

Richard's story

I used to think that violence was only when someone physically harmed me, and that leadership was about controlling people by telling them what to do.

At home I did not have a close relationship with my father. Often when I was around him I did not feel free and open, but distant from him. This was because he used to beat me if I refused to do what I was told to do. Always I would surrender to do what was asked of me even if I did not want to and I could not express myself because I did not know how.

When I was in Matric in 2001, a friend in the same class introduced me to the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP). What motivated me to attend the workshop was that it focused on communication skills, trust building and leadership skills, which I sought.

After the first day of the workshop, I went home with the handout I received on Perception and Win-win steps. When I arrived at home, I felt the desire to share what I had learnt with my parents. I shared the "Position and Needs" story about two girls who were fighting over an orange and asked how they would resolve the situation.

My father said he would have beaten them up for fighting. My father then revealed that his father (my late grandfather) used to beat him and his brothers if they fought and he did not waste time to talk things through with them. From this I understood why he used to treat me the way he did. I told him how it felt being beaten. He explained that this was his only way of disciplining me.

Seeing violence as the only tool to resolve problems because it is the only method you have been exposed to, is a vicious cycle set to increase the hurt to yourself, to the people you care about, and to society at large. Instead we need to get the opportunity to learn of other alternatives, which would value ourselves and the relationship with our loved ones.

I am grateful for knowing about AVP. Had I not known of AVP, I do not know what could have become of me. There is a huge need for AVP to remind people of the precious inborn values of trust, self-respect and caring.

Today I am aware of myself and my feelings and I can express myself. My relationship with my father has improved, and I know we can continue to work on it further.

