

Oakleaves

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Teens and violence

by Daniel Kinsey, M.D.

James Garbarino, Ph.D., is the Maude C. Clarke Chair in Humanistic Psychology at Loyola University in Chicago. Dr. Garbarino has studied the effects of violence in the ganglands of our urban cities to the war-ravaged middle east. He has studied children in Cambodia, Vietnam, Kuwait, Palestine, Mozambique and Nicaragua. He has written countless articles, several books, and given presentations across the world about his findings and hope for the future and our children.

Dr. Garbarino reports that the killings and wounds of war have a very different impact on children than would, for instance, the death of a grandparent. If the death was a natural one, parents can try to make it fit into the order of things, imbuing it with the sense that the world is still safe and predictable. "You see thumb-sucking in kids far too old, tics and nervous habits like picking at their nails that suggest these kids have lost the ability to soothe themselves," he says. "The sight of a bloodied body," he said, "attacks the benign myths we quite rightly use to give children a sense their world is

secure. It shatters a child's belief that people can be trusted and leaves them with a sense that the world is a malevolent place."

Those truths can be applied in a growing number of American neighborhoods where sudden, lethal violence is commonplace. For example, by age five, virtually all the children Dr. Garbarino and colleagues interviewed in Cabrini-Green, the notorious public housing project in Chicago, had seen a shooting, or knew someone who had been involved in one—usually as an innocent bystander. He cites other studies of children in American inner cities, finding that 30 percent of children there have witnessed a killing by the time they are 15 years old and more than 70 percent have seen someone beaten.

"What we mean by a 'lost childhood' is that they realize their vulnerability," he said. "And that realization is so overwhelming they either get depressed and shut down, or take on a defensive bravado. If you look behind the facade of those tough teenagers who scare you on the street, you may find a frightened kid who sucks his thumb at night and is afraid of the dark. It's easy to forget

they're hurting inside."

In the most troubled neighborhoods, a sense of abandonment and helplessness has left half the mothers severely depressed. One consequence of this depression, Dr. Garbarino says, is that they neglect their children, who feel fear and anxiety living under this threat, but who have no one to soothe or assist them.

No wonder Dr. Garbarino finds among American children in embattled neighborhoods depression, rage and a bleak sense of their own prospects in life. "They lose any sense of a future," he said. "You ask these kids, what will you be when you're 30? and their answer is, 'Dead.'" "At least in a war zone you know the battle will end and peace may come," he continued. "But with community violence in America, the war never ends and peace never comes."

To make a positive change in halting the gang violence plaguing some sectors of northern Indiana, a concerned citizen should do the intellectual work necessary to understand as much of the problem as possible, Dr. Garbarino says.

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(Violence, continued from page 1)

The “society context” matters in trying to gain a deep understanding of youth violence. Nonetheless, there are more elements to be understood in order to gain the knowledge necessary to fix the problem. Americans are practical and many tend to approach difficult problems “where the light is good,” as often happens by virtue of financial support from companies, Garbarino says. Many individuals are repulsed by the notion of going “to the deep dark areas” where problems exist. For instance, a well-intended and popular program where police officers visit schools to talk to young people about illegal drugs, while organized with the best of intentions to fix the problem, may ultimately be ineffective in large part due to shallow understanding. “You cannot talk to kids about drugs as a police officer in a way that they need to hear about the dangers of drugs.”

There are other real-life elements that should be considered in gaining an understanding of society, such as the physical condition of a young person’s neighborhood; the number of sibling and parents that reside at home; whether mental, physical or sexual abuse has occurred in the home; racism; and the person’s experiences at school, among others. Some elements in this puzzle can be easily recognized—such as the fact that an absent father can adversely affect a boy. But understanding one of the reasons a fatherless childhood can impact a boy negatively takes more digging.

Research has shown that fathers who physically wrestle with their children “help teach them how to handle aggression because the kids learn how to move away from it,” Garbarino says. Nevertheless, gloom and doom were not his only messages. In essence, Garbarino believes that a community, through collective efforts of individual members, can make positive impacts on gang violence.

The starting point is a “fundamental respect” for human life, including the lives

of disadvantaged young people, he says. Moreover, a community as well as an individual can “focus on development aspects” of youth. “Assets are things we could build into these kids’ lives.” Social scientists consider some 30 assets to be experiences a young person could have outside the boundaries of their family. For instance, a teenager may experience the positive feelings of reading for pleasure by having a librarian take interest in them.

Moreover, faith-based organizations can positively influence young people in northern Indiana who are at risk or already involved in gangs and violent activities. “We’ve had the delusion that the disadvantaged youth don’t have an inner life,” says Garbarino. He noted that a number of young people he interviewed talked about their inner life, their feelings, and their sense of abandonment.

How we, as advocates for children in northern Indiana, handle violence in our neighborhoods and schools is important. The more we can learn and support each other and our at risk children, the better our chances of making a difference. The Systems of Care model that is re-emerging in our county is truly exciting to me. (See the FYI section for more information.)

I hope many of you will join me in hearing Dr. Garbarino in person in November when Oaklawn hosts him for a seminar on childhood aggression and adolescent violence. I’m sure his research and knowledge will benefit all of us who work with youth.



Daniel Kinsey, M.D. is medical director at Oaklawn.



County System of Care being developed

We hope to soon announce a System of Care coordinator for Elkhart County. The creation of this position is the result of several county organizations working together in an effort to coordinate resources and services for families and children in our community. This process has included school systems, Department of Child Services, probation and courts, Bashor Children’s Home, Oaklawn, United Way, CAPS—Child & Parent Services, Goshen Health System, and others.

Oaklawn has long been a leader in wraparound services that support a system of care for children and families. Funding changes cut most of those services in recent years but there are now signs of hope for the redevelopment of those services on a broad level that integrate them into the fabric of our child-serving systems. Those signs of hope include:

- the consortium of agencies that have pooled funding to hire a System of Care Coordinator who will assist with vision, infrastructure development and funding options;
- the marriage of Positive Behavior Supports now being used in schools with System of Care principles and practice so that schools are becoming the hub of culturally competent and appropriate services for children who need them;
- the newly approved service standards by the Department of Child Services that support the development of System of Care practices;

- the new community alternative to psychiatric residential treatment facilities through wraparound facilitation of a broad service array.

System of Care practice has been endorsed nationally and is an important direction for the community—a direction that local agencies agree will better serve the needs of children and families in our area.

For more information about the county System of Care plan, contact Bonita Bontrager Schrock at (574) 533-1234, ext. 223.

Visit our new web site

Oaklawn's web site was recently updated at www.oaklawn.org. Referral sources can continue to seek information on bed openings for our intensive programs. Also on the referral page, you will find a contact form should you have questions or want to be put on our mailing list. On the News & Events page you can find information about upcoming professional education events and past issues of *Oakleaves* and our newsletter for foster families. Other features of interest may be our professional staff listing, job opportunities and, of course, detailed information about all our programs.

Foster families needed

Oaklawn's therapeutic foster care program needs more foster parents to help meet the placement requests for children and youth with emotional and behavioral problems. In addition to providing for a child's basic physical needs of food, clothing, shelter and medical care, foster parents offer instruction, supervision, positive role modeling and appropriate discipline. Foster parents receive a per diem to help with expenses plus ongoing training and support from Oaklawn staff. For more information about becoming a therapeutic foster parent, call (574) 537-2669.

Oaklawn Education Events

Oaklawn is committed to providing education events for professionals and the general public and to collaborating with other community agencies. Information about education events can also be found on our web site at www.oaklawn.org.

Professional training events

Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction

Speaker: Mark Laaser, Ph.D., director of the Institute for Healthy Sexuality of the American Association of Christian Counselors and executive director of Faithful and True Ministries, Ministries, Eden Prairie, Minnesota

When: Thursday, October 2, 2008, 7:15–11:15 a.m.

Where: Oaklawn, 330 Lakeview Drive, Goshen

Cost: No fee, but registration is requested

CEUs: 3.0

Who should attend: This seminar is designed for pastors and church lay leaders.

Description: Pastors are increasingly dealing with incidents of pornography and sexual addiction in their congregations. Dr. Laaser is the author of *Faithful and True*, the first Christian book to address these issues. He has since written six additional books, including *The Pornography Trap* with Dr. Ralph Earle. Dr. Laaser will speak to church leaders about how to compassionately minister to those with a sexual addiction.

Sponsored by: Oaklawn

For more information or to register: Call (574) 537-2680 or email info@oaklawn.org

Between Loss and Hope: Tools to Cope

Speakers: Rex & Nancy Gleim

When: Friday, October 17, 2008, 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

Where: Goshen College Church–Chapel Fellowship Rooms, 1900 S. Main St., Goshen

Cost: \$60

CEUs: 6.0

Who should attend: This seminar is designed for professionals and others who help those going through the grief process.

Description: Sixth Annual Grief Seminar will feature workshops which address art therapy, cultural variations in mourning, complicated/traumatic grief, grief in the work place, play therapy & support groups.

Sponsored by: Goshen College Social Work Program and Ryan's Place; cosponsored by Oaklawn

For more information or to register: Contact Marge Brandeberry at margemb@goshen.edu or (574) 535-7400. Web site: www.goshen.edu/sowk/Seminars

Pathways from Childhood Aggression to Adolescent Violence

Speaker: James Garbarino, Ph.D., director of the Center for the Rights of Children at Loyola University, Chicago

When: Friday, November 7, 2008, 8:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.

Where: Matterhorn Banquet and Conference Center, 2041 Cassopolis St., Elkhart

Cost: \$60

CEUs: 5.0

Who should attend: This seminar is designed for professionals who work with children, including probation, department of child services, school counselors/teachers/nurses, therapists and social workers, pastors, and others interested in the topic.

Description: One of the important developmental starting points in understanding violence is that physical aggression is essentially universal in infants. Early trauma creates risk that this early aggression will coalesce into violent behavior in adolescence. The experience of abuse sets the child up for the kind of "risky thinking" that leads to chronic patterns of aggression, bad behavior, acting out and violating the rights of others that can lead to a diagnosis of "conduct disorder." If no intervention occurs, this pattern of childhood conduct disorder becomes the entryway into adolescent delinquent and antisocial violent behavior. The presentation is based upon the author's books *Lost Boys* (NY: Free Press, 1999) and *See Jane Hit* (NY: Penguin Press, 2006).

Sponsored by: Oaklawn

For more information: Call (574) 537-2680 or email info@oaklawn.org

National Memory Screening Day

When: Tuesday, November 18, 2008, 2:00–5:00 p.m.

Where: Greencroft Senior Center, 1820 Greencroft Blvd., Goshen, IN

Description: Free memory screenings by Greencroft and Oaklawn professionals

Sponsored by: Oaklawn and Greencroft

For more information: Call (574) 537-2680

The professionals at Oaklawn



Steven Bright



Jeannie Brunk



Shelley Poindexter



Lisa Van Houten



Amanda VanZile



Angie Wireman

Steven Bright, M.S.W., LCSW, is manager of child and adolescent intensive outpatient programs with the family intervention team at 2600 Oakland Avenue, Elkhart. He has a master of social work degree from Ohio State University, Columbus, and is a licensed clinical social worker.

Jeannie Brunk, M.S.W., is a social worker with outpatient services at 101 Marilyn Avenue, Goshen. She has a master of social work degree from Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo.

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Lisa Van Houten, M.S.W., LCSW, is a licensed clinical social worker with the adult outpatient team at 2600 Oakland Avenue, Elkhart. She has a master of social work degree from Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond.

Amanda VanZile, B.S., is program coordinator for Oaklawn's adolescent group home in Elkhart. She holds a bachelor's degree in behavioral psychology from Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo.

Angie Wireman is coordinator of outreach and service development. In this role, she will be meeting with referral sources and available for tours or information about Oaklawn's intensive residential services. In December, Angie will complete her bachelor's degree in organizational leadership at Goshen College.

Oakleaves is published three times a year and is designed to address timely mental health and addictions clinical issues as well as inform professionals of Oaklawn's services and educational events.

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Toward Health and Wholeness

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