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**School Based Disrespect among Middle and High School Youth**

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**PERSONAL DISCLOSURES**

Keith A. King, PhD, CHES  
Rebecca A. Vidourek, PhD, CHES

- There are no personal disclosures to make regarding personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation.

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**BACKGROUND**

- The National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health found that school connectedness (feeling that one belongs and fits in) was the leading school protective factor against risky health behaviors.
- Youth who feel emotionally supported in their school report feeling more confident in making healthy decisions and engaging in healthy behaviors.
- While much research has been conducted on school connectedness and school climate, a paucity of studies has specifically examined students' perceptions regarding school-based respect.
- Respect is considered to be inversely related to bullying.

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**METHODS**

**Participants**

- A purposive sample of middle and high school students in Greater Columbus area schools was used.
- School principals were provided with the overall aims and procedures of the study and requested to participate.
- Point persons in each school assisted the research team in obtaining samples of students for focus group participation.
- Efforts were made to recruit equal numbers of students from each grade level.
- A total of 9 focus groups were conducted:

Middle schools	High schools
1 public urban	2 public urban
2 public suburban	2 public suburban
1 non-public	1 non-public
- A total of 78 students in 9 different Columbus area schools participated.

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**METHODS**

**Procedures**

- Focus group procedures were developed based on Krueger's (1994) methods.
- Questions were based on the student survey, a review of the literature, and tested for content validity by distributing them to a panel of experts (N = 5).
- Groups were facilitated by the PI, lasted one hour in length, were held in a school room away from teachers and school staff, and tape recorded.
- Potential reflexivity and dual issues of topics were addressed.

**Data Analysis**

- Audiotapes were transcribed and analyzed to identify key themes.
- Student responses were coded as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998).
  - Open coding was used to provide a line-by-line analysis and labeling of responses.
  - Axial Coding was used to place data into appropriate categories.
  - Selective Coding was employed to accurately depict the major themes that emerged.

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**RESULTS**

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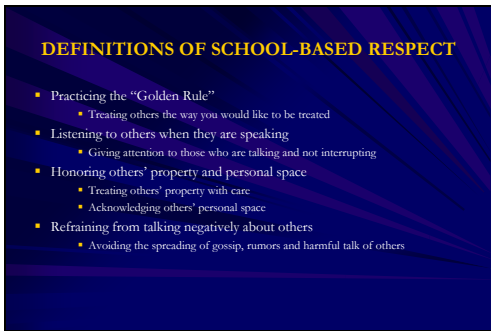
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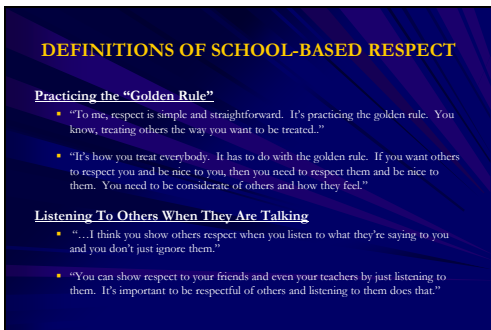
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**DEFINITIONS OF SCHOOL-BASED RESPECT**

**Honoring Others' Property and Personal Space**

- "Respect also means not destroying other people's property. I see a lot of kids who rip up other people's things and they shouldn't do that. That's disrespectful. It's not showing the kid respect. If you respect someone, you would respect their stuff as well."
- "It's also respecting others' personal space. Some people want more space than others. You can't just get up into their face. I show respect by giving them the space they need."

**Refraining from Talking Negatively about Others**

- "...It's important that others aren't talking behind your back and especially ripping on you when you aren't there. When they do that, it definitely isn't respectful."
- "You have to earn it from somebody by being trustworthy and being a good friend. Good friends don't talk behind each other's backs."

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**WHAT IS SCHOOL-BASED DISRESPECT?**

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**DEFINITIONS OF SCHOOL-BASED DISRESPECT**

- Students at every school reported their school had a problem with disrespect
- Disrespect was defined as:
  - Being mean to other by making fun of them or teasing them
  - Putting others down
  - Not listening to others or interrupting them when they were speaking,
  - Gossiping and spreading rumors about others
  - Bullying others

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**DEFINITIONS OF SCHOOL-BASED DISRESPECT**

**Making Fun of or Teasing Other Students**

- "When you're mean to people and not nice to them, you're not showing them respect."
- "I think it [disrespect] happens when they make fun of other people and tease them because they want to feel good about themselves."
- "You 'dis' someone when you cut on them and rip on them behind their back."
- "Students tease others about what they're wearing or what they have on, girls especially. They're mean to each other because of their clothes or hairstyles... That's disrespectful."

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**DEFINITIONS OF SCHOOL-BASED DISRESPECT**

**Putting Others Down and Ridiculing Them**

- "...People trying to put you down and make you feel bad. That's what it means to me."
- "It really makes a person feel bad when they're disrespected and put down... We're all supposed to be equal. Right?"

**Not Listening to Others While They are Speaking**

- "When others don't listen to you when you're speaking then they are dising you."
- "I think it's when people don't listen to you. That makes you feel really unimportant."
- "It's disrespectful when you're talking and someone interrupts you. They obviously don't care about what you're saying and are really only into themself."

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**DEFINITIONS OF SCHOOL-BASED DISRESPECT**

**Gossiping and Spreading Rumors**

- "People make up stuff about others to try to sound good and build up their rep. They try to make themselves look good."
- "There's a lot of gossiping that goes on in our school. People just spreading rumors about others. It's mostly the girls but the boys do it too. It's disrespectful."

**Bullying and Threatening Others**

- "There's a lot of bullying that goes on. And that isn't too nice. It's disrespectful...and it happens all the time. A lot of kids are afraid because of getting bullied."
- "Bullying is definitely a problem...I see kids getting into each others' faces and threatening each other. It's ridiculous."

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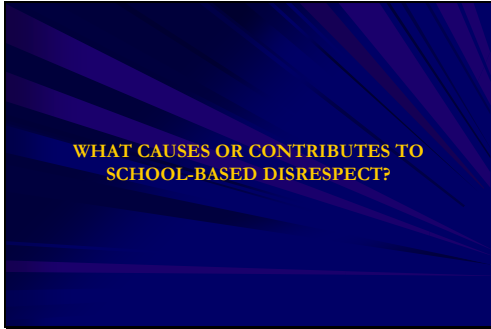
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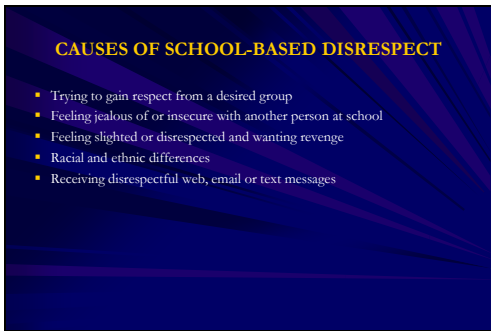
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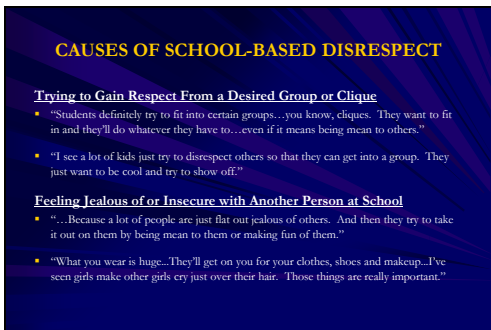
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**CAUSES OF SCHOOL-BASED DISRESPECT**

Feeling Slighted Or Disrespected Themselves And Wanting Revenge

- "It happens because of revenge. You know, somebody might get mad and want to get back at the other person."
- "They're trying to get back at you for something. They want to try to get even."

Racial And Ethnic Differences

- "A lot of kids make fun of others because of their race. We have a lot of Somali kids here and they always get teased and made fun of."
- "They make fun of me because of what I wear and how I dress but that's just how everybody dresses where I come from. It's just the same as them making fun of the Mexican kids because they're speaking Spanish and no one knows what they're saying."

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**CAUSES OF SCHOOL-BASED DISRESPECT**

Disrespectful Web, Email or Text Messages

- "They use MySpace...99% of students are on it and a ton of rumors start there...and a lot of fights start on the Internet. That creates fights at school."
- "The person you made mad will tell everybody else and someone will post it [on MySpace] and then everybody will know about your problem."
- "A lot of kids text each other in class. They spread rumors through texts and you know it starts fights at school. My friend got in a fight in the hallway because of a text sent during class. It's a real big problem here."

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**DISRESPECT BASED ON GENDER**

- Students at all schools felt girls were worse than boys regarding disrespect, particularly that which involved gossiping, judging others and verbally harassing others because of clothing or attire.
- Students at all schools also felt that boys were more likely than girls to disrespect others based on race/ethnicity and engage in physical violence (including gun violence).
- Students at all schools felt that boys frequently used name-calling, particularly the term "gay" to disrespect others.

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**DISRESPECT BETWEEN STUDENTS AND TEACHERS**

- Three main issues emerged regarding student disrespect toward teachers and school staff:
  - Acting out in class and causing interruptions
  - Ignoring the teacher
  - Not listening in class; not paying attention
  - Making fun of teachers behind their backs
- Students also mentioned using MySpace to post negative comments and rumors about teachers.
- Regarding teachers showing disrespect to students, at every school there was mention of teachers who are rude, play favorites, prejudge, and do not listen to their students.

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**WHAT RESULTS FROM DISRESPECT AT SCHOOL?**

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**STUDENTS CITED THE FOLLOWING PROBLEMS RESULTING FROM DISRESPECT**

- Depression and feeling bad about one self; low self-esteem
- Suicide (thinking about suicide; developing a plan)
- Self-injurious behaviors (self-cutting; self-mutilation)
- Eating disorders
- Drug and alcohol abuse (too escape and numb the pain)
- Bullying and violence; fighting
- School shootings (could occur after years of disrespect)

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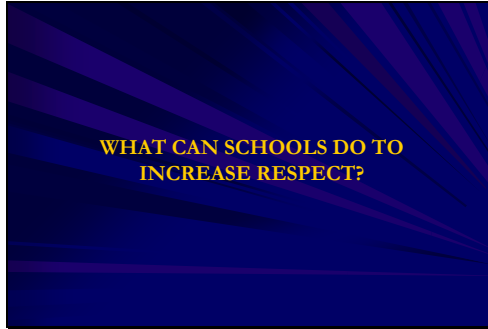
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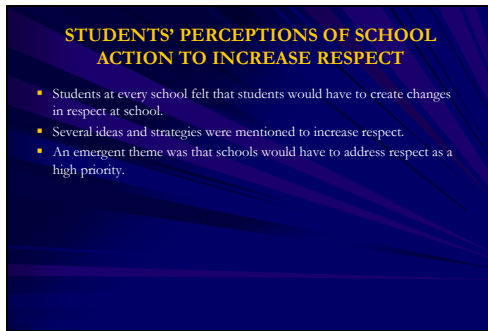
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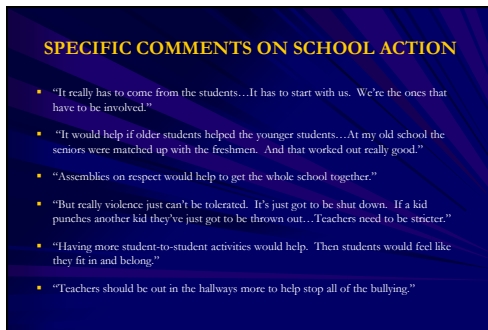
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**SPECIFIC COMMENTS ON SCHOOL ACTION**

- "If we had more opportunities to work with other students and kids in other grades. That would help."
- "The school needs to promote nonviolence. It should be a violence-free school."
- "Let students know how important respect is and why we all need to treat others like we want to be treated."
- "Have people go to a counselor immediately and talk about their problems."
- "Teachers need to stop being scared of the kids."
- "The school could give leadership programs and mentor programs."
- "We need more activities, games and team projects."

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**CONCLUSIONS**

- Findings indicated that disrespect is a prevalent problem in the school.
- Students understood the issues and definitions of respect and disrespect.
- The most common types of disrespect included:
  - showing poor attitudes toward other students; gossiping; making fun of others; interrupting others; not listening; putting others down; making fun of students' dress/attire; being mean; and showing disrespect because of cliques.
- Many students currently use web, email and text messaging to disrespect peers and spread rumors and gossip.
- Students felt that several steps should be taken at their schools to address issues of respect.

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**CONCLUSIONS**

- Overall, all students felt that lack of respect was a problem at their school and that it contributed to problems during school.
- Students at every school believed students would have to create changes in respect at school.
- Many students felt school activities/programs could be developed to increase respect.
- Students cited several strategies that schools could use to help increase school-based respect.

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**LIMITATIONS**

The following limitations to this study should be noted:

- 1) Participants were delimited to students attending a sample of Greater Columbus schools.
- 2) Since the study employed a focus group design, only a small sample of students participated.
- 3) The study was delimited to students in middle schools and high schools and thus no information was obtained from elementary school children. Therefore, caution should be exercised in attempting to generalize findings.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are offered:

- 1) Students, teachers, administrators, and other school personnel should work cooperatively to enhance school-based respect.
- 2) Schools should use the findings of this study to assist in developing and implementing educational programs, events and campaigns aimed at increasing respect.
- 3) Programs aimed at enhancing school-based respect should be thoroughly evaluated and shared.
- 4) Future studies should investigate parents' and teachers' perceived needs in increasing school-based respect.

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**CONTACT INFORMATION**

For additional information on student respect, school connectedness, positive youth development, and how to implement and evaluate school-based programs, please feel free to contact:

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