
Tenet #1 • Most people are fundamentally good and don't want others to be hurt.

The program is based on the simple premise that there are more individuals within any given community that are not committing violence and harassment than those that are. As long as this holds true, it is not a matter of "if" a reduction in the targeted violence can happen – only "how." Rather than a pathological conceptualization of bystander inaction in the face of violence – such as apathy, indifference, character deficiencies or selfishness – Green Dot etc. is based on the premise that most community members are decent and don't want anyone to experience violence.

The approach taken in all Green Dot etc. programs presumes most individuals are potential allies in prevention efforts. But, despite good intentions, everyone (children and adults alike) faces difficulties in acting or stepping up, even when they know they should. These "obstacles to action" (i.e., peer pressure, fear of retribution, fear of embarrassment, shyness, uncertainty, etc.) keep well-intended people silent – and often feeling bad for their silence. This program avoids some historically ineffective approaches to these obstacles to action such as: using shame or guilt to try and push through the obstacles; trying to "force" the obstacles out through rules and threats; trying to eradicate the obstacles with a pep-talk; or simply pretending these obstacles don't exist. Instead, this program acknowledges the legitimacy and universality of obstacles to action, and provides multiple approaches to deal with them.

Tenet #2 • Hope is necessary for success.

Martin Seligman did seminal research suggesting that when individuals believe they have no control over their environment, they will quit making any effort to change or improve it. If violence in our communities is perceived as "inevitable," there will be little motivation on behalf of community members to change it. It's not so much that people don't know that violence and harassment is a problem. It's not so much that people don't realize they should do something. It is simply hopelessness; a sense of resignation that this kind of violence is just a part of the human experience. They just don't believe it can be different. They just don't believe their actions matter. But, beneath the externally imposed layers of apparent indifference and inaction – people do care and it's our job to help peel back the layers of hopeless inaction and reconnect our communities to the renewed possibility that power-based-personal-violence is not inevitable. With renewed hope will come a resurgence of action. Inducing hope and optimism that significant improvement can be accomplished appears a foundational prerequisite to successful engagement of a targeted population.

Tenet #3 • Ultimately it has to come from within.

There are many aspects of the human experience that can be externally mandated. In schools for example, academic effort can be shaped by grades; individual behavior can be influenced by rules, consequences and punishment; attendance can be regulated through truancy laws; and certain educational content can be guaranteed an audience through mandatory classes. Caring, however, cannot be forced. Caring enough about each other to take a personal and social risk by intervening cannot be mandated or otherwise externally enforced. There are countless examples of "mandatory programming" that never translated to behavior change because "mandatory" was used as a shortcut to genuine engagement. Since much of the violence and harassment that happens in our communities happens outside the view of authority, effective intervention ultimately requires engaging intrinsic motivation within community members. This reality must inform the tone, content and overall approach to prevention.

Tenet #4 • The messenger matters.

A key element to effective engagement is the relationship between those delivering the message and those receiving it. Green Dot etc. programs are predicated on educators and allies creating an environment that is non-judgmental, respectful and honest. No one does well on the defensive. No one is eager to join when they feel judged, criticized or shamed. Three key messages for creating the necessary learning environment for engagement with regard to their role as bystanders include: (1) Honoring the legitimacy of obstacles to action, (2) Sharing our own vulnerabilities, connections and/or failures as a bystander, and (3) Predicting and normalizing “failure” – acknowledging that no one will do it right all the time. These messages help create a sense of shared ownership, decreasing resistance and defensiveness.

Tenet #5 • A message is most effective when it is simple, direct and manageable.

Integrated into all components of the Green Dot etc. program is this simple idea: Green dots good. Red dots bad. Do a green dot. The narrative is intended to be easily accessible and easily implemented. “If you happen to notice something that doesn’t feel OK to you, check your obstacles to action and consider doing something that feels realistic and manageable to you.”

Tenet #6 • Numbers matter.

Prevention requires culture change. Culture change requires critical mass. Critical mass is the numeric threshold that must be reached within any given population to ensure a new idea, behavior or value is adopted throughout the targeted community. Given the human cost of violence against women, critical mass is not only necessary but urgent and demands that our fundamental lens is one of maximum engagement. A primary lens to assess the effectiveness of each presentation or program should focus on the percentage of your audience that was engaged throughout and ultimately demonstrated a behavioral change.

Tenet #7 • The creation of a shared vision and shared language creates an opportunity for the necessary momentum to take hold.

The red dot/green dot map is not an afterthought, but an essential element to create a sense of shared language and vision. The map is a visible manifestation of each person’s role and how his/her role fits into a larger strategy. This allows for momentum - the sense of “I don’t have to do it all. My green dot, in combination with everyone else’s green dot, can make a difference.”