

Dr. Carl Bell's Keys to Reducing Violence and Re-Engaging Youth to Society

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For over 30 years, Dr. Bell has practiced psychiatry. As an internationally recognized lecturer and author, he has given numerous presentations on mental wellness, violence prevention, and traumatic stress caused by violence. Most recently, he has participated as the Principle Investigator with CHAMP, an HIV/AIDS youth prevention research project in South Africa. He is the author of *The Sanity of Survival: Reflections on Community Mental Health and Wellness* and co-author of *Suicide and Homicide Among Adolescents*. Dr. Bell is also a clinical professor of psychiatry and public health at the University of Illinois School of Medicine. In recognition of his efforts to reduce violence, he became the first recipient of the American Psychiatric Foundation's Minority Service Award in 2004. He is also the recipient of the American Psychiatric Association's Presidential Award.

Dr. Carl C. Bell's Seven Principles for Changing At-Risk Behavior and Cultivating Resiliency Among Youth

- 1. Rebuilding the Village/Reweaving the social fabric/Recreating a sense of community**
Reestablishing a sense of community by bringing together churches, schools, and families to create networks, organize resources and establish programs that provide support, safety and security for our youth. A sense of community also reinforces cultural identity.
- 2. Providing access to ancient and modern technology to provide practical systems for the application of knowledge**
Providing models, tools, skills and techniques to facilitate implementation of the concept or program (for example, mentoring, multi-family groups, how to cultivate resiliency and wellness, and manualized family interventions).
- 3. Providing a sense of connectedness**
Creating situations, programs and relationships that foster a sense of connection, attachment, and belonging to a larger group or a common goal. This counters feelings of alienation, helps provide feelings of security, and increases self-esteem. Again, reestablishing the village reinforces cultural identity and can be a platform for the delivery of cultural education. Well thought out rites of passage (e.g. the belt system of progression in Japanese martial arts) programs have been very effective in actualizing this principle.
- 4. Providing opportunity to learn social & emotional skills**
Providing social and emotional skills that people need to interact and communicate with each other. This not only increases self-esteem but effectiveness in relationships as well. These include parenting skills, refusal skills, negotiating skills, the capacity to remain calm in a crisis, and more.

5. Providing opportunities to increasing self-esteem

A. Giving our children a sense of power (self-efficacy) by showing them they can do things for themselves and positively influence their own lives. For example, adopting healthy behaviors creates both a sense of wellness and an outcome of wellness.

B. Providing a sense of models to help our young make sense of the world and teaching them how things work. Mentoring is a very powerful model that can be used to achieve this. A strong cultural value system is another.

C. Creating a sense of specialness and uniqueness as an individual or group. Clearly, knowing and respecting your culture gives you a sense of power by virtue of being connected to something valuable and strong.

D. Creating a sense of connectedness - encouraging bonding and connection to a culture, group or an idea. Teaching them their history and cultural significance creates a sense of power from being associated with a rich and powerful legacy. Spirituality is another powerful influence in encouraging connectedness.

6. Providing an adult protective shield

Providing an adult protective shield and monitoring speaks to providing supervision, discipline, and a caring adult presence. These foster a sense of safety and security. The concept of the village with multiple adult figures taking responsibility for the nurture and well-being of the village children is a concept that connects us to our culture and our spirituality. Wellness is also important in this respect. A child can be severely stressed by the illness of a caretaking adult, so it is in the best interest of the adult to adopt behaviors that promote wellness, both personally, and as a model for children to emulate.

7. Minimizing trauma

Minimizing trauma - Developing an individual's spirituality, a person's sense of self-efficacy, helping create a sense of safety, and providing stress management skills as well as psychological first aid (see attached) to encourage a sense of self-mastery and turn helplessness into helpfulness are all examples of putting this principle into action.

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