Violence

What is violence?

Violence is the act of severely hurting someone on purpose. It has become a major issue facing today's young adults. Teens between the ages of 12 years and 17 years are two times more likely than adults to be victims of violent crime.

What factors lead to violent behavior?

- Childhood history of abuse (sexual, mental, and physical)
- Witnessing violence at home, in the community, or in the media
- Use of alcohol and drugs
- Access to weapons
- Poor self-esteem and low levels of self-worth, causing increased need for attention or respect
- Peer pressure to participate in criminal activities from friends who commit crimes or who are members of gangs
- Poor school performance

There is never a simple answer to why someone commits an act of violence. Some people can be using violence to express and release feelings of anger or frustration. They think there are no answers or solutions to their problems. Violence is their way of releasing emotions. Sometimes, violence is used to influence others to get something they want. Other times, it can be used to get back at those who have hurt them or someone they care about.

What are the warning signs of violence?

- Loss of temper almost every day with frequent physical fighting
- Carrying a weapon at any time, having access to a weapon, or fascination with weapons
- Threatening others regularly
- Gang membership or desire to be in a gang
- Participation in more risk-taking behaviors, such as frequent use of drugs and alcohol
- Having a clear plan on how to commit an act of violence against someone and talking or writing about it
- Trouble controlling feelings of anger and always arguing with others
- Feeling disrespected or rejected by others constantly
- Not respecting the feelings or rights of others
- History of discipline problems in school or problems with the law
- Enjoying hurting animals

These are not all of the warning signs. These are the ones that, if several of them occur frequently, have the highest risk for violent behavior. It is important to recognize warning signs of violence in others and yourself. Then, you or the person can get help to deal with the problems that may lead to violence.

What should you do if you know someone who is likely to be violent?

- Keep yourself safe! Do not spend time alone with the person. If you are in a situation where you could get hurt, get to a safe place immediately and call 911.
- Tell someone you trust about your concerns to get help for that person. You can talk with a family member, teacher, coach, doctor, or a friend, but let someone know that you are worried about this person.
- If you are worried about being a victim of violence, tell someone in authority. They will be able to help and provide you with protection. Do not resort to violence or use a weapon to protect yourself.

What can you do to avoid becoming violent?

First of all, you need to remember that it is normal to get angry or frustrated when you feel like things have not gone the way you planned or if someone has upset you or let you down. It is okay to feel angry or frustrated, but it is not okay to express those feelings by being violent. You can control your feelings by remembering the following points:

- Learn to talk about your feelings with someone you trust.
- Learn to express your feelings calmly without losing your temper or fighting.
- Learn to listen to others to get their point of view and better understand where they are coming from.
- Learn how to work out your problems by looking for different answers and cooperating with others.
- When you are angry or frustrated, learn how to take a deep breath to relax, tell yourself to remain calm, and think about the consequences of your actions before you act.

Stop and think before acting, and remember the previously listed points. You will have a much more positive outcome to the situation.

For more information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Telephone: (202) 638-5577 or (800) 673-8444
Web: www.acog.org

American Medical Association
Telephone: (800) 621-8335
Web: www.ama-assn.org

American Psychological Association
Telephone: (202) 336-5500 or (800) 374-2721
Web: www.apa.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Youth Violence Prevention
Telephone: (800) CDC-INFO (232-4636)
Web: www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/YVP/default.htm

Focus Adolescent Services
Web: www.focusas.com

National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center
Telephone: (866) 723-3968
Web: www.safeyouth.org/scripts/index.asp

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
Telephone: 202-307-5911
Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse: (800) 851-3420
Web: www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov

Stop Bullying Now!
Health Resources Services Administration
Web: stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/index.asp?area=main

Prepared by the ACOG Committee on Adolescent Health Care. For more information, e-mail violence@acog.org or visit ACOG's Violence Against Women web site at www.acog.org. Click on Violence Against Women.
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