

## **Social skills training programmes as a way to discourage deviant behavior among teenagers**

**T. E. Titovets**

The psychological make-up of contemporary society has become the focus of special attention with the advent of informational technologies, ever-increasing specialization and secularization.

The upsurge in suicide rate and ratings of mania, obsessive-compulsive disorder, hypochondriasis, anxiety disorder, depression, deviant behavior evident among teenagers throughout the world brings into question stress-related factors and preventive actions to be taken in time. Some of these variables require careful examination.

One of the underlying reasons for inadequate juvenile behavior preponderant in the world is inability to fill one's life with a healthy dose of challenge and emotional experiences involving spiritual nature of human being. Therefore the preventive measures include both social prevention programs (projects of sports activities, hobbies and educational activities as well as educational and promotional activities, mostly at schools) and social skills training programs which discourage deviant behavior.

There are various ways to introduce juveniles to principles of constructive behavior and communication and familiarizing them with methods and concepts of morality within social skills training programs:

- Case studies which exemplify manifestations of exemplary behavioral patterns
- Overview of the major areas where values are universal
- Reading articles which can be summarized in the notion 'As victims see us'
- Group discussions of various stereotypes and their origin.
- Watching documentary films with a view to assess ways of overcoming peer dependence and develop strategies for dealing with controversial issues
- Self-assessment tests which make students aware of their own moorings.

The integral part of social skills training is investigation of pitfalls deviant behavior may present and examining the ways to tackle it. The chief dimensions which can be effectively employed in analysis are as follows:

- Emphasis on the value of personal identity
- Studying assumptions about gender roles
- Examining ways to express emotions
- Studying the ratio of deal-focused vs relationship focused interaction
- Getting up to date with internal or external locus of control
- Speculating on one's attitude towards authority (high-power or low-power distance).

Within the framework of social skills training programmes simulations and role-playing are undertaken as one of the most efficient ways of changing one's motivation and self-awareness as a person. The stages of a typical role-play used in work with deviant juveniles are as follows:

- Clarifying the purpose of role plays.
- Asking teenagers to act out a prepared situation in the script.
- Identifying clear, achievable criteria for success.
- Reinforcing participation.
- Coaching clients during role plays.
- Providing feedback.

A group provides a valuable context for role playing because many models and varied sources of feedback are available.

Promoting emotional and social competencies which social skills training programs are aimed at may contribute a great deal to preventing or reducing deviant behavior in teenagers. According to Greenberg, M. T., Kusche, C., & Mihalic, S five crucial factors come into play while correcting emotional and social competence. First, the school environment is fundamental to a child and can be a central locus of change. Second, a holistic approach that includes a focus on affect, behavior, and cognition is necessary to influence significant changes in children's social and emotional competence. Third, children's ability to understand and discuss emotions is based on their ability to first inhibit their own behavior by using verbal self-control. Fourth, a central component of effective problem-solving and social interaction depends on children's ability to understand their own and others' emotions. Fifth, it is important to build protective factors that decrease maladjustment. All of these skills help increase children's ability to engage in positive social interactions and provide for a wide variety of learning experiences.

### References

Greenberg, M. T., Kusche, C., & Mihalic, S. (1998). Promoting alternative thinking strategies (PATHS). In D. S. Elliott (Series Ed.), Blueprints for violence prevention. Boulder, CO: University of Colorado at Boulder, Institute of Behavioral Science, Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence.