



Guiding Children Away From Violence



Carolinas Medical Center
Violence Prevention Committee

Uncompromising Excellence. Commitment to Care.

Guiding children away from violence.

News reports every day remind us that violence threatens our children. Most parents would rather not have their children exposed to violence. Unfortunately, that is not always possible. However, there are things you can do to guide children away from becoming involved with violence. The same things that help children avoid violence also help them succeed in other areas of their lives, leading to a productive future and a more fulfilling life.

No child is born violent. Violence is learned early in life, and parents must take the steps necessary to help our children learn positive ways of solving their problems, dealing with disagreements and handling their anger. By teaching these skills, parents and caregivers can overcome some of the negative things that are part of growing up, making children stronger and more kind-hearted. These skills will make them far less likely to grow up to be violent or to be victims of violence.

So what can you do to help children avoid violence?

First and foremost, home needs to be a safe place for children. A child needs to feel safe and loved at home. One of the most important things protecting children from violence outside the home is whether they feel secure in the home. This booklet has been divided into the following five sections to help guide you in creating a safer violence free home and environment for your family by:

- Providing good examples of how to act
- Developing a positive parenting style
- Teaching children how to handle anger and conflict without violence
- Reducing exposure to violence and to guns
- Knowing children's warning signs and what resources exist to help

Provide Good Examples of How to Act

What to do when your children are with you...

Be a good role model. You are your child's first and best teacher. Remember your child is learning how to behave by watching and listening to you. Do you scream and yell at your children or at others in your home? Does your child see you fight with others at home or in public? Try to show positive ways of handling anger, and avoid physical fighting and angry loud voices. It is important to teach children to solve problems without violence, and it is very important for parents to use these skills at home. When adults in the home have disagreements openly and calmly and show respect for one another, children are more likely to behave in the same way with their friends.

On the other hand when children see family members using angry words, fighting or pouting, they are more likely to behave the same way with their friends. By setting a good example, parents can help children learn to handle their anger in a good and safe way. **Remember children learn most by imitating and watching people.**

It is not always easy to be a good role model. Parenting can be very stressful, but try not to let that affect your behavior around your child. Here are some tips to keep in mind:

- Recognize when you are frustrated, tired, or just having a bad day. This can help you avoid having angry feelings toward your children.
- Learn to manage your own stress and control your anger. Find and practice a method that works well for you.
- Solve disagreements using words, not violence. If you feel a situation is getting out of control, walk away or take time to re-group and think before acting.
- Talk to friends about your feelings and enlist their support and help.
- Teach children the importance of connecting with and caring for one another by connecting and caring for others yourself. Children who feel connected to others in their community are less likely to get into trouble or engage in violent activity.

Section I:



There is no substitute
for giving children your time.

Whenever possible eat dinner together, watch their activities and share everyday experiences. You have a great influence on your child's development. What you teach them today will impact them in the future and hopefully guide them away from violence.

Section I:

What to do when you can't be with your children...

Make sure your child has good adult role models. In addition to spending time and being a good role model for your children, it is also important to know where they are, who they are with and what they are doing when you are not with them. Often parents have work schedules and responsibilities that make it hard to supervise children without help. However, making sure that your child is exposed to positive role models during these times is important as well. Check out supervised care and after school programs in your neighborhood, including programs at schools, community recreation centers, businesses and churches. Getting involved in the arts, music, sports and various clubs will help your child meet other children and adults who can be a positive influence. In addition, these activities keep kids busy, and busy kids have a lot less time to get in trouble or become involved with violence. The most likely times for school-age children to engage in violence is between 3 p.m. and 7 p.m., so make sure your kids are busy doing positive things during these hours.

Make sure your children have the proper adult supervision. Children under 10 years old should be supervised by an adult. Some older children may be able to be home by themselves at times, but this depends upon the child and the situation. In either case, make sure you know what your child is doing at home when you are not there. Call home to check that your children have arrived safely from school and are prepared for how to spend their time without you. If a baby-sitter is supervising your child, make sure he or she knows the house rules and what your expectations are for your child. As is the case for after-school activities outside the home, children should be kept busy doing positive things and not be allowed to endlessly watch TV or play video games (see Section IV below). Check in with your child frequently and make sure they are where they are supposed to be. If they are going to be at a friend's house, be sure they are adequately supervised, even if that means contacting that friend's parents or baby-sitters directly.

Section I:



Steer your child toward positive friends. Peer pressure can influence children to make good and bad decisions, so make it your business to know your child's friends and their families. This can be difficult because your child may have friends who you never see, or who never call your house. Cell phones and the Internet are just a few of the many ways kids communicate today, so finding out exactly who your child is associating with may take a little digging around at times. Talking to your child's teachers, coaches and counselors at school is one way to be sure that your child is not spending a lot of time with kids you don't know. When your children are tempted to follow the crowd and make bad choices, support from family and positive friends can help them to stand up to, and resist this negative peer pressure.

**Your support is key to your
child saying no to negative influences!**

If you feel your child is being bullied or pressured into risky behavior, such as involvement in gang activity, it is wise to seek help from others such as teachers, school counselors, mental health professionals, religious leaders or the police.

Develop a Positive Parenting Style

As parents your role is not to be friends with your children but to set limits and provide guidance as they become more independent and begins to test their limits.

Set rules and limits. Children need clear rules for their behavior. Setting rules without enforcing them is confusing to children, and encourages them to test your boundaries and get away with bad behavior. To avoid confusion and reduce the need for discipline:

- Set reasonable limits and rules. When possible, include children in setting the rules. When children help make rules, they have an easier time following them. When your children complain that some of your rules are unfair (and they will), explain to them why the rules have been put in place so that they understand the reason behind them.
- When you know that your child's normal schedule of activities is going to be different or interrupted, be sure to give them advance notice to prepare them for these changes. Sudden changes in a child's schedule may disrupt their sense of security, resulting in fearful and violent behavior. Make sure they understand how you expect them to behave, and what will happen if their behavior does not meet your expectations.
- Be consistent with your children in how you respond when they behave badly. Make sure they understand that there will be consequences for their bad behavior, and that these consequences will be the same each time they demonstrate the same bad behavior.
- Watch for times when your child demonstrates good behavior, and make sure you tell them that you notice and appreciate their behavior.
- Make sure you understand how a child's behavior changes as they grow up, so you know what behavior is appropriate for your child's age. Be sure your expectations for your child's behavior are age-appropriate and that you are not asking too much or too little of your child. By the same token, be sure that when your child needs discipline for negative behaviors, or rewards for positive behaviors, that these are age-appropriate as well. For more information about age-appropriate behavior, we recommend checking out The CDC Positive Parenting Program (*see Resource section at the end of this guide*).

Praising good behavior leads to more good behavior. Harsh words lead children to act out. Choose your words carefully when talking with your child.

Section II:



Choose Your Battles Wisely. As parents, we need to understand that a little flexibility is not a bad thing, and that we don't need to have our way all the time. At all ages, but particularly in the teenage years, parents should know that it is OK for them to tolerate some negative behaviors from their child as long as the behaviors do not pose a safety risk to the child. Children need to be able to express themselves and feel independent, yet supported, while learning how to set safe, good boundaries. When differences of opinion arise, parents need to balance concerns about the child's safety with the need for the child to develop this sense of independence. Allowing children a little freedom in one aspect of their behavior can make it easier for parents to be a little more strict about other more important negative behaviors that may actually be dangerous for the child.

Use Non-Physical Discipline. When a child misbehaves, it can be frustrating at home and embarrassing in public. It may be hard to respond in a calm manner. Providing calm, appropriate discipline is important in order to raise healthy, well-adjusted children. Remember, the goal of discipline is to teach children self-control, not to punish them.

Section II:

Discipline is based on the idea that children will act better if they feel better. Discipline focuses on positive behaviors and helps children learn to:

- Calm down
- Solve problems
- Manage their anger
- Control their emotions
- Know what behavior is expected of them

Punishment is based on the idea that children need to feel pain or humiliation to learn how to behave. Punishment focuses on negative behaviors and teaches children to:

- Control behavior through power and fear
- Hide or lie about misdeeds
- Act in a certain way in order to avoid a punishment from an adult
- Offer or respond to a bribe



About spanking:

Spanking as a form of punishment sends a confusing message to children. Spanking says it's okay to hurt someone you love in order to control them.

Other methods of discipline you might try include:

- Take away something the child values. For younger children, this might be a favorite toy or watching their favorite TV show. For older children, it might be more appropriate to restrict their social life by suspending their driving privileges, not allowing them to attend movies and parties with friends or limiting their use of cell phones or personal computers. This method of discipline teaches children that negative actions have real consequences.
- Allow children to experience the negative consequences of their actions. It is natural for parents to want to protect their children from pain, loss and disappointment, but children may never learn that negative behaviors have negative consequences if they are constantly protected from such things by their parents. For example, if a young child gets angry and breaks his favorite toy, do not replace the toy. Allow the child to experience this loss, and help him understand that it was his negative behavior that caused the loss. Do not, however, risk a child's safety just to teach him a lesson.
- Ignore some behaviors that may be irritating but not dangerous, such as whining and temper tantrums. Reacting to such behavior may just encourage more of the same outbursts.

Teach Children How to Handle Anger and Conflict without Violence

Help children learn to manage their anger. Teaching anger control is an important part of early violence prevention. Children who can manage their anger are more likely to make and keep friends. Children who are constantly fighting and arguing are the ones most likely to have problems in school. As they get older, this can lead to problems with more serious types of violence, criminal activity, gang involvement and drug use.

- Everyone gets angry at times. It is a normal human emotion, but it can be hard for young children to understand and control their anger. Teach children that it is OK to be angry, but there are good and bad ways to show that anger. Make it clear that hurting others or breaking things is not allowed. Encourage children to tell someone when they are angry. Help them talk about their feelings and think of positive ways to solve problems.
- Help children deal with anger in ways that are appropriate for their age.
 - o **Babies** may simply need to be cuddled or fed to calm down.
 - o **Young children** sometimes have temper tantrums and need help learning how to calm down. Teach them skills such as taking a few deep breaths, sitting down, or counting to 10 to help them calm down. Then, help them figure out what is causing them to be angry (for example, frustration, anger or disappointment) so they can learn how to deal with these different feelings in different ways and not treat them all as anger.
 - o **Older children** should be helped to use words to explain what happened and talk about how they feel. Listen without interrupting and help them think about ways to change the situation that made them angry.

Help children resolve conflicts. Arguments often involve strong feelings between people. As children grow, they learn to manage their feelings and fix problems without hurting other people. By age 5, children can usually begin to put their feelings into words, understand how others may feel and think of ways to solve a problem. Encouraging children to “think out loud” will help them develop problem solving skills. Help them to understand that it's OK to make mistakes trying to solve a problem, which is how learning happens. Children should also know that it's OK to ask an adult for help if the situation becomes too hard for them to handle. Adults can use that time to help teach children to solve the problem in a way that is safe, fair and non-violent.

Section III:



When conflicts do occur between children:

- Separate the children and help them calm down.
- Encourage them to talk about why they are angry.
- Help them to think about and understand what the other child may be feeling.
- Help them think of possible solutions and choose the best one for the situation.
- Praise children when they solve a conflict without violence.

One way to help children practice solving problems is by having group play sessions. Group play can be used to teach children how to play fairly, share, take turns and solve problems without fighting.

Reduce Exposure to Violence and Guns

In the home

Use TV, video games and other media responsibly. It is important for parents to be familiar with the many types of media entertainment that their children are exposed to in their homes. Many television programs, video games, music and music videos contain a lot of violence. Much of this violence is glamorized to make it attractive for today's youth. Even TV shows that you might not ordinarily think of as being violent (cartoons, sports shows and even the news) feature a surprising amount of violence. Being surrounded by violent entertainment as much as they are, it is easy to see why many of today's youth find violence to be an exciting and acceptable way to handle conflict. Repeated exposure to media violence hurts children both immediately and sometimes years later. Hundreds of studies done over the past 60 years prove that children who watch significant amounts of television and movie violence are more likely to exhibit aggressive behaviors and attitudes, and to believe that violence is the best way to solve problems.



Media violence:

- Makes violence and aggression seem glamorous
- Provides children with violent heroes to follow
- Creates worries and fears causing children to believe their world is less safe
- Makes children much more accepting of real life violence and less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others
- Increases a desire to see more violence in entertainment and in real life
- Causes children to view violence as an acceptable way to settle conflicts

What you can do:

- Monitor and control what your child watches and listens to. Draw up rules defining what kinds of media are acceptable, and what kinds are not. Talk to your children about what makes good media and explain why you have made these rules.
- Help children pick entertainment with a good message.
- Pull the plug on too much TV watching. Set a daily time limit on how much your child watches (including television, computer and video games). Pediatricians say children should not spend any more than two hours a day watching TV or playing video games.
- Encourage children to find other physical or educational activities to decrease the amount of time they spend watching TV and music videos and playing video games.

Section IV:

- Turn media time into family time. Watch television as a family and talk about what you are watching. Keep entertainment media out of children's bedrooms where you cannot see it.
- Teach your child that while media violence may seem exciting to watch, it can be very bad for them.



Share your rules

about TV and video games with babysitters and your child's other caregivers so that your child will not be exposed to media violence when you are not at home.

Did you know?

- American children ages 2-17 watch television on average almost 25 hours per week or 3 ½ hours a day. Almost one in five watch more than 44 hours of TV each week.
- Children spend more time watching television than any other activity except sleeping.
- Television is the top after- school activity chosen by children ages 6 to 17.
- A child views about 25 acts of violence a day on television. By age 18, that child will view 16,000 simulated murders and some 200,000 acts of violence. 28 percent of children's television shows contain four or more acts of violence.

Away from home

Many children see real-world violence much too often. Some, unfortunately, see it in their own homes, or it may be very common in their neighborhood or at school. Many have actually lost friends and even family members to violence, so they may react very differently from other children when they re-experience real violence in their lives. If your children witness violence in the neighborhood or at school, encourage them to talk about it. Try to get them to tell you how it made them feel. You might be surprised at what they tell you, and you may need to find someone else (teachers, counselors, pastors, etc.) who can help you and your child work through this difficult situation. Use this experience as an opportunity to talk to them about handling conflict, and about some things they might do differently in order to avoid becoming involved in a similar violent situation.

Violent behaviors encountered outside the home may include:

- *Arguments on the playground*
- *Bullying*
- *Name calling*
- *Fights or weapons at school*
- *Violence on TV or in video games*
- *Toys that involve violent play*
- *Dating violence*
- *Fights or weapons in the community*

Preventing children's access to guns

Guns and children can be deadly. Children may not be able to tell a real gun from a toy, or may think the gun is not loaded when it really is. Since guns can be found in about 40 percent of homes in America, there is a good chance guns are in at least one of the homes where your child visits. What can you do?

- Consider removing guns from the home when children are present.
- If you choose to keep a gun in the home, never leave it where a child can find it.
- Store firearms unloaded in locked areas with the ammunition kept in a separate location.
- Teach children about the dangers of guns and the importance of immediately alerting an adult if they see one. However do not rely on this lesson alone. Children are naturally curious and if a gun is not locked away they are likely to find it and play with it. It is very important to keep guns locked and secured if you choose to have them at all.

Warning Signs That Your Child May Be At Risk

In children, certain behaviors can indicate a potential problem. If you see any of the following warning signs, or have any concerns about your child's behavior, seek help from your child's doctor or school guidance counselor.

Warning Signs in the Pre-School Age Child:

- Often has temper tantrums or outbursts that last a long time or occur for no obvious reason
- Is extremely active, impulsive, and fearless
- Refuses to follow directions or listen to adults on a regular basis
- Engages in play that hurts other children
- Often witnesses violence at home or in the community

Warning Signs in the School Age Child:

- Does poorly in school, is easily frustrated, does not listen to adults or has trouble paying attention
- Has few friends or makes friends with children who are aggressive or unruly
- Gets into fights with other children and acts violently towards people or animals
- Reacts to disappointment, criticism, or teasing with intense anger, blame or threats of revenge
- Does not care about, or completely ignores, the feelings of others

Warning Signs in the Adolescent:

- Does poorly in school, skips classes, is suspended or drops out
- Joins a gang or begins to hang out with kids that destroy property, steal or fight
- Uses alcohol or drugs
- Ignores the rights of others and does not listen to people in authority
- Feels life has treated him unfairly
- Solves problems with threats or physical violence

Resources

We hope this brochure is useful to you as a parent or caregiver. Remember the daily experiences you provide for your child are very powerful, not only for preventing violence but also for increasing your child's chances of leading a happy, productive life. What we teach children today will have a major influence on who they become in the future and what they offer to society and their community.

Other nationally trusted resources for information on this topic include:

- The American Psychological Association “ACT Against Violence” Program
www.ACTagainstviolence.org
- The National Association for the Education of Young Children
www.naeyc.org
- The American Academy of Pediatrics “Connected Kids” Program
www.aap.org/connectedkids
- The CDC Positive Parenting Program
<http://www.cdc.gov/parents>
- The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control: Violence Prevention Program
www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention

This brochure is brought to you by the Carolinas Medical Center Violence Prevention Committee, the Hemby Pediatric Trauma Institute and the Carolinas Center for Injury Prevention.

About the authors:

David Jacobs, MD

Associate Medical Director
The E.H. "Sammy" Ross, Jr. Center
Carolinas Medical Center

Nora Raynor, RN, MSN

Pediatric Trauma Nurse Coordinator
The Hemby Pediatric Trauma Institute
Carolinas Medical Center

Janice Williams, MSEd

Director, Carolinas Center for Injury Prevention
Department of Emergency Medicine
Carolinas Medical Center





Carolinus Medical Center
Violence Prevention Committee

Uncompromising Excellence. Commitment to Care.