

Children, School, and Violence: What Parents Can Do

Violence is part of our world today, but there are many things parents can do to help prevent youth violence. Homes and schools should be safe havens for children.

The following guidelines help parents reinforce children's positive behaviors and reduce aggression. Using these tips, parents can teach their children to be nonviolent and to communicate their feelings.

Early warning signs help parents identify children who may become violent and address their needs before problems escalate. Parents teach nonviolence by setting an example, demonstrating good problem-solving skills and communicating with their children. In addition, spending time together helps parents build loving relationships with their children, which reassures children that parents will do everything they can to keep them safe.

Reducing Violence Begins At Home

- Maintain a supportive, loving relationship with your children. Spend time with them on a regular basis.
- Reinforce your children's positive behavior with praise.
- Build your children's self-esteem. Children who feel good about themselves are better able to stand up for themselves in tough social situations.
- Set limits, such as "No hitting or name-calling."
- Rather than spanking/physical punishment, use alternatives such as time-out, consequences or withdrawal of privileges.
- Set an example by being nonviolent and patient with your children. Learn to manage your own anger, and your children will learn from your example. Express your feelings in words, and teach your children that when they're upset they can use words instead of hitting.
- Teach problem-solving by remaining calm, involving children in discussions and working together to resolve conflicts. When you remain calm in tense situations, your children will learn to control their strong feelings too.
- Talk to your children and acknowledge their feelings. When parents listen, their children are less likely to resort to aggressive behavior.
- Limit your children's access to media violence. Explain that the violence they see on TV shows is make-believe, and discuss the consequences of violence in real life.
- If children hear about violence in the news, allow them to talk about how it makes them feel. Take time to listen to their feelings of fear, sadness or confusion. Reassure them that you will help keep them safe.
- Limit TV viewing to 1-2 hours per day, and keep TV's out of children's bedrooms.
- Monitor children's use of TV, Internet and video and computer games.
- Discuss gun safety with your children.
- Teach children never to touch a gun and to let you or an adult know if they see a gun.

- If parents own a gun, keep it unloaded and locked separately from ammunition. Keep firearms far away from children's reach.
- Teach tolerance of other people. Do not discriminate.
- Know where your children spend their time after school, and get to know their friends.
- Read books with your children.
- Identify risk factors that may lead children to become violent.
- Identify Violent Behavior Early
- Early warning signs enable parents and schools to address a child's needs before problems escalate.

If you notice warning signs, talk to your children about any problems they may be having. Consider getting professional help for them. Talk to their teachers or school administrators.

Warning Signs

- Any dramatic change in a child's normal behavior
- A noticeable decrease of interest in school or social interactions
- Feels alone, rejected or withdrawn
- Feels picked on or has been a victim of bullying/violence
- Makes threats of violence or is overly aggressive – hitting, bullying or being verbally abusive
- Cannot control anger
- Expresses violence in drawings or writings
- Is cruel to pets and animals
- Has a history of behavior problems
- Is prejudiced or intolerant of differences
- Frequently fights
- Watches a lot of violent television programs or plays many violent video games
- Uses drugs or alcohol
- Has access to firearms/guns in the home

Safety at School

- Build partnerships with schools and community organizations to promote children's safety. Get to know other parents and discuss safety issues.
- Be an advocate for your children.
- Attend school meetings, which become even more important as your child becomes older.
- Develop a parent-on-campus policy that makes it convenient and comfortable for parents to visit the school. Start the program with a small group of parents who can spread the word. Breakfast or lunch clubs work well for working families.
- Work with schools to promote school safety programs, such as peer mediation, conflict-resolution and anger management.
- Learn about school district policies on discipline, violence and bullying.
- Discuss zero-tolerance policies with your children. Threats of violence are unacceptable.
- Tell children to report any incidents of bullying or violence.
- If you hear about any threats of violence, report them immediately to school administrators.

- Discourage cliques. Encourage your children to be accepting to all of their peers, even if they seem different.
- Bullying is a common form of school violence. Teach children to maintain control and be assertive, not aggressive, when confronted by bullies. Role-play with children to help them practice these non-violent approaches.
- Teach children to ignore or walk away from a bully. If a bully causes physical harm, teach your child to try to get away and get help.
- Fighting a bully can cause more harm and should not be encouraged.
- Let children know it is not their fault if they are bullied.
- Bullies often pick on children who are alone. Teach children to stay near other people.

Information provided by Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh.