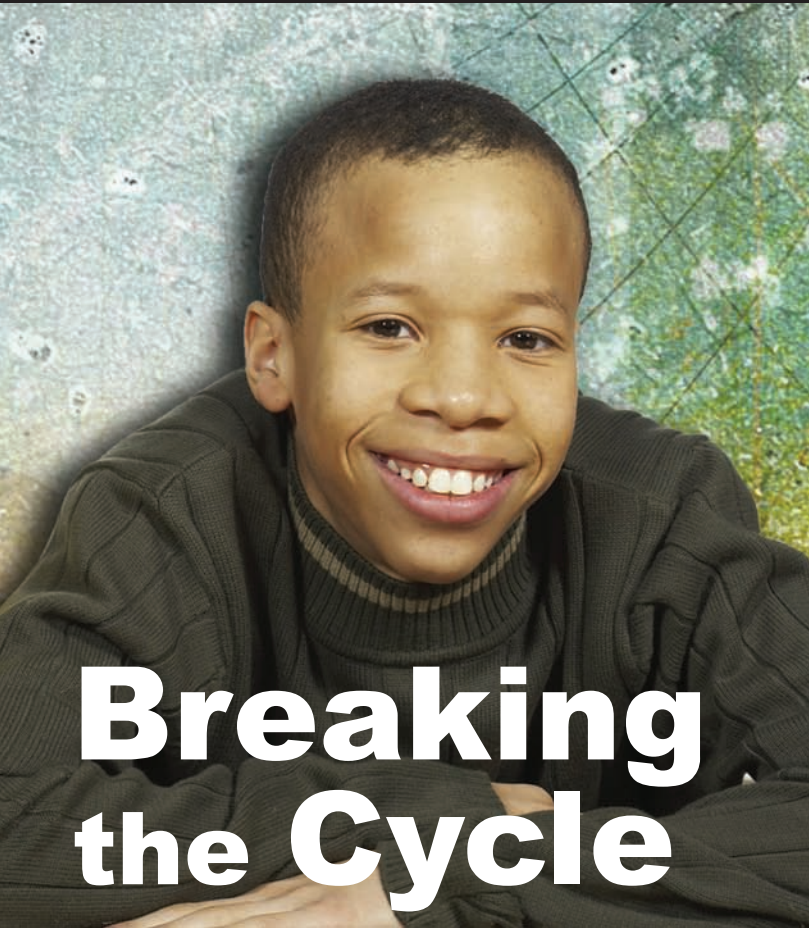


# Innovative Program Boosts Self-Confidence and Positive Communication Skills for New Haven Area Youth



## Breaking the Cycle

### Making **POSITIVE CHANGES** in Behavior

The Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center has a new program designed to help young people build self-confidence. *Breaking the Cycle*, conducted over a 12-week period, focuses on inner city kids from broken homes.

As a Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)-centered program, the intention of the sessions is to recognize thoughts and feelings. Young people are shown how to help unlearn negative emotional or behavioral reactions and are taught new ways of dealing with anger and low self-confidence.

The program originated with two boys groups; one for 7-12 year olds and the other for 13-16 year olds. A 12-member cap is placed on participation in order to keep the groups manageable. The sessions are held once a week and each month has a specific area of focus.

In the first month, the boys are taught to acknowledge a variety of home and school issues. Particular attention is paid to helping the boys recognize their emotions and assuring them they are not alone. Anger management skills are taught during the second month. The boys, who may be prone to fights and other self-esteem issues, are shown different methods for controlling their anger. They also learn to build social skills.

The third month of the program centers on building self-

confidence and examining family dynamics. Boys are encouraged to learn who they are and the importance of loving themselves.

A behavioral plan in which the boys earn playing chips dependent upon their behavior is part of the program. Five different colored chips are earned for demonstrating a positive attitude, listening skills, participation and showing respect to one another. The main chip, a blue one, is earned when one of the boys has learned something from one of the sessions and shares it with a parent.

A number of therapeutic activities are also performed within the groups. One popular activity is making stress balls out of household items. Another favorite is making homemade bubbles, the goal of which is to focus on the deep breathing that comes with blowing them. It calms the boys down and shows them a positive way to handle anger or stress.

Also popular with both groups is a series on how people end up in jail. The boys learn that developing small criminal behaviors could land them in prison. They are told how to identify and listen to their conscience (the "good voice" versus the "bad voice").

The sessions help the boys to open up. In one weekly exercise the boys talk about their experiences during the week. If one boy shares something, maybe admitting to a bad choice that was made, the other boys in the group offer ideas on other choices that could have been made. The insight from their peers makes the boys more likely to take what they say into consideration when faced with a similar situation down the road.

Parents have noticed changes in their children. By the end of the first month they've noticed their sons have changed a lot of their negative behaviors.

In addition to the 12-week sessions, *Breaking the Cycle* also offers an 8-week summer session on family and family dynamics. Boys are taught that they can establish their own self-image.

Following the success of the boys groups, a program for girls (ages 10-14) is being offered. The session is designed for girls dealing with issues at home, particularly with absent fathers. The girls group centers on acknowledging abusive behaviors such as verbal abuse and low self-esteem.

Sessions are held at the Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center on 226 Dixwell Avenue in New Haven. To get more information on *Breaking the Cycle* contact the health center at (203) 503-3458.

