

# When anger gets in the way of academic success

## Student feedback...

*"I like that this group helped me be more assertive. I now understand it is okay to say how I really feel."*

*"We all share a lot of anger styles and we're able to learn how to deal with anger in a much healthier way."*

Many young people struggling academically in schools are blocked by social barriers that interfere with their success. In 2005, YOUTHLINK joined forces with the Toronto School Boards, Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre and East Metro Youth Services to deliver specialized programs in schools to address these barriers.

Our contribution is to provide **Anger Management Groups** for students who may be underachieving and/or at risk of leaving or being expelled from school due to aggressive behaviour. Following decades of experience with violence prevention programs, we have developed a highly structured curriculum that looks at the underlying causes of aggressive behaviour.

The 10 week course helps students understand different anger styles, their personal triggers and the different ways that men and women are socialized.

Recently, the course was adapted to include anti-oppression practises to help youth to challenge anger provoked by systemic causes, such as racism or homophobia.

Other topics include communication skills, problem-solving, conflict resolution and coping strategies such as relaxation and visualization. Youth are also connected to resources in their communities such as employment, volunteer opportunities and recreation programs for additional support.

Last year, we ran seven groups in five Scarborough schools with 49 youth participating.

For many, it was their first opportunity to reflect on their behaviour when angry and how it affects their lives and relationships.

A recent evaluation by Child Development Institute showed that the youth found the groups helped them to control or manage their anger or to express it verbally. Participants felt this would improve their personal relationships and reduce situations where their anger leads them into trouble.

YOUTHLINK's Ronni Gorman leads the program and notes: "Many youth have identified great personal successes from the program and we are still in touch with them which is fantastic. Beyond achieving success in their personal and academic lives, our larger goal is to engage the students in the wider school culture and to integrate the learnings into the life of the school."

There is still much to be done to reach students who would benefit most from the group but may be "under the radar" in their schools, including those who have been expelled, display low level attendance or are marginalized by the school culture.

Ronni notes: "The program has been most successful when schools promote it as a positive experience towards personal growth and academic achievement. If it is viewed as punishment, those most severely disengaged may choose not to participate. We also want to avoid labelling group participants as "angry" in addition to the other labels that the youth may carry."



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