury—A_Risk_at_Any_Stage_of_Life2006-a.pdf

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

of violence among youth. Yet, very few violence prevention programs have evidence demonstrating their effectiveness.

Identifying Violence Prevention Programs That Work

The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence is a research program of the University of Colorado at Boulder founded in 1992 to inform understanding and prevention of violence, particularly adolescent violence. Center researchers link research to practice by informing practitioners, policy-makers, and the public about the causes, consequences, and prevention of violence.

The center's Blueprints for Violence Prevention project identifies outstanding violence and drug prevention programs that meet a high scientific standard of effectiveness through systematic and continuous reviews. Researchers classify these programs as model or promising programs.

Model programs must meet these criteria:

- Evidence of deterrent effect with a strong research design
- Sustained effect at least one year beyond the end of the program
- Replication with strong research design

Promising programs must meet at least the first criterion.

For more information about Blueprints for Violence Prevention model and promising programs, see [Appendix 1](#).

RWJF's Interest in This Area

RWJF's Vulnerable Populations' Portfolio had recently embarked on new programming in the area of violence prevention that supports the development of effective violence prevention efforts targeting high-risk youth at the time this grant was made.

Other initiatives in the violence prevention area are:

- *Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships*. The *Start Strong* model combines and expands innovative strategies in education, policy change, community outreach and social marketing campaigns to empower teens to develop healthier relationships throughout their lives. Located in 11 cities around the country, *Start Strong* is working closely with the Family Violence Prevention Fund to create a menu of best practices that can be tailored to local needs.
- *Preventing Intimate Partner Violence in Immigrant and Refugee Communities: Strengthening What Works*. The program is evaluating models for prevention of

intimate partner violence in immigrant and refugee communities and building capacity in these communities for internal evaluation of best practices.

THE PROJECT

The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence replicated two violence prevention programs classified as promising by its Blueprints for Violence Prevention project and evaluated their impact on program participants. One program, the [Good Behavior Game](#), is for first and second graders; the other, [CASASTART](#) targets adolescents aged 11–13.

The Good Behavior Game

The [Good Behavior Game](#) is a classroom management strategy for first and second graders designed to improve aggressive/disruptive classroom behavior and prevent later criminality. It is a behavior modification program that improves teachers' ability to define tasks, set rules, and discipline students, and allows students to work in teams in which each individual is responsible to the rest of the group.

For more information about the Good Behavior Game, see [Appendix 2](#).

Replication and Evaluation of the Good Behavior Game

The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence replicated the Good Behavior Game for one year in 13 schools in Adams County and Denver, Colo. Thirty-six first grade teachers with 859 students participated. From fall 2008 to the end of the school year in spring 2009, half of the classes were randomly selected to use the Good Behavior Game and the other half assigned to a control group that did not.

[Invest in Kids](#), a Denver-based nonprofit organization, provided two coaches who worked with each teacher biweekly. The [American Institutes for Research](#), which had conducted the original evaluation of the Good Behavior Game in Baltimore beginning in 1985, trained the teachers, and trained and monitored the coaches. Both organizations did this work under subcontracts to the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence.

Evaluators from the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence collected data about classroom activities and student behavior and ability. They recorded behavior during 10 classroom observations of the Good Behavior Game and collected data through structured interviews with:

- The participating first grade teachers before and after the Good Behavior Game
- Second grade teachers at the end of the school year to gather information about students one year after they participated in the program

Evaluators also visited the participating schools four times to document program fidelity—how well the program was implemented compared to the original program design.

For more information about the Good Behavior Game evaluation, see [Appendix 3](#).

CASASTART

CASASTART has sought to reduce the exposure of youth aged 11–13 in high-risk environments to drugs and criminal activity. The program has sought to decrease individual, peer group, family, and neighborhood risk factors through eight required components (e.g., case management services, after-school and summer activities, and increased police involvement). CASASTART also has worked to improve attachment to adults and pro-social norms⁶, school performance, and participation in pro-social activities/peer groups.

For more information about CASASTART, see [Appendix 4](#).

Replication and Evaluation of CASASTART

The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence replicated and evaluated CASASTART in 21 schools in seven cities, starting in either the 2007–2008 or 2008–2009 school years⁷. Most schools and students participated for two years. Two schools in two cities participated for one year because their schools lost funding for the program after the first year due to the poor economy. For the same reason, some students, who began the program in the 2008–2009 school year received only one year of the program.

The evaluation included 364 students initially: 190 students in CASASTART and 174 students in the control group. After the program, evaluators collected final data from 272 students (74.7%): 144 in CASASTART and 128 in the control group. This attrition was caused by the loss of student participants in schools that lost funding for the second year and by some students who left their original school and whom the evaluators were unable to track.

The [National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse](#) at Columbia University, which developed the program, provided training at the sites before the program started and during implementation, under a subcontract to Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence.

⁶ Standards of behavior that benefit other people or society, such as helping, sharing, or cooperating.

⁷ Baltimore (2 schools), Bridgeport, Conn. (2 schools), Livingston County, Ky. (2 schools), McKeesport, Pa. (4 schools), Portland, Ore. (1 school), San Antonio (4 schools), and Trenton, N.J. (6 schools).

Evaluators from the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence collected data on 17 problem behaviors and eight risk and protective factors.⁸ For a list of the behaviors and factors evaluated, see [Appendix 5](#).

The evaluation design called for surveying participating students face-to-face three times:

- Shortly after they were assigned to the CASASTART or control group:
 - Evaluators surveyed 364 students: 190 in CASASTART and 174 in the control group.
- In the fall of the following school year:
 - Evaluators surveyed 332 students: 176 in CASASTART and 156 in the control group.
- At the end of the second school year after starting participation in the program's evaluation:
 - Evaluators surveyed 272 students: 144 in CASASTART and 128 in the control group.

They also reviewed school records at the end of the program.

To document progress and program fidelity, evaluators also visited the participating schools two to three times per year.

FINDINGS

Findings on the Good Behavior Game

The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence reported the following findings about the Good Behavior Game in a report to RWJF.

- **There were few positive effects and some negative effects for the Good Behavior Game:**
 - Boys were lower in social isolation at the end of first grade, but there were no other desirable effects.
 - Boys had higher relational aggression⁹ at the end of first grade and lower achievement and concentration at the one-year follow-up (the end of second grade).

⁸ Risk factors increase and protective factors reduce a person's risk, in this case, for violence.

⁹ Relational aggression is behavior that harms someone by damaging, threatening to damage, or manipulating his/her relationships with peers, or by injuring the person's feelings of social acceptance.

- Problem behavior among girls was reduced at the end of first grade, but there were no demonstrated effects for their behavior or ability at the end of second grade.
- The program had no significant program effects on disruptive behavior or classroom disorder.
- **The failure to find positive outcomes is not due to lack of implementation fidelity.**

Findings on CASASTART

The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence reported the following findings about CASASTART in a report to RWJF.

- **Overall, CASASTART showed few significant effects on behavior.**
- **There were differences between the percent of youth engaged in a behavior and how often they engaged in the behavior:**
 - More youth in CASASTART than in the control group were involved in status offenses,¹⁰ truancy, and being sent to the principal's office.
 - Youth in CASASTART were involved significantly less often in serious delinquency, total violence, serious property violations, and drug sales than youth in the control group. They engaged marginally less often in serious and minor violence.
- **Results by gender showed the strongest patterns:**
 - Male students participating in CASASTART engaged less often in problem behaviors (e.g., total delinquency, serious delinquency, total violence, serious property violations, and arrests) than males in the control group. But there was no impact on the percentage of youth engaged in these behaviors.
 - CASASTART may be detrimental to females:
 - More female CASASTART participants than females in the control group were involved in total delinquency, serious delinquency, minor delinquency, serious violence, status offenses, truancy, and arrests.
 - Female CASASTART participants were involved more often than females in the control group in: total delinquency, minor delinquency, drug use, status offenses, sexual activity, arrests, and number of days of officially-recorded school suspensions.

¹⁰ Activity prohibited for minors, such as buying cigarettes.

- **CASASTART showed significant results for two risk and protective factors:**
 - Students participating in CASASTART, especially males, were more likely to be able to refuse peer offers to engage in drug use and delinquency than students in the control group.
 - CASASTART males were more strongly attached to their parents than students in the control group.
- **Fidelity to the original CASASTART program was low, averaging 55 percent across the participating schools. This meant that many participating students received a little more than half of the required components.** However, higher implementation fidelity did not improve the outcomes.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT

Researchers at the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence had hoped that the evaluations of the replicated Good Behavior Game and CASASTART programs would provide sufficient evidence to move these programs from Blueprints for Violence Prevention’s promising programs list to its model programs list. As model programs, they would be ready for widespread dissemination. However, the evaluations failed to provide sufficient evidence to classify either program as a model program.

“We don’t believe that a program that’s ranked promising is ready to go to scale nationally,” said Project Director Sharon Mihalic, MA. “Until we have ample evidence showing that these programs work and work under a number of conditions, I think we need to be cautious about doing them.”

Mihalic noted that the federal government has listed the Good Behavior Game and CASASTART as evidence-based programs and as such, these programs have already, to some extent, gone to scale. The evaluation findings, however, suggest that these programs may not be ready for scale. Sites that want to implement them should do so with some caution and evaluate the results to ensure that they are not harming the participants.

After the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence completed this evaluation, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University discontinued CASASTART. Blueprints for Violence Prevention removed CASASTART from its list of promising programs.

LESSONS LEARNED

Mihalic offered the following lessons to RWJF:

1. **Faithful implementation of violence prevention programs is important, as this impacts outcomes.** “It’s not enough to simply do an evidence-based program; the program design must be carefully followed,” said Mihalic, who noted the need to evaluate implementation fidelity as well as outcomes.
2. **Involve program developers and trainers to engage key stakeholders at project sites.** By involving the American Institutes for Research to train principals and teachers in the Good Behavior Game sites and the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse to train the sites participating in CASASTART, the evaluators were able to engage key stakeholders.

AFTERWARD

The project team continues to study the data to determine why CASASTART may be detrimental to female participants.

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APPENDIX 1

Blueprints for Violence Prevention Model and Promising Programs

The Blueprints for Violence Prevention project has classified 11 programs as model programs and 29 programs as promising programs (as of January 2012).

Model programs must meet three criteria:

- **Evidence of deterrent effect with a strong research design:** This is the most important criterion. Evidence of effects covers these key indicators:
 - Violence (including childhood aggression and conduct disorder)
 - Delinquency
 - Drug use
 - Mental health (anxiety, depression, suicide, and self-regulation)
 - Educational skills and attainment
 - Physical health outcomes.

The research design must address these issues at a minimum:

- Designs must be randomized or quasi-experimental with matched control group.
 - Sample sizes must be large enough to provide statistical power to detect at least moderate-sized effects.
 - Attrition, or loss of study participants, may indicate problems in program implementation or failure to locate subjects during a follow-up period. An analysis of differential attrition should be performed.
 - Tests to measure outcomes must be administered fairly, accurately, and consistently to all study participants.
 - Analyses should be appropriately designed.
- **Sustained effect:** Designation as a Blueprints model program requires a sustained effect at least one year beyond treatment.
 - **Replication:** Programs that have worked in diverse settings (e.g., urban, suburban, and rural areas) and with diverse populations (e.g., different socioeconomic, racial, and cultural groups) create greater confidence that such programs can be transferred to new settings. Becoming a Blueprints model program requires at least one high-quality replication with fidelity demonstrating that the program continues to be effective.

APPENDIX 2

Good Behavior Game

The goals of the Good Behavior Game are to:

- Socialize children in their role as students (e.g., sitting still, paying attention, and completing school work)
- Reduce off-task, aggressive, and disruptive behavior in the classroom.

To play the Good Behavior Game, teachers create teams of four to seven students. Initially, the students play the game for 10 minutes three times per week. As the school year progresses, they play for longer periods, at different times, and during different classroom activities and settings.

During game time, children work individually on a project or lesson determined by the teacher. Teachers present four classroom rules at the beginning of the school year and prior to each game period:

- No verbal disruption.
- No physical disruption.
- Remain seated unless the teacher grants permission to get up.
- Be compliant.

The teacher monitors student behavior during the game and immediately identifies any child who breaks a rule while praising the other children for their good behavior. He or she records a check mark for the rule-breaking student's team. At the end of each game, teams that have broken rules fewer than four times receive a small reward such as stickers or snacks.

APPENDIX 3

Evaluation of the Good Behavior Game

Teacher Survey: Teacher Observation of Classroom Adaptation

This survey collects information about each individual student in a teacher's classroom. It covers behavior and ability, using measures of achievement, antisocial behavior, relational aggression,¹¹ concentration, impulsivity, social isolation, prosocial behavior,¹²

¹¹ Relational aggression is behavior that harms someone by damaging, threatening to damage, or manipulating his/her relationships with peers, or by injuring the person's feelings of social acceptance.

rejection, and victimization. The evaluators added a separate measure for physical aggression under the antisocial behavior measure.

Observation

The evaluators observed:

- Classroom activities: Whether the Good Behavior Game was played and the way in which the teacher taught the class, lesson content, and the subject.
- Individual student behaviors: Whether the student was on-task or off-task, socially isolated, disruptive, and/or aggressive.
- General classroom behavior: Well behaved, fairly well behaved, poorly behaved, or chaotic.

APPENDIX 4

CASASTART

CASASTART's goals are to:

- Prevent and reduce drug and alcohol use.
- Promote good school attendance and academic performance.
- Lower the incidence of disruptive behavior at school.
- Reduce drug-related crime and violence.
- Reduce delinquent behavior among high-risk youth.
- Increase opportunities to gain skills and achieve positive goals.

CASASTART has eight service components:

- *Community-Enhanced Policing/Enhanced Enforcement*: increases police presence and involvement in the community and working with youth.
- *Case Management*: small caseloads (13–18 families) ensure close attention to the needs of participating youth and their families and implementation of plans to meet their needs.
- *Criminal/Juvenile Justice Intervention*: communication between case managers and the juvenile justice and probation departments ensures enhanced supervision and planning for youth who become involved with the courts.

¹² Behavior that benefits other people or society, such as helping, sharing, or cooperating.

- *Family Services:* parent programs, counseling services, organized activities, and family advocacy by case managers increase positive involvement of parents in the lives of their children.
- *After-School and Summer Activities:* offer prosocial activities¹³ with peers. These types of activities include not only recreation and entertainment but also personal social development programs, particularly those aimed at self-esteem, cultural heritage, and social problems.
- *Education Services:* strengthen individual skills by offering tutoring and homework assistance, as well as work preparation opportunities.
- *Mentoring:* group or one-to-one relationships are fostered to promote positive behaviors.
- *Incentives:* both monetary and non-monetary incentives for participation in CASASTART activities.

APPENDIX 5

Evaluation of CASASTART: Problem Behaviors and Risk and Protective Factors

Problem Behaviors

- Total delinquency
- Serious delinquency
- Minor delinquency
- Total violence
- Serious violence
- Minor violence
- Total property damage
- Serious property damage
- Minor property damage
- Drug sales
- Alcohol use

¹³ Activities in which students help, share, or cooperate such as tutoring, band, and sports teams.

- Status offenses (activity prohibited by minors such as buying cigarettes)
- Truancy
- Sent to principal's office
- Gang membership
- Sexual activity
- Arrests and tickets

Risk Factors

- Delinquent attitudes
- Exposure to delinquent peers
- Peer pressure for drug use and delinquency

Protective Factors

- Prosocial activities
- Self-esteem
- Parental supervision
- Attachment to parents
- Attachment to school