

Property destruction: vandalism & graffiti

Offense: Property destruction, vandalism, graffiti

Graffiti can be seen as an act of property destruction, an act of artistic creation, or both. It falls roughly into four categories: conventional, ideological, gang, and popular art (tagging). Matching the intervention to the motivation increases the chance of its success.

“Conventional” property destruction suggests one approach

“Conventional” property destruction, such as breaking windows, and “conventional” graffiti can both be motivated by anger, hostility, boredom, despair, failure, and frustration. Problem solving, anger management, impulse control and identifying a constructive passion can be effective interventions for this group.

Ideological graffiti suggests a different approach

In other cases, the main function of graffiti, and occasionally other property destruction, is communication of an ideological message. This may include spray painting political slogans. It may involve bias activity, such as targeting a synagogue with vandalism or an anti-Semitic message. Providing skill development to promote civic engagement, including skills in confronting injustice, can be an effective intervention for “ideological” graffiti makers. A suggested set of interventions for bias activity is covered on page 17.

Gang activity has its own context

Gang graffiti is mainly a tactical weapon. It serves to mark turf, convey threats, or publicize achievements. A suggested set of interventions for gang activity are covered on page 35.

Artist want their work to be seen

Some graffiti involves creation of complex works of art. Graffiti as an art style is as legitimate and deserving of public recognition as abstract, impressionistic or representational art. It is where the art is placed (on someone else’s property without permission), not the style of art itself, which constitutes the offense. Some students who are failing academically, get their sense of self-worth from succeeding as public artists. Firming up a sense of self worth, recognizing the positive value of creativity, and developing skills to address school failure can be effective interventions with this group.

In rare cases, marker of conduct disorder

In only a few cases, destruction of property is an early marker of conduct disorder, or serious anti-social behavior that will *require more intensive therapeutic and correctional interventions than the Ripple Effects program can provide*. That being said, targeted skill training can be an important part of that set of targeted interventions.

Goals of intervention

Youth will:

- Develop norms against vandalism
- Master techniques for managing anger
- Identify the positive function doing graffiti has for them
- Identify legal, constructive ways to achieve the same ends
- Know their personal risk and protective factors
- Identify their personal strengths
- Set personal goals for school and life success

A suggested scope and sequence

SKILL TRAINING TOPICS

Knowing yourself

Learning style
Creativity
Strengths
What you love
Goals
Power
Self-esteem
Risk factors

Managing feelings

Self talk

Empathy

Perspective taking

Assertiveness

Doin' democracy
Resisting peer pressure
Confronting behavior

Problem solving

CHALLENGE TOPICS

Vandalism

Graffiti

Anger
Authority
Bias Activity
Boredom
Defiance
Depression
Failure
Frustration
Friends
Gangs
Mistakes
Pride
Recklessness
Revenge