

The “Do the Write Thing” Challenge Program Can Change Minds

The “Changing Minds” campaign is sponsored by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. According to OJJDP, in 2015, 60% of all American youth were exposed to violence, crime or abuse. Based on scientific research from Harvard, the research reveals that a child’s positive and negative experiences literally shape and reshape the brain. The more a child witnesses violence, the more neural connections are created in the regions of the brain that involve fear, anxiety and impulsiveness...while fewer are created in regions that involve reasoning, planning and behavior control. This increased stress can lead to “long-term behavioral and physiological disorders” including depression, drug abuse, diabetes, stroke and inflammation patterns.

However, the young brain is malleable. Fostering stable, supportive relationships can prevent or help reverse this damage, resulting in lifelong benefits for the child’s learning, behavior and overall health.

“Do the Write Thing” Challenge is a proven program that can mitigate the negative impact of violence on a child when teachers, educators and volunteers open pathways using the “Five Gestures” suggested by OJJDP to help heal a child.

CELEBRATE

- Publically recognize and praise children
- Encourage children to try new things and teach them about being kind and helpful to others
- Engage children in open ended thinking
- Encourage positive interactions between children and their peers and teachers

COMFORT

- Offer children safe ways to express their feelings and ideas
- Help children empathize and take others’ perspectives
- Expand children’s network of consistently caring adults

LISTEN

- Encourage children to express their feelings and thoughts
- Be open to their ideas and opinions
- Help children to express their experiences and make sense of them
- Allow them to share their story without interruptions
- Create processes that allow students a chance to share and be heard

COLLABORATE

- Encourage children to think ahead by discussing challenges they would face in carrying out their plans and help them consider how they can prevent or solve them
- Guide students to first identify and understand their obstacles, communicate how they are feeling and describe the problems in their own words
- Acknowledge children’s problem solving attempts whether or not the attempts are successful

INSPIRE

- Encourage children to spend time with other caring adults who can act as role models
- Help children develop strategies to bring them closer to short and long term goal success
- Support children’s abilities to speak up when things go wrong or when they are victimized
- Help them become advocates for change