

## Anti-violence message not getting through

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Students need to be educated on the dangers of violence in a more systemic way, says Sarah Kaplan, or else schools will continue to see the kind of violence that shook T.R. Leger Monday when a classroom of students witnessed a deadly stabbing.

"Do you think your kids are going to learn math if I come in (to teach it) for one hour once a year?" asks Kaplan, Assault and Sexual Abuse Program co-ordinator at Cornwall Community Hospital.

Kaplan isn't blaming teachers, nor is she blaming schools, but she believes the people who decide what children should be learning need to be a greater part of the solution when it comes to anti-violence education - not just cram it in on top of phys-ed.

Earlier this month, she sent recommendations to the Ministry of Education for its Safe Schools Action Team consultation meeting in Ottawa. She also hopes to present her ideas to local school boards in the near future.

Ted Kennedy was at the meeting. He's responsible for ensuring administrators within the Upper Canada District School Board are kept current with the Safe Schools Act.

He concedes that a single presentation about issues like violence aren't enough to change behaviours, but he's excited about a new opportunity with the Ministry of Children and Social Services, as well as the Ministry of Education.

Alongside the Catholic District School Board - which is leading the way on the project - Kennedy says they're in the final stages of putting together a funding request for a support network program that would not only benefit schools, but the community.

"We'll be working with intervention as well as support," Kennedy said. "It will make things more formalized and more effective."

Kennedy says he's pleased that schools in his board are using programs like Tribes or Peacekeepers, which is a schoolyard monitoring system.

"They help others deal with early conflict and create positive role models," Kennedy said.

The problem, in Kaplan's view, is not the lack of first-rate programs for schools to choose from.

There are many. Respect Ed and Avenues (which she helped create) are just two. It's the implementation of such programs that's the challenge, she says, simply because schools don't have to use them. Every week, Kaplan gets calls from schools requesting that she come and speak to students about things like date rape or bullying, and every week, she needs to turn many away (although last year she did 109 presentations).

Just like educating students about violence isn't necessarily part of a teacher's mandate, neither is speaking at schools part of Kaplan's. Not to mention, Kaplan says, that many teachers aren't comfortable in this role.

"If you say the wrong thing, they may never ask for help again," she said, noting the enormous pressure and responsibility of that position.

Kaplan said children are inundated with violent messages.

At a recent RBC Cup game, it shocked her to hear people cheering when members of the opposing team were injured.

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She hopes the effects of anti-violence education in schools will become similar to that of recycling education. After a period of time, the concepts simply become ingrained.

"You hardly ever see a young kid litter these days," Kaplan observed.

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