

**The German Prevention Congress (DPT)
and its long-term partners (DFK, ProPK, WEISSER RING)
May 10/11, 2021**

**The Cologne Declaration
26th German Prevention Congress**

**PREVENTION PROVIDES ORIENTATION!
... planning ... training ... exchange ...**

Since 2020, the SARS-CoV-2 virus pandemic has brought about new dangers that affect almost all areas of life and are causing a great sense of insecurity. Existing social inequalities are growing starker, new conflicts are bubbling up, democratic processes are being questioned.

Orientation – a basic human need – is difficult to achieve during such tumultuous times. Not knowing what authorities to place our trust in, the new and complex developments are difficult to understand and overcome. The resulting lack of orientation is not only felt by individuals and social groups, but also noticeable on the meta-level of societal analysis, evaluation, and crisis management.

With the focus of the Cologne Declaration, the German Prevention Congress wants to draw attention to the fact that prevention – understood as a science-based, future-oriented way of acting – can be a good reference point helping us orient ourselves in times of crisis.

Every crisis is also an opportunity, especially since it brings out existing problems, shortcomings, and inequalities more clearly. First and foremost, this crisis is an opportunity to rethink existing conditions and set new priorities. In this context, education – across the entire spectrum of knowledge sharing, social learning, and political education – seems especially important.

The Cologne Declaration of the German Prevention Congress emphasizes the most important factors needed from a crime prevention perspective to achieve the following:

- **Orientation during the current crisis**
- **Orientation when it comes to shaping the future**
- **Necessary reorientation and change**

For the 26th Congress on Crime Prevention, eight experts have sent us short video statements on the subject. In addition, Prof. Dr. Gina-Rosa Wollinger and Prof. Dr. Haci-Halil

Uslucan have contributed extensive written reports. The Cologne Declaration that is now in front of you is the result of their comprehensive expertise¹.

- **Orientation during the current crisis**

Skepticism towards science, prejudice, fake news, conspiracy narratives, hate speech, and people supporting authoritative structures or taking up arms are some of the current issues we are facing when it comes to violence and crime prevention. First of all, we would like to stress that these phenomena were not brought about by the current crisis. All these risky developments have been observed in the past but gone largely unnoticed, while the current situation has helped them gain more prominence and gather a larger following.

Orientation is the result of negotiations based on shared convictions. This requires the ability to engage in discourse, which in turn requires the ability to see and accept different perspectives, and take the opinions of others seriously. Orientation cannot be achieved solely on a political or scientific level but requires focused action on behalf of individuals, based on a spirit of compromise.

Prevention is made possible through basic scientific understanding. To counteract the skepticism towards science we are currently seeing, we need to take science-based action and the critical, analytical way of thinking it requires, out of a purely academic context.

For successful crime prevention, it is important to cultivate people's ambiguity tolerance—the understanding and acceptance that there are no definite, unambiguous answers, but that rather, reality consists of countless shades of gray. Ambiguity tolerance can be cultivated through education and should be taken as seriously in this context as the ability to recognize and take on different perspectives.

Besides participation, young people's fundamental needs include defending their interests, getting recognition, and feeling empowered. Satisfying these needs at schools rather than frustrating them significantly contributes to preventing violence.

Emotional competencies are key competencies that need to be cultivated in parents, as well, since they are the foundation of their children's psychological resilience.

During the current crisis, schools need to find better ways of combining digital and classroom teaching. To achieve this, they must be given the technology and training they need so they can continue supporting students on an individual level and building a relationship with them in the digital space.

¹ The following experts have contributed to this declaration: Dr. Helle Becker (Transfer für Bildung e.V./ Association for the Transfer of Education); Dr. Anika Duvencek (Freie Universität Berlin/ Free University of Berlin); Thomas Gödde (Landesstelle Schulpsychologie und Schulpsychologisches Krisenmanagement NRW/ State Office of School Psychology and School Psychology-based Crisis Management); Prof. Dr. Charlotte Hanisch (Universität Köln/ University of Cologne); Prof. Dr. Rita Haverkamp (Universität Tübingen/ University of Tübingen); Reinhard Kahl (Journalist, educational scientist, and author); Prof. Dr. Haci-Halil Uslucan (Universität Duisburg-Essen/ University of Duisburg-Essen); Prof. Dr. Gina-Rosa Wollinger (Hochschule für Polizei und öffentliche Verwaltung Nordrhein-Westfalen/ Police Academy & Academy of Public Administration in North Rhine-Westfalia).

- **Orientation when it comes to shaping the future**

Education is not limited to the mere transfer of knowledge. It is not solely about the brainless type of rote learning criticized so frequently, but also about giving students the skills they need to manage their lives. Key competencies in this context are democratic competencies and social competencies. Therefore, teaching should be more competency-oriented than curriculum-oriented.

Education should be designed as a process of self-education, rather than teaching. Our new priority should be students' active knowledge acquisition through free learning and concrete projects.

Educational institutions are not only places of cognitive training. Rather than simply allocating students to follow-up institutions and careers, they should also be regarded as social spaces helping students learn about the values and ethics that apply in society. Schools should be understood and supported as points of orientation within the world.

Being part of students' lives and giving them rules and stability, schools can offer them a safe haven, and contribute to the integration of migrant children, especially those who have suffered traumatic experiences along their journeys.

- **Necessary reorientation and change**

Education should not be equated with prevention, which pursues the specific goal of preventing crime and violence. In the same vein, education at schools cannot replace good social policy on behalf of the government. The current performance-based selective function of schools (re)produces and legitimizes social inequalities instead of counteracting them. What we need is a better understanding of the causal relationships between education, networking, and poverty. The opportunities and limits of schools in their current form should be clearly identified, named, and used as a starting point to restructure goals and responsibilities.

Education is key to our society and should be given more significance and focus in public discourse. We need to discuss our goals in this context, and the way we want to teach the generation that will shape our future.

During the current pandemic, we have seen heated debates on whether schools should be closed or kept open. The unusual situation schools find themselves in makes two things clear. One: Schools are vital pillars supporting the functioning of society as a whole. Two: Schools are not getting nearly enough funding and support to accomplish what is expected of them. From a crime prevention perspective, this situation urgently calls for reorientation and change.