

NEARI NEWS:

TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

An Essential Tool for Professionals Working with those who Sexually Abuse or... A Great New Way to Stay Current with Cutting Edge Sexual Abuse Research.



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Dear Colleague,

First of all, a happy and healthy new year to you and to those you love. If we don't have you and your dedication to this work, none of what we do would be possible.

In this month's issue we focus on looking at the goals and motivations for aggressive behaviors in adolescent girls and boys. Too often we have focused on changing behaviors without fully understanding both the positive goal motivators and their relationship to inappropriate behaviors. With this more complex understanding, professionals can then design treatment protocols for these youth that address these core motivations as well as help teens develop other dimensions of their lives-- those that can lead to internalized self-control and, ultimately, an end to sexually abusive behavior.

As always, we welcome your feedback. And if you want us to examine a particular issue or research article, please let us know. We appreciate your feedback.

Goals, Skills, and Strategies: Revisiting Our Assumptions

by David S. Prescott, LICSW

The Question

What are some practical ways to understand the goals underlying aggressive behaviors?

The Research

Zeev Winstok studied a wide number of goals, skills, and strategies related to aggression in adolescent boys and girls. He found that three critical goals or reasons for these adolescents to abuse eventually emerged: Avoiding harm, maintaining relationships, and gaining respect. Winstok's perspective builds upon previous research examining how adolescents understand social information and then how they can either influence or adjust to their environment. He found that both adolescent boys and girls have goals of avoiding harm to themselves. However, young men also engaged in aggressive behavior with the goal of gaining respect from others, while young women often engaged in aggression with the goal of maintaining their relationships.

Winstok examined goals, skills, and strategies in depth. He found that adolescents' goals (and the skills and strategies they use to attain them) are intertwined and influence one another. Professionals who set a goal of eliminating aggression may miss the mark unless they understand the other goals the adolescent is trying to attain. Winstok reminds us that the motivations underneath aggression (such as wanting to be important and stand up for oneself), can be normal and even desirable.

Implications for Professionals

Setting goals should involve collaboration between the adolescent and his or her treatment providers. Winstok reminds us that goals, skills, and strategies are inter-related and influence one another. The more professionals understand the fundamental motivations and values of their clients, the better they can engage in treatment planning and

Sincerely,
Joan Tabachnick and Steven
Bengis



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NEARI RESOURCES

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[Try and Make Me! Power Struggles: A Book of Strategies for Adults Who Live and Work with Angry Kids](#)

By Penny Cuninggim, EDD,
MSW

From its evocative title to its insightful strategies, *Try and Make Me!* decodes power struggles between adults and the acting-out kids in their care.

Who is responsible for power struggles and why do they occur? Why do kids start them and what is the payoff? Penny Cuninggim has answers and techniques to effectively prevent, respond and defuse power struggles, drawing on

provision.

Honor the goals of youth. What is clear from this study is that when a youth is using a strategy to achieve a goal, then he/she is less likely to give up that strategy unless he/she can achieve the goal in an alternative way. This new concept of working with youth speaks to the need to honor the feelings and honor the youth's goal motivators while detaching that feeling and motivators from a destructive behavior.

Adolescent development is not simply about working towards goals. This study found that the skills that adolescents possess often shape the goals and strategies that they develop. Providers should focus on how youth can meet the goals of gaining respect and maintaining relationships without using aggression. If treatment providers set a goal of reduced aggression, this study suggests they risk missing their mark unless they also work towards the broader goals that Winstok examines.

Implications for the Field

Adolescents often use sexually aggressive behavior to meet otherwise healthy goals. Working towards healthy relationships and gaining respect are natural developmental tasks for all adolescents. Professionals who keep this in mind may gain greater credibility and "buy-in" from their clientele.

Reference

- Winstok, Z. (2009). The relationships between social goals, skills, and strategies and their effect on aggressive behavior among adolescents. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 24*, 1996-2017.

To print a pdf of this article, click [newsletter](#).

Abstract

It is widely accepted that conflict-related goals, skills, and strategies are linked. Yet it is rarely explored how these factors relate to each other and how they jointly promote or inhibit aggressive behaviors. The aim of this study is to provide answers to these questions. Data were derived from a structured questionnaire administered to 660 male and female adolescents of an average age of 14.99 years from two urban schools in northern Israel. Findings show that goals, skills, and strategies that promote or inhibit violence are positively interrelated. Furthermore, negative association was found between violence promoting and inhibiting goals, skills, and strategies. Gender differences were also analyzed. It has been found that boys display aggressive behavior more frequently than girls. Findings also show that the rate of violence promoting goals, skills, and strategies is higher among boys than among girls, whereas that of violence inhibiting ones are higher among girls than among boys. Yet when controlling the effects of goals, skills, and strategies, girls demonstrate aggressive behavior more frequently than boys. These research findings are discussed and conceptualized within the

27 years of experience in residential and day settings. *Try and Make Me!* is a practical resource for expanding the caregiver's repertoire of positive responses and a must-read for parents and foster parents, public and special education teachers, therapists and counselors, child-care and group-home staff, guardians ad litem, and case workers.

For more information, click the image of the book or go to the NEARI website at www.neari.com/press.

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theoretical framework of social adjustment.

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Motivational Interviewing

<http://motivationalinterview.org/library/index.html>

Motivational interviewing is a client-centered, directive method for enhancing intrinsic motivation to change by exploring and resolving ambivalence. This website provides general information about the approach as well as links, training resources, and information on reprints and recent research.

About the Author:
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[David Prescott website](#)

A nationally recognized expert in the field of sexual abuse assessment, treatment, management, and prevention, Mr. Prescott has published numerous articles and authored, edited, and co-edited books on risk assessment, interviewing, and providing residential treatment to youth. He is the President of ATSA and is currently the Clinical Director at the Minnesota Sex Offender Program in Moose Lake, Minnesota.