

Violence



A second grader watches a children's television program that features over 200 examples of violence in a single hour. An eighth grader brings a gun to school to protect himself from the students who have threatened to beat him up on the way home.

Every day in large cities, suburbs, small towns and rural areas, children are exposed to violence. We like to think of childhood as a time of innocence—a time when children can be protected from the harsh realities of life. But if that were ever true, it is true no longer. Today's children see violence in their homes, their communities and, too often, their schools.

Here are some basic facts you need to know about dealing with the tough issue of violence.

QuickTips®

What causes violent behavior?

Experts say that violence is a “learned behavior.” Most children learn about violence through the media or through playing with violent toys or video games. Many children see real-world violence on television news programs. Some are affected by acts of violence in their community. And still others are exposed to violence in their homes.



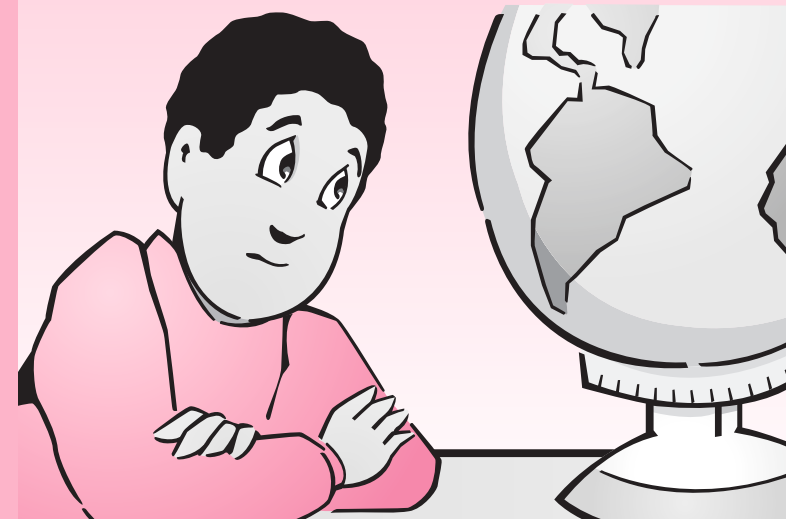
All these experiences teach children that violence is a way to solve problems. But behaviors that are learned can be unlearned. Parents, schools and communities can work together to help children learn to find solutions without violence.



How does violence affect children?

Violence is damaging to children in many ways:

- **Violence makes children believe the world is a dangerous place.** When children feel unsafe, their social and emotional development can be harmed. They can become more aggressive or impulsive. They are frequently distracted. It is hard for them to concentrate on the important lessons they need to learn in childhood.



- **Violence makes children feel powerless.** Children cannot grow into strong and healthy adults if they do not believe they can make a difference in the world in which they live.
- **Violence makes children less likely to trust others.** They are in turn more likely to use violence in their dealings with others.
- **When children are the victims of violence, they are more likely to grow up to be violent adults.**

Is violence in schools a problem?

The news is full of stories about violence in schools. And there is no doubt that schools today reflect the violence in society. But many children still say that they feel safer at school than anywhere else.

Still, even one instance of school violence is a problem. If you are concerned about school violence, contact your school. Let the principal and the school board know you support strong anti-violence policies.

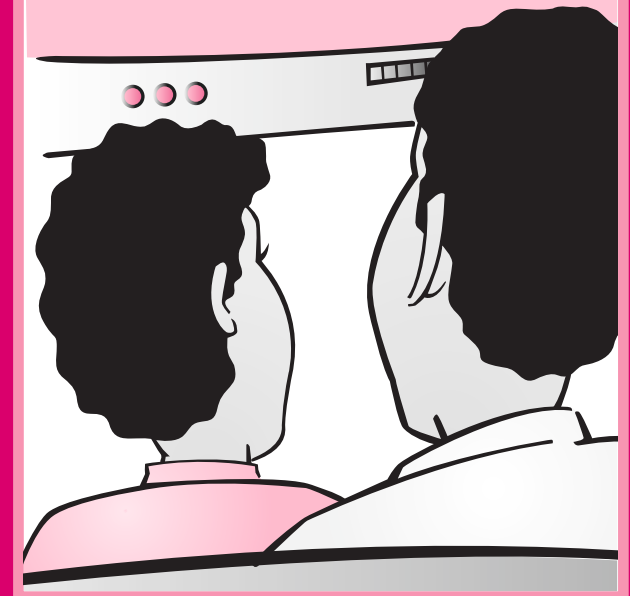
Ask your school principal how you can help—by spending time in the lunchroom, or being present on the playground or other places where violence may occur.



What can you do?

- **Help your child learn ways to resolve conflicts without violence.** From the very earliest grades, teach your child how to disagree respectfully and how to work with others to resolve conflicts.
- **Monitor the television programs your child watches.** Some experts believe that watching too much violence on television can make children behave more violently. Take steps to remove violence from your child's "TV diet."
- **Help your child anticipate and avoid situations that might lead to violence.** For example, walking to school with a friend may make a child more confident that he will not be picked on by other children. Make sure your child keeps money and valuables out of sight. Help your child think about what to do if he feels unsafe. Is there a store or a home he could run to?
- **Be aware of gang activity in your community.** Gangs are not just an urban problem. They are also found in suburbs and small towns. To prevent gangs from taking hold, work to provide after-school activities and sports for all children in the community.

As a parent, you can't stop the threat of violence to children all by yourself. But you *can* teach your child to avoid violence.



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