

# An Ounce of Prevention

Complimentary

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## **Raising children to resist violence: What you can do**

Nearly every day the news reports stories about children committing acts of violence, often against other children.

Research has shown that violent or aggressive behavior is often learned early in life. However, parents, family members and others who care for children can help them learn to deal with emotions without using violence. Parents and others can also take steps to reduce or minimize violence.

### **Suggestions for Dealing with Children**

Parents play a valuable role in reducing violence by raising children in safe and loving homes. Here are suggestions that can help. You may not be able to follow each one exactly, but doing what you can will make a difference in your children's lives.

#### **Give your children consistent love and attention**

Every child needs a strong, loving, relationship with a parent or other adult to feel safe and secure and to develop a sense of trust. Behavior problems and delinquency are less likely to develop in children whose parents are involved in their lives, especially at an early age.

It's not easy to show love to a child all the time. It can be even harder if you are a young, inexperienced, or single parent, or if your child is sick or has special needs. If your baby seems unusually difficult to care for and comfort, discuss this with your child's pediatrician, another physician, a psychologist or a mental health provider. He or she can give you advice and direct you to local parenting classes that teach positive ways to handle the difficulties of raising children.

#### **Make sure your children are supervised**

Children depend on their parents and family members for encouragement, protection, and support as they learn to think for themselves. Without proper supervision, children do not receive the guidance they need. Studies report that unsupervised children often have behavior problems.

Insist on knowing where your children are at all times and who their friends are. When you are unable to watch your children, ask someone you trust to watch them for you. Never leave young children home alone, even for a short time.

Encourage your school-aged and older children to participate in supervised after-school activities such as sports teams, tutoring programs or organized recreation. Enroll them in local community programs, especially those run by adults whose values you respect.

Accompany your children to supervised play activities and watch how they get along with others. Teach your children how to respond appropriately when others use insults or threats or deal with anger by hitting. Explain to your children that these are not appropriate behaviors,

and encourage them to avoid other children who behave that way.

#### **Show your children appropriate behaviors by the way you act**

Children often learn by example. The behavior, values and attitudes of parents and siblings have a strong influence on children. Values of respect, honesty and pride in your family and heritage can be important sources of strength for children, especially if they are confronted with negative peer pressure, live in a violent neighborhood or attend a rough school.

Most children sometimes act aggressively and may hit another person. Be firm with your children about the possible dangers of violent behavior. Remember also to praise your children when they solve problems constructively without violence. Children are more likely to repeat good behaviors when they are rewarded with attention and praise.

Parents sometimes encourage aggressive behavior without knowing it. For example, some parents think it is good for a boy to learn to fight. Teach your children that it is better to settle arguments with calm words, not fists, threats or weapons. And most importantly, don't hit your children.

#### **Be consistent about rules and discipline**

When you make a rule, stick to it. Children need structure with clear expectations for their behavior. Setting rules and then not enforcing them is confusing and sets up children to "see what they can get away with."

Parents should involve children in setting rules whenever possible. Explain to your children what you expect, and the consequences for not following the rules. This will help them learn to behave in ways that are good for them and for those around them.

#### **Keep violence out of your home**

Violence in the home can be frightening and harmful to children. Children need a safe and loving home where they do not have to grow up in fear. A child who has seen violence at home does not always become violent, but he or she may be more likely to try to resolve conflicts with violence.

Work toward making home a safe, nonviolent place, and always discourage violent behavior between brothers and sisters. Keep in mind as well that hostile, aggressive arguments between parents frighten children and set a bad example for them.

If the people in your home physically or verbally hurt and abuse each other, get help from a psychologist or some other type of mental health provider. He or she will help you and your family understand why violence at home occurs and how to stop it.

## Try to keep your children from seeing too much violence in the media

Studies show that seeing a lot of violence on television, in the movies and in video games can have a negative effect on children. As a parent, you can control the amount of violence your children see in the media. Here are some ideas:

- Limit television viewing time to 1 to 2 hours a day.
- Make sure you know what TV shows your children watch, which movies they see and what kinds of video games they play.
- Talk to your children about the violence that they see on TV shows, in the movies and in video games.
- Help them understand how painful it would be in real life and the serious consequences for violent behaviors.
- Discuss with them ways to solve problems without violence.
- Help your children stand up against violence.

Support your children in standing up against violence. Teach them to respond with calm but firm words when others insult, threaten or hit another person. Help them understand that it takes more courage and leadership to resist violence than to go along with it.

Help your children accept and get along with others from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. Teach them that criticizing people because they are different is hurtful, and that name-calling is unacceptable. Make sure they understand that using words to start or encourage violence — or to quietly accept violent behavior — is harmful. Warn your child that bullying and threats can be a set-up for violence.

*This material was excerpted from a brochure produced through a collaborative project of the American Psychological Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics. Full text copies of the brochure are available by contacting the American Academy, Division of Publications, 141 Northwest Point Blvd, PO Box 927, Elk Grove Village, Ill. 60009-0927.*

## Talking to kids when they need help

As parents and teachers, you are the first line of support for kids and teens. It's important for you to have an open line of communication with them and build a sense of trust. When your kids and teens are having difficulties, you want them to feel comfortable turning to you for help.

Just as important, is the ability to identify when your kids are struggling emotionally. Kids and teens tend to internalize their feelings. If something is troubling them, they may not speak up and ask for support. Sometimes, they don't realize that help is available. So, it's essential for parents and teachers to be able to detect when something is wrong and how to approach your kids and teens.

Getting your kids to open up and talk to you can feel like a challenge. The following tips can be helpful in starting a conversation and understanding what's going on in their lives.

## Make them feel safe.

You want to put kids and teens at ease so they feel comfortable talking to you. It is essential to make it clear why you are talking with them. Kids especially are fearful that they may be in trouble or are being punished if they are pulled aside to talk. Reassure them that this is not the case that you are there to offer support. Parents might consider scheduling a time to talk one-on-one on a regular basis, such as having lunch with your kid or teen weekly or biweekly.

## Listen to them.

Take the time to actively listen to what your kid or teen has to say. Many times, all kids or teens want is someone who will listen to them. Try to understand their perspective before offering suggestions. Sometimes your own anxiety can prompt you to try to fix everything. But in many cases the best help you can offer is to listen attentively.

## Affirm and support their need for help.

If a kid or teen tells you they're feeling sad or upset, for example, tell them you're proud of them for sharing their feelings. Let them know you appreciate the courage it took for them to talk with you and for trusting you to help them. If your kid seems to need more help than you can provide, consult with an appropriate professional. You may want to start by talking to the school psychologist.

## Be genuine.

Try to avoid speaking from a script. Teens can tell when you're not being genuine. If you are open, authentic and relaxed, it will help them to be the same.

## Don't be afraid to say I don't know.

As a parent or teacher, it is OK to admit that you don't have all the answers. However, if a kid or teen asks you something, you should make every effort to find an answer or someone who can help.

## Warning signs of suicide: Suicide is preventable.

The two most important steps in preventing suicide are recognizing warning signs and getting help. Warning signs may include significant alcohol or drug use, a sudden drop in school performance or talking about death or hurting oneself. If you believe your child or student is in crisis, call 911 immediately and stay with him or her while help is on the way.

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### Parenting Corner

**Search:** [APA and PTA Webinar: How to Tell When a Kid is Struggling Emotionally](#)

**Search:** [Trauma, Brain & Relationships: Helping Children Heal](#)

**Search:** [Little Kids, Big Questions: Podcast Series](#)

### \*\*\*Net News\*\*\*

Here are some web sites you & your family may find helpful:

**Search:** [Can Family Secrets Make You Sick? - NPR](#)

**Search:** [Valley's "police whisperer" helps cops with PTSD](#)

**Search:** [Alcoholism Through a Doctor's Eyes NY Times](#)

### Self-Help Corner:

City of Edmonton Community Resources: 211

Support Network / Distress Line: 780-482-HELP

Kids Help Line: 1-800-668-6868