
APPENDIX

The 10 Points of Logic Behind the SSA Program

The Safe School Ambassadors program is built on a solid foundation of research and over nineteen years of field experience (*since 1999*).

1) SSA is a student-centered program. Students see, hear, and know things adults don't. They are everywhere mistreatment happens, whereas adults aren't, and students can intervene in ways adults can't. Therefore, adults need to share power and decision-making with Ambassadors. For example, don't just decide how you'll recognize and appreciate them, rather, find out from them what would be meaningful and appreciated and use that information in your decision-making. To the extent practical and age appropriate, involve Ambassadors in running the program and Family Groups: taking attendance, conducting opening and check-in activities, tallying Action Logs and completing Action Log Summaries, planning all-Ambassador meetings, etc.

2) The focus of the program is on reducing incidents of peer mistreatment. The reduction of incidents of mistreatment in turn leads to a decrease in discipline incidents (detentions, suspensions, etc.) and an improvement in school climate. Better school climate means increased attendance and improved academic performance. However, this change takes time. Most programs require three years of diligent implementation to become firmly ingrained in the school system (i.e., sustainable) and have the desired impact on the campus' social norms.

3) SSA utilizes the bystanders. It is not a program to fix bullies or aggressors. It is not a program to give targets more tools to fend off or cope with the mistreatment they experience. It *IS* a program that harnesses the power of the bystanders, whose silence or acquiescence in the face of mistreatment "permits" it to happen. But SSA does not involve just any bystanders, nor does it try to directly reach all of the bystanders at a given school. It carefully and precisely identifies, orients, and selects the socially influential "opinion leaders" of the school's diverse groups and cliques.

4) Ambassadors are socially-influential leaders. Studies have shown that just having empathy and skills is not enough for a student to speak up to stop mistreatment or to do so effectively. Students with high social capital are more likely to **USE** their skills, and when they do, they are more likely to be followed. While all students can benefit from certain components of the SSA training – building relationships with peers in different social circles and understanding the extent and costs of the problem of mistreatment – only some have the courage and social capital (stature and influence in the eyes of their peers) to be effective Ambassadors.

5) Younger grades (i.e., K – 3) are not trained to be Ambassadors. Students at this age are still developing the communication and social skills that are the foundation of this program. Developmentally, they may also have limited understanding of the subtleties of mistreatment, so it is hard for them to determine when to intervene. We believe that resources are better devoted to helping K-3 students develop an appreciation for diversity and learning basic communication and friendship skills.

6) Ambassadors do not just focus on bullying and violence. The SSA program helps Ambassadors notice – and then act to prevent or stop – a broad spectrum of peer mistreatment: exclusion, put-downs, relational aggression, and sexual harassment, in addition to bullying and violence. These less-visible forms of mistreatment often escalate into incidents that trigger an adult response and disciplinary action.

7) Ambassadors work mostly with their friends. They have the greatest influence on the people they know well and are much less likely to be accosted or experience any harm from those close to them. Since they have been recruited from the diverse cliques on campus, they can have significant impact simply by working with those close to them.

8) Ambassadors are generally not very visible. Many Ambassadors feel that they are more effective and influential when their friends don't know or forget that they are Ambassadors. Ambassadors use their relational power to prevent and stop mistreatment rather than any positional power that might be bestowed by a t-shirt or badge or visible designation as a mediator.

9) Ambassadors need supervision and support. Any person who learns new skills and tries to use them in challenging circumstances needs regular opportunities to:

- discuss her/his experiences with others who understand,
- sharpen those skills through practice and coaching from peers and mentors, and
- receive meaningful recognition and appreciation for their courage and commitment.

10) Regular assessment of Ambassador activity and program impact is essential. Building a broad and sustainable base of institutional support requires demonstrating to administrators and staff that the SSA program has made an impact. Therefore, it is critical to collect data that shows measurable changes, such as a reduction in office referrals or other disciplinary indicators, and the relationship to student interventions, such as those captured in Action Logs. These reports are best when enriched by stories of actual interventions as told or demonstrated by Ambassadors themselves.