

Alternatives To Violence Project of Vermont

Community Program



For further information, please contact the Project Coordinator:

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What is the Alternatives to Violence Project?

Goals

The Alternatives to Violence Project is a multi cultural volunteer organization that is dedicated to reducing interpersonal violence in our society.

AVP workshops present conflict management skills that can enable individuals to build successful interpersonal interactions, gain insights into themselves and find new and positive approaches to their lives.

The AVP program offers experiential workshops that empower people to lead nonviolent lives through affirmation, respect for all, community building, cooperation and trust.

Philosophy

Our fundamental belief is that there is a power for peace in everyone, and that this power has the ability to transform violence. AVP builds on a spiritual base of caring for self and others.

Program

- AVP is an experiential program, helping people change their lives through a series of structured experiences.
- AVP is a prison program, helping inmates learn new skills and attitudes that can lead to fulfilling, crime-free lives.
- AVP is a community program, offering a new approach for community groups, social service agencies, youth organizations and all that would like to participate.
- AVP is a program for everybody regardless of race, religion, political view or national origin. Though founded by Quakers based on their belief in an inborn power for peace in everyone, it draws its participants and trainers from all religions, races and walks of life.
- AVP is an intensive learning experience offering two or three-day workshops on three levels:
 1. The Basic Workshop
 2. The Advanced Workshop
 3. The Training for Trainers Workshop

How AVP Began & Grew

The Alternatives to Violence Project began in 1975. An inmate group at Green Haven Prison in Dutchess County, New York was seeking to work with youth gangs and teenagers at risk, but they were having difficulty communicating their message about the consequences of violence. They sought help from the Quaker Project on Community Conflict which sent an inter-racial team to conduct a workshop for them. This was so successful that requests were soon received for more. The AVP organization was born and grew quickly. AVP currently conducts hundreds of workshops each year and the program has spread to 44 states and over 16 other countries. It soon became evident that the program designed for prison inmates could be useful for everyone. Community people began to seek the AVP Training and workshops are regularly offered to the general public.

The Basic Workshop

The Basic AVP Workshop helps to develop primary conflict management skills. Step-by-step experiences and exercises focus on:

- Affirmation - Building self-esteem and trust.
- Communication - Improving both listening skills and assertive methods of expression.
- Cooperation - Developing cooperative attitudes that avoid competitive conflicts.
- Community - Learning to build community within a diverse society.
- Creative Conflict Management - Getting in touch with an inner ability for Transforming Power to manage potentially violent situations. By role playing, participants learn new and creative ways to respond to conflict situations.

The Advanced Workshop

The focus of the Advanced Workshop is on the underlying causes of violence. Some of the common themes explored are:

- Fear - Reveals the hidden fears that usually underlie anger, jealousy, hate and prejudice.
- Anger - Results in a deeper understanding of the personal situations that trigger anger.
- Communication - Develops personal listening and verbal expression skills and the ability to communicate in tense and stressful situations.
- Stereotyping - Builds awareness of stereotyping, bias and prejudice in personal relations.
- Power and Powerlessness - Helps individuals to understand power structures and helps them to get in touch with their inner power.
- Forgiveness - Builds the groundwork for reconciliation and the freedom from guilt.

The Training for Trainers Workshop

The Training for Trainers Workshop focuses on team building and leadership skills. The curriculum includes:

- **Group Process Skills** - Introduces leadership styles, planning for experiential learning and processing of exercises.

- **Team Leadership Methods** - Focuses on developing a team contract and cooperative leadership styles.

- **Hands on Experience** - Offers practice in planning, presenting, processing and evaluating workshop sessions.

The AVP Vision

Today, we are a violent society. The homicide rate in the United States is twice that of many developed countries, including Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. Violence in the home, physical and mental, directed against both spouse and child is rampant. Violence knows no geographical boundaries; it exists everywhere. But the citizens of Northern Ireland stand a lower chance of being murdered than those of the United States. Nor can Americans take pride or comfort in the fact that this land of the free has overtaken Russia and the Republic of South Africa and now leads the world in prison population per

capita. Prisons, viewed as a solution to violence, in turn spawn violence of their own.

We are working toward the creation of a nonviolent society. Our goal is to reduce the level of violence by reducing the need that people feel to resort to violence as a solution. Our process uses the life experience of participants as a learning resource, drawing on that experience to deal constructively with the violence in themselves and in their lives. We do our training where violence is found: in our prisons, and in our communities.

The AVP Model

"We learn by experience."

The AVP program teaches through experiential learning with a minimum of lecture. The AVP workshops consist of a series of structured experiences, or 'exercises.' Intellectual knowledge is generally not very helpful in the midst of conflict but repeating nonviolent behavior that has been previously practiced is helpful. Role plays are a key focus of AVP

workshops. They help participants discover new ways of dealing with conflict nonviolently and gives them an opportunity to practice new behavior.

"The best way to kill the program is to require people to attend It"

A fundamental requirement is voluntary participation in the program on both an individual and an institutional level. When the

program is required or imposed by others, it is probably doomed to failure. Our workshops are about personal growth, and people can only grow when they choose to do so themselves. All our workshop leaders are volunteers, and we expect all our participants to be volunteers also.

Sometimes, in spite of our best efforts to prevent coercion or the appearance of coercion, prison inmates register in our workshops because they are, or believe they are, under institutional pressure to do so as a condition of parole. Should this motive prevail throughout, most of our prison workshops would be ruined. We find, however, that it does not prevail for long. Because of the experiential approach, participants usually decide very early in the workshop that they have more to gain from an AVP workshop than a certificate for their parole file, and from that point on they become volunteers in earnest.

"The process works by itself."
Over a period of years, AVP has evolved a structure and a process and a set of exercises for workshops that really work. If the leaders stick to the process, the process will work with good leadership and with ordinary leadership, and even sometimes with bad leadership. It has been said that any organization can prosper with great and charismatic leadership, but only a great organization can prosper with ordinary leadership. AVP seeks to develop great leaders, but it is not dependent on them.

"The way for the program to grow is to train new leaders."

Much of AVP's growth and success is the result of empowering people and training them to be leaders. We believe that anyone who really wants to be a leader can learn to be one. We do not have 'star' trainers. We have a team leadership model which discourages 'stars'. We insist that no one conduct an AVP workshop alone, not only because such leadership encourages 'stardom,' but also because it fails to model the team leadership that we consider essential for teaching cooperative behavior patterns. One of the key functions of our lead trainers is to help other members of the team become better leaders.

"The program is blessed with good training! manuals."

In the beginning, AVP flourished and grew miraculously, even though we had little structure and no adequate training manuals to use. The underlying philosophy of AVP was (and is) very different from the average organizational philosophy. Drawing on human relations training and our own ongoing experience, we wrote our own training materials using the creativity of our own volunteers. Developed in this way, the manuals have become an organic part of the AVP experience. Every leader now has a clear, well-written training manual that he or she can rely on, and may even have contributed to. The manuals are in a constant state of evolution and updating with creative ideas. Every one of our trainers may contribute to this process as he or she strives to produce high quality workshops.

"In our organization power seeps up, it does not trickle down."

Our organizational model is one of building from the grass roots up. We believe that this approach is essential to nonviolence training. Our decision making process is one of consensus. We are wary of too much formalization, and we resist anything that might encourage a hierarchy among us. AVP is not about hierarchy; it is about community, about acknowledging and encouraging the potential of all of us to grow and develop, and about working together by agreement and without coercion. AVP is measured and tested by its adherence to these values. If it loses sight of them, it will have failed in its mission, no matter how brilliantly it succeeds by any other standards.

"The true source of nonviolence is spiritual power."

Although we avoid references to sectarian religion in our workshops, AVP leaders recognize that it takes more than mere techniques and skits to defuse violence. A spiritual power is inherent in humans and it is found in all religious beliefs including Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Native American, Hindu, and Buddhist. We have leaders who follow many spiritual paths; they seek to stay in touch with their spiritual power and to use this power

in their lives.

"Local coordinators"

Our system of workshop coordinators for each institution or community is essential to making the system work. The coordinator is a volunteer who organizes workshop teams and arranges workshop schedules with the institution or in the community for which he or she is responsible. Most coordinators are lead trainers who lead by example. They conduct many workshops themselves and invite others to do the same.

"The AVP program is a "win-win-win' model."

The participants, whether in prison or in the community, win because they get the training they need to cope with violence, both their own and others. The AVP facilitators win because they have an opportunity to improve their leadership skills, get new insights about themselves, other people and a nonviolent life. Prison administrators and staff win by hosting a program that will improve the level of cooperative and nonviolent behavior in their institutions, making their jobs more rewarding. Communities win and community life is enhanced when their members learn new skills to cope with violence and build community.

We appreciate your interest in AVP and invite your participation.

There is a need for this training at all levels of our society.

You may help bring this valuable training into schools, prisons, churches, community organizations.

Please contact the coordinators listed on the cover of this pamphlet.

Co-Sponsoring an AVP Workshop

AVP works best in a community setting when there is a local church or community organization lending its support.

For a successful workshop, we ask co-sponsors to:

- **Provide a working space**
A room which will comfortably hold up to 20 participants and 4 facilitators seated in a large circle on armless chairs, with room outside the circle for 4 tables. We put up quite a few newsprint charts, so lots of wall space is certainly a plus.
- **Promotion to your membership and the community**
AVP will provide you with master copies of informative brochures, posters, press releases and other printed materials. Your commitment is to let your membership know about the workshop as well as how to enroll. We would certainly urge you to consider promoting the workshop to the surrounding community. Our past experience shows that diversity among participants frequently makes for a very satisfying workshop experience. Enrollment needs to be no less than 12 and no more than 20 participants.
- **Coffee Breaks and Light Meals**
During any late afternoon / evening session starting before 5PM, it is customary to break 45 minutes for a light evening meal. For daytime sessions, we normally break an hour for lunch as well as 15 minutes in mid-morning and mid-afternoon for a coffee / soda. Some co-sponsors keep a coffee pot going all day. Your furnishing of meals and break refreshments are very appreciated.

Workshops need to be a minimum of 20 hours duration, normally over a contiguous 3 day period. There are many ways to arrive at the needed hours so please call to discuss this as well as our fee structure. We frequently have offered generous partial scholarships to those who would find it a financial hardship to pay a full workshop fee. All fees from participants at community workshops are used for materials and supplies to provide free AVP workshops at prisons.

All AVP facilitators and staff are non-paid volunteers.

GUIDES TO TRANSFORMING POWER

- 1. Seek to resolve conflicts by reaching common ground.**
- 2. Reach for that something in others that seeks to do good for self and others.**
- 3. Listen. Everyone has made a journey. Try to understand where the other person is coming from before you make up your mind.**
- 4. Base your position on truth. Since people tend to seek truth, no position based on falsehood can long prevail.**
- 5. Be ready to revise your position if you discover it is not fair.**
- 6. When you are clear about your position, expect to experience great inward power to act on it. A response that relies on this power will be courageous and without hostility.**
- 7. Do not expect that this response will automatically ward off danger. If you cannot avoid risk, risk being creative rather than violent.**
- 8. Surprise and humor may help transform.**
- 9. Learn to trust your inner sense of when to act and when to withdraw.**
- 10. Work towards new ways of overcoming injustice. Be willing to suffer suspicion, hostility, rejection, even persecution if necessary.**
- 11. Be patient and persistent in the continuing search for justice.**
- 12. Help build 'community' based on honesty, respect and caring.**