

2009 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

The Dollars and Sense of Violence Prevention



The Melissa Institute
For Violence Prevention and Treatment

Thirteen percent of 17-year-olds are functionally illiterate. This number jumps to 40 percent among minority youth.

Approximately half of youths with a history of substance abuse have reading problems.

About 75 percent of America's unemployed adults have reading or writing difficulty.

Children with low reading achievement in early grades have a greater likelihood of drug abuse, early pregnancy and unemployment.

By 2011, the U.S. population in state and federal prisons is projected to increase by more than 192,000 inmates. The increase will cost as much as \$27 billion. One out of every 178 Americans will be incarcerated.

The number of women prisoners is projected to grow by 16 percent in the next three years.

Total national spending on prisoner incarceration has jumped to more than \$60 billion from just \$9 billion in 1980.

The Dollars and Sense of Violence Prevention

The Institute's mission is to prevent violence and promote safer communities through education and application of research-based knowledge.

Can violence prevention be reduced to mere numbers? To dollars and cents? Surely, it's a human problem with a human face. It involves people's lives, children's futures and the stability of families. How can issues so fundamentally societal and so laden with emotion be discussed in terms of economics?

At The Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment, we see the problem of violence in very personal terms. We're here because of a personal tragedy that took the life of Melissa Aptman more than 13 years ago. But discussing violence prevention in terms of cost, we believe, is a way to understand the magnitude of the problem, and to assess the need to change attitudes, make progress and improve the lives of every member of our community. It's a way to see clearly the path that lies ahead of us, and to make the most of the limited resources available to affect change.

In today's economy, people struggle with the cost of gas, food, a tight job market and unaffordable homes. These are very human consequences of economics. We believe that violence prevention can be viewed in the same way.

At our May conference, Institute Scientific Board member Isaac Prilleltensky, Ph.D., told the audience that, on average, high school students who graduate will earn about \$300,000 more than their counterparts who drop out. Out of that \$300,000, they will pay \$100,000 more in taxes. Go to your local high school. Count all the students who will not graduate, and multiply

that number times \$100,000. Then factor in all of the high schools in the county, in Florida and in the nation.

The Institute's efforts to keep kids connected, to increase literacy, to prevent bullying, to provide outreach and to give away science to prevent violence is in everyone's interest. Every dollar spent on the consequences of violence is a dollar that cannot be spent elsewhere — on health services, infrastructure or security. Yet, every dollar spent on prevention saves up to \$28 down the road.

The numbers add up to something that is very human. In these pages, you'll learn about our emphasis on literacy, which substantially decreases the likelihood that a child will grow up to be a prison inmate. You'll discover that bullying prevention efforts have positive consequences into adulthood. Our Silence the Violence symposium brings together violence prevention experts, educators, school counselors and other community stakeholders to discuss proven, culturally sensitive approaches to violence prevention.

All of this, and more, is why The Melissa Institute exists. All of it comes down to dollars and cents. As we've said, numbers can have a human face. For us, that face is your face. Your generous donations make it possible to do what we've been doing for 13 years: make our community — and the world — a better place.



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Bullying: The High Cost of Doing Nothing

In 2000, Scientific Board member Debra J. Pepler, Ph.D., spoke at a conference of 600 educators and administrators from Miami-Dade County Public Schools, where student violence was becoming a growing problem. At the end of her lecture, one school principal told Dr. Pepler that she had wasted his time talking about bullying, because the schools had “real problems” to deal with.

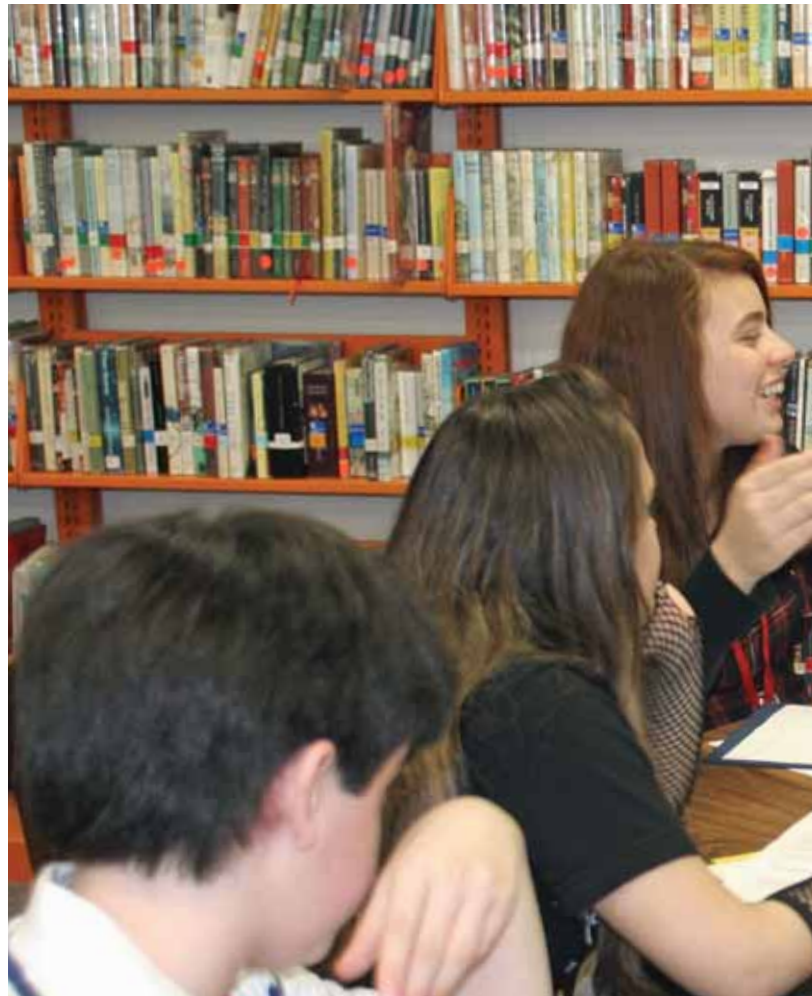
Fast-forward to 2008, when the Florida state legislature passed a law mandating that every public school must include bullying prevention in its curriculum. This mandate comes at a time when other school programs face curtailment due to a shortage of funds.

Apparently, between 2000 and now, everyone has received the message that bullying is a major contributing factor of school violence, and that funding research-based bullying prevention programs can save money down the road. Bullying has a ripple effect beyond school and into adulthood. Workplace harassment, gang violence and violent adult behavior often have their roots in the aggression and victimization found in school bullying. These consequences affect individuals and the community as a whole in ways that society simply cannot afford to ignore. The Melissa Institute addresses bullying through education programs, workshops and educator seminars.

Through Dr. Pepler’s seminars and the numerous middle school conferences con-



Trish Ramsay, Education Director, works with students at Arvida Middle School.



Safe School Specialist Idalia Vargas talks to students about bullying

ducted by Institute Education Director Trish Ramsay, the Institute has reached thousands of individuals directly, and has also indirectly influenced an even greater number of educators and students.

During the past year, Dr. Pepler conducted two bullying prevention conferences for students and school counselors. One conference involved 50 middle school students and 10 counselors. A second program included 90 elementary students from nine schools, 15 Miami-Dade County Public Schools counselors and student mediators from Killian High School.

We also address bullying and school violence through our innovative educators' website, www.teachsafeschools.org — a valuable resource for parents, teachers,

school counselors and administrators. The site has received more than a million hits, extending the outreach of The Melissa Institute. Recently, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, awarded a grant to the Gallup Organization to use the information on teachsafeschools.org to develop a new website for school principals. The effort will be one of three national anti-bullying programs in the U.S., and will be available to nearly 35,000 middle school principals across the nation. The educator's website complements the Institute's primary website, www.melissainstitute.org.



Art by Alaina Moore,
3rd Grade, Palmetto
Elementary School.



and violence prevention.

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Silence the Violence: Sharing Proven Strategies

“I’m going to start a program where kids create their own video about violence prevention,” said one audience member. “I’m going to go back and implement some of these strategies right away,” said another. “I’m going to make it my business to tell every educator I know about *teachsafeschools.org*,” announced a third.

These were comments made by some of the more than 230 participants in the third annual Silence the Violence conference. The day-long, invitation-only event was attended by mental health professionals, educators, law enforcement personnel and other interested community stakeholders.

The Institute was fortunate to enlist the participation of two luminaries in the field of violence prevention: Ronald Slaby, Ph.D., Senior Scientist at the Center on Media and Child Health, Harvard Medical School; and Marleen Wong, Ph.D., LCSW, Assistant Dean and Clinical Professor, University of Southern California.

Dr. Slaby is one of the creators of the

Aggressors, Victims and Bystanders program — an innovative classroom-based curriculum for middle school students. “There are two things that must be done in order to bring about change,” he said. “First, think of alternatives. Then practice them.” He explained that, in cases of bullying, bystanders need to take an active role. “More than half of the time, if a bystander simply speaks up, it will stop or prevent violence. Youngsters need to have the opportunity to examine their habits of thinking and be shown that they can become leaders in violence prevention.”

Dr. Wong discussed the need for accurate and timely threat assessment. “In all school shootings since Columbine, the shooters went to the Internet and looked up how it was done,” she told the audience. “In many cases, other students warned authorities of the shooters’ plans, but were never taken seriously.”

“Every time there is an air disaster, the FAA has a checklist to evaluate what went wrong,” said Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., Institute Research Director and moderator of the event. “We don’t have such a checklist to examine a school shooting.” He offered a



Art by Victoria Santi, 4th Grade, Coral Reef Elementary School



Founders, presenters and sponsor representative: Front row, left to right: Suzanne Keeley, Ph.D., Silvana Spinelli-Casale, Ph.D., Lynn Aptman and Marleen Wong, Ph.D. Back row: Michael Aptman, M.D., Ron Slaby, Ph.D., Randy Lee and Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D.



Panelists Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., Marleen Wong, Ph.D., and Ronald Slaby, Ph.D.

detailed, step-by-step threat assessment checklist and report card to be used by juvenile violence intervention specialists.

The symposium featured a breakout session in which participants formed groups and discussed ways to implement prevention techniques based on the information they had heard and seen. The discussions were spirited — sometimes passionate. Each group enthusiastically reported its findings and outlined how its members would turn what they had learned at Silence the Violence into concrete strategies within their own organizations.

“The goal of this conference is that you walk away with workable strategies to address youth violence,” Dr. Meichenbaum said.



Law enforcement officers, school personnel, community agency leaders and public policy makers participated in Silence the Violence.

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Tools for Educators

The Melissa Institute's educators' website — www.teachsafeschools.org — is the perfect complement to www.melissainstitute.org. This ongoing project provides tool-kits for teachers, counselors and administrators. Made possible through the support of the Robert and Renee Belfer Foundation and other supporters, the site bridges the gap between research findings and practices and procedures for violence prevention. It's a dynamic and indispensable resource for educators.

ACT Speaks Louder Than Words

Parents teach their children, even when they are not aware that they are teaching. Poor parenting skills can reinforce a cycle of violence and dysfunction that lasts into adulthood. A reduction in family violence can mean higher literacy rates, less time lost from work, fewer resources used by schools to combat violence and less strain on overcrowded emergency rooms.

Adults and Children Together (ACT) Against Violence is a program designed by the American Psychological Association to train early childhood, mental health and service agency professionals to deliver an enhanced parent education curriculum. The Melissa Institute has been designated as the ACT Regional Training Center for the southeastern United States.

Not all parents have the skills necessary to influence their children positively. Teen parents or parents who were abused as children often lack anger management and conflict resolution

skills necessary to parent effectively.

ACT Against Violence trains the professionals who work with parents to offer techniques for improving parenting skills. Participants become more aware of the impact that their actions have on their children. Parents are trained to recognize anger in themselves, to consider alternative strategies to corporal punishment and to practice effective role model behaviors. They also learn to develop realistic expectations of their children. For example, parents who learn that young children normally misbehave for one-third of their waking hours are more likely to be understanding and supportive and less likely to engage in violence.

The Melissa Institute conducted a series of interactive two-day ACT Against Violence training seminars in 2008, including a work-



Trish Ramsay, ACT Regional Coordinator (foreground), with ACT

shop for the Palm Beach County Division of Youth Affairs. The ACT Against Violence program has been evaluated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as an effective way to instruct adults about parenting.

Reading the Future

It is possible to predict whether a young person will eventually spend time in jail based on the number of words he or she knew before kindergarten. Eighty percent of prison inmates are functionally illiterate. Third-grade reading scores are used by the government to project the amount of prison space that will be needed in the future. It costs \$200,000 to build one prison cell.

The implications are clear: Literacy has a profound impact on the individual and the community. In today's economic climate, dollars need to be spent more wisely than ever. Currently the government spends more money on prisons than schools. However, we know

that every dollar that is spent on prevention saves up to \$28 spent fixing the consequences of inaction. The prudent financial choice is readily apparent.

A child who lacks basic reading skills can fall into a cycle of failure and violence. Self-esteem becomes low, frustration mounts. The child drops out of school, is unemployable and drawn to crime and violence. These children contribute significantly less to society, while requiring the community to expend more and more resources in treatment, health services and incarceration. Their children often fall into the same trap.

In conjunction with The Melissa Institute, internationally acclaimed reading expert and Scientific Board member Dale Willows, Ph.D., is working to establish a literacy website based on the "Balanced Literary Diet" — a proprietary program developed by Dr. Willows after more than 25 years of research and application.

"In working with Dr. Willows, we expect that this site will become an indispensable tool that will empower educators to help increase literacy," said Suzanne L. Keeley, Ph.D., president of The Melissa Institute.

"If you can get kids to read on grade level by grade three, they rarely get in trouble with the law, and have a greater likelihood of finishing school," said Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., Research Director of The Melissa Institute and recipient of a 2008 American Psychological Association Lifetime Achievement Award. The Institute needs to raise \$300,000 for Dr. Willows' innovative project, and is currently only about a third of the way there. "If you look at how much we all save by preventing violence rather than treating it, every dollar contributed to this initiative is a dollar well spent," Dr. Meichenbaum said.



Against Violence workshop attendees.

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Reaching Out to the Community

Institute Scientific Board member Jim Larson, Ph.D., gave a series of presentations on strategies for dealing with behavior management, anger management and aggression in schools. Dr. Larson presented his findings at the Juvenile Justice Center in Miami and to the principals of Miami Killian Senior High School and the Young Women's Academy for Academic & Civic Development at JRE Lee.

Additionally, Dr. Meichenbaum shared his expertise on post-traumatic stress disorder when he gave a presentation to the Veterans Administration in Miami on the disturbing rate of suicide among soldiers returning from Iraq. Veterans with post-traumatic stress and substance abuse issues have a greater number of problems in daily living, including social conflicts, violent behavior and suicide attempts. Dr. Meichenbaum has given similar presentations throughout the U.S. and he will address the staff of the West Palm Beach V.A. in December.



Art by Michael Torres, 5th Grade, Coral Reef Elementary School.

Violence Video Becomes College Course

Last year, Dr. Keeley developed a riveting video presentation that told the stories of three women who were victims of violence. The video will soon be the basis of an ongoing course on domestic violence at Florida International University. The Institute has given a \$10,000 grant to FIU to support the course development, which will be implemented in the college's social work curriculum.

May Conference

Several hundred psychologists, teachers, counselors and child development specialists attended The Melissa Institute's 12th annual May conference. The topic of the May event was "Reducing Violence by Nurturing Emotional and Behavioral Well-being." The thrust of the meeting was that "it takes a village" to nurture well-being and prevent



May conference presenters Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., Isaac Prilleltensky, Ph.D., Roger Weissberg, Ph.D., and J. David Hawkins, Ph.D.

violent behavior from developing. Attending to the social and emotional needs of students improves academic performance and reduces violence in schools. Three leading violence prevention experts addressed the conference: Roger Weissberg, Ph.D., J. David Hawkins, Ph.D., and Isaac Prilleltensky, Ph.D. Drs. Meichenbaum and Keeley moderated the event.

**Mark Your Calendar
May 1, 2009**

The topic of the 13th annual conference will be “Multicultural Treatment Approaches: Addressing the Needs and Tapping the Strengths of Minority Populations.”



J. David Hawkins, Ph.D.



Roger Weissberg, Ph.D.



Suzanne Keeley, Ph.D.



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Peace and Harmony

More than 250 Institute supporters raised \$75,000 at “An Evening of Peace and Harmony: Music for a Better World.” The annual fundraising concert, held at Congregation Bet Shira in March, also included a silent auction chaired by Grace Carricarte, which raised more than \$30,000. Attendees were entertained by the Johnny Rodgers Band. Johnny Rodgers regularly tours with Liza Minnelli. The event was co-chaired by Jerry Markowitz and Patricia Redmond, and Christopher and Lelania Vasallo.



Event Co-chairs included Chris and Lelania Vasallo, Patricia Redmond and Jerry Markowitz.



◀ Brian E. Keeley, Marianne and Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D.

Philipp Ludwig, ▶ Suzanne Keeley, Ph.D., and Court Keeley.



Shara Vales, Silvana Spinelli-Casale, Ph.D., Hon. Norman Gerstein and Lisa Baird.



Lynn Aptman and Ken Bloom.



◀ Silent auction supporters check their bids.



Three generations of Aptmans: Michael Aptman, M.D., Sol Aptman and Matthew Aptman.



Joe Lombardo with Jodie and Paul Soulé.

Dissertation Scholarship Awards

The Melissa Institute awards scholarships to doctoral students who are conducting research within the area of violence prevention and treatment. The Institute has partnered with the Belfer Family Foundation to create a permanent endowment for the Belfer-Aptman Scholars Award. The following individuals received \$2,000 each:

Shanna B. Dulen, M.A.

University of Miami

“Assessment of Traumatic Experience, Distal and Proximal Risk and Protective Factors and Differential Adjustment Indicators of Unaccompanied Immigrant Children”

Anita Jose, M.A.

Stony Brook University

“Antisocial Traits, Borderline Traits, Substance Use, Marital Distress and Psychological Aggression as Predictors of Physical Aggression in Couples”

Andrea Regina, MSCCP

University of Toronto

“At-Risk Youth With Reading Difficulties: Targeting Negative Consequences through Literacy Intervention”

Kimberly A. Van Orden, M.S.

Florida State University

“Construct Validity of the Interpersonal Needs Questionnaire”



Art by Ashley Hinds, 2nd Grade, Palmetto Elementary School.

OUR VOLUNTEER BOARDS

Without the participation, expertise and leadership of our volunteer boards, the Institute could not accomplish its goals. The boards include the Board of Directors, Scientific Board and Honorary Board.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Committed individuals who volunteer their time to oversee the operation of the Institute, assist with fundraising, plan projects and represent the organization at community events.

Suzanne L. Keeley, Ph.D., President and a founder of The Melissa Institute, a psychologist in private practice with extensive clinical experience in treating victims and perpetrators of violence.

Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., Distinguished Visiting Professor, University of Miami, clinical psychologist, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, University of Waterloo, Ontario, Research Director and a founder of The Melissa Institute.

Lynn Aptman, M.Ed., Melissa's mother, one of the founders of The Melissa Institute and Director of Information Services.

Michael Aptman, M.D., neurologist, Melissa's father, one of the founders of the Institute and Vice President.

Jo Baxter, MBA, Corporate Vice President, Baptist Health South Florida.

Queen T. Brown, M.A., Community Violence Prevention leader and program host on WINZ radio.

Grace L. Carricarte, MS.Ed., therapist, Journey Institute Program Family Counseling Services of Greater Miami.

Silvana Spinelli-Casale, Ph.D., psychologist, Coconut Grove Counseling Center.

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SCIENTIFIC BOARD

This board comprises international experts in the areas of violence prevention and treatment of victims.

Etiony Aldarondo, Ph.D., is Associate Dean for Research and Associate Professor in the School of Education at the University of Miami. His professional career includes appointments at Boston College, Harvard Medical School's Cambridge Hospital and the Philadelphia Child Guidance Center. The recipient of various recognitions for academic excellence, his scholarship focuses on positive development of ethnic minority and immigrant youth, domestic violence and social justice-oriented clinical practices. His publications include the books *Advancing Social Justice Through Clinical Practice* (Routledge) and *Programs for Men Who Batter: Intervention and Prevention Strategies in a Diverse Society* (Civic Research Institute with Fernando Mederos, Ed.D.) Dr. Aldarondo has a long history of involvement with grass roots advocacy organizations and federal government agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institute of Justice. He serves on the boards of directors for the National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence and the Council on Contemporary Families.

Jim Larson, Ph.D., NCSP, is Professor of Psychology and Director of the School Psychology Training Program at the University of Wisconsin, Whitewater. He has more than 25 years' experience in the study and treatment of anger-related behaviors in children and youth. Dr. Larson was a school psychologist with the Milwaukee Public Schools for 14

years and directed their violence prevention program. He also has extensive experience in the area of parent management training and is co-author of *Parent to Parent: A Video-augmented Training Program for the Prevention of Aggressive Behavior in Young Children* and *Helping School Children Cope with Anger: A Cognitive-behavioral Intervention*. His most recent book is *Think First: Addressing Aggressive Behavior in Secondary Schools*.

Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D., is Research Director of The Melissa Institute, Distinguished Visiting Professor, School of Education, University of Miami, and Distinguished Professor Emeritus, University of Waterloo, Ontario. He is one of the founders of cognitive behavior therapy. In a survey reported in *American Psychologist*, he was voted "one of the 10 most influential psychotherapists of the 20th century." He has published extensively, and his most recent book is *Treatment of Individuals with Anger-control Problems and Aggressive Behavior*. Other books include *Treating Adults with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder*, *Nurturing Independent Learners* and *Stress Inoculation Training*.

Clifford R. O'Donnell, Ph.D., is Professor of Psychology and Director of the Community and Culture Psychology Graduate Program at the University of Hawaii. He has published on topics such as delinquency prevention, school violence, firearm deaths among children and youth, cultural-community psychology, and education and employment in community psychology. He currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Intermountain Centers for Human Development and consults for several youth mentoring programs that use his community-peer delinquency prevention model. His most recent book is *Culture and Context in Human Behavior Change: Theory, Research, and Application* (2005) with Lois Yamauchi. Professor O'Donnell received Fellow status in the Society for Community Research and Action (Division 27 of the American Psychological Association) in "Recognition of His Outstanding Contributions to the Field of Community Research and Action," an "Outstanding Professor" award from the University of Hawaii Psi Chi, and the 2001 award from the Council of Program Directors in Community Research and Action for his "Outstanding Contributions

to Education and Training in Community Research and Action.” He was elected President of the Society for Community Research and Action for 2004-2005.

Debra Pepler, Ph.D., C.Psych., is Distinguished Research Professor of Psychology at York University, Toronto, Ontario, and co-director of Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network (PREVNet), Canada’s national initiative for bullying prevention. She is an internationally recognized expert on bullying and childhood aggression and an authority on school-based interventions. Dr. Pepler speaks widely to professional and community audiences and publishes extensively. She is an author and co-editor of *Understanding and Addressing Bullying: An International Perspective*. She was honored with the Contribution to Knowledge award from the Psychology Foundation of Canada.

Isaac Prilleltensky, Ph.D., is Dean of the School of Education at the University of Miami. Prior to that he was Director of the Doctoral Program in Community Research and Action at Peabody College of Vanderbilt University. He was born in Argentina and has studied and worked in Israel, Canada, Australia and the United States. He has lectured widely in South America, Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Dr. Prilleltensky is concerned with value-based ways of promoting personal, relational and collective well-being. He is the author, co-author or co-editor of several books, including *Community Psychology: In Pursuit of Liberation and Well-Being*, *Doing Psychology Critically*, *Critical Psychology*, *Promoting Family Wellness and Preventing Child Maltreatment*, and *The Morals and Politics of Psychology*. He recently completed with his wife, Dr. Ora Prilleltensky, a book entitled *Promoting Well-Being: Linking Personal, Organizational, and Community Change*.

Wendy K. Silverman, Ph.D., ABPP, is Professor of Psychology and Director of the Child and Family Psychosocial Research Center at Florida International University. She has authored/co-edited four books and over 100 scientific articles. Her research on developing and evaluating evidence-based assessment and treatment procedures for use with children and adolescents with anxiety disorders has been continuously funded for the past two decades by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). In

addition to conducting research, teaching and mentoring students, she has served as editor of the *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, associate editor of the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, Past President of the Society of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology (Division 53, American Psychological Association), and Chair of the NIMH grant review panel for Child and Adolescent Psychosocial and Psychopharmacological Intervention Research.

Dale Willows, Ph.D., is a Professor in the Department of Human Development and Applied Psychology, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. She is also a registered psychologist. Dr. Willows is a renowned expert in the teaching of reading and preventing reading and writing difficulties in young children. She has devoted herself to implementing change in early literacy education through in-service professional development for primary grade teachers and school administrators. In addition to publishing extensively in journals and authoring numerous books and book chapters, she is frequently invited to present at academic and professional conferences. In 2001, Dr. Willows was honored as an Outstanding Educator by three Canadian school districts. Dr. Willows serves as the only international member of the National Reading Panel, which was commissioned by the U.S. Congress in 1998. She was invited to attend the White House Assembly on Reading in 2001.

Marleen Wong, LCSW, Ph.D., is Assistant Dean and Clinical Professor of Field Education at the University of Southern California School of Social Work. As the former Director of Mental Health and Crisis Intervention for the Los Angeles Unified School District, she has developed school crisis teams, mental health recovery programs and training for school districts and law enforcement personnel in the United States, Canada and Asia, and is frequently consulted by the U.S. Department of Education to assist with recovery for schools impacted by violence and disaster. She is the original community partner with RAND Health and the UCLA Health Services Research staff who developed and evaluated CBITS (Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools), an evidence-based program that uses skill-based, group intervention to relieve symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and

general anxiety among children exposed to trauma. She is also one of the authors of Psychological First Aid (PFA) for Students and Teachers: Listen, Protect, Connect (LPC), one of a family of public health strategies available on the public website of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Dr. Wong has served on the Institute of Medicine Committee on Preparing for the Psychological Consequences of Terrorism and the IOM’s Board on Neuroscience and Behavioral Health, which is charged with assessing national priorities and approaches to public health and medical practice, public policy, research, education and training.

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