



## VIOLENCE: A FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS

Violence is the act of severely hurting someone on purpose. It has become a major issue facing today's young adults. Each year, far too many teens commit acts of violence and their victims are most often other teenagers. Although media coverage tends to focus on mass shootings like those at Columbine High School and Virginia Tech, youth violence actually includes a range of activities, such as bullying, threatening remarks, physical fights, assaults with or without a weapon, gang violence, and suicide.

### Why should you be worried about youth violence?

The statistics show that too many youth continue to harm others, continue to carry weapons, and are becoming victims

- Teens between the ages of 12 years and 17 years are two times more likely than adults (aged 18 years or older) to be a victim of violent crime.
- With teen victims, 50% are between the ages of 15 years and 17 years.
- The 2007 National Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey listed the following results:
  - 6% of high school students reported carrying a weapon (eg, gun, knife, or club) on school property
  - 8% reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property one or more times
  - 12% had been in a physical fight on school property one or more times
  - 6% had missed one or more days of school because they felt unsafe at school or when traveling to or from school in the past 30 days preceding the survey

### What are risk factors for teenagers who engage in violent behavior?

Research has shown that there are many different factors that increase the risk for and cause violent behavior in teens. The more factors that are present, the greater the likelihood of becoming involved in or committing an act of violence. Risk factors include the following items:

- Being a victim of physical, sexual, and mental abuse
- Exposure to violence in the home, community, or media
- Use of alcohol and drugs
- Access to weapons and presence of firearms in the home
- Combination of stressful family and socioeconomic factors (poverty or low-income, unemployment, marital stress or breakup, single parenting, and loss of support from extended family)
- Untreated mental illness
- 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

### Are there any warning signs?

Violence is not taught, it is learned from a person's experiences and environment. One of the ways to prevent violence is to be able to recognize warning signs of violence. If you see these immediate warning signs, violence is a serious possibility, and you need to get help immediately for your teen.

- Threats of violence, either verbal or written
- Loss of temper on a daily basis, including frequent physical fighting and uncontrollable angry outbursts
- Access to guns or other weapons and bringing weapons to school
- Increase in risk-taking behavior
- Increase in use of drugs and alcohol
- Enjoying hurting animals





### If you see these chronic warning signs over time, the potential for violence exists and your teenager needs help as soon as possible.

- A history of violent or aggressive behavior
- A history of alcohol and drug abuse
- Gang membership or strong desire to be in a gang
- Fascination with and access to weapons
- Preoccupation with violence through media, video games, and Internet web sites
- Untreated mental illness
- Threatening others regularly
- Failing to acknowledge the feelings or rights of others
- Trouble controlling feelings like anger
- Withdrawal from friends, family, and usual activities
- Feeling rejected, alone, and constantly disrespected
- Poor school performance
- Being a victim of bullying
- History of disciplinary problems or frequent problems with the law
- History of vandalism, destruction of other's property, and setting fires

Typically, the greater the number of these chronic warning signs, the greater the risk. It is important to realize that many children exhibit these chronic warning signs over time and never resort to violence. That is why it is recommended that you get help for your teen as soon as possible so a professional can address these issues to reduce the risk of violence in the future.

### What should you do?

- If you are concerned about your teen possibly committing a violent act, and she is exhibiting a number of immediate warning signs, get help quickly.
- As a precaution, make sure she does not have access to weapons and remove other dangerous materials or objects from your home.
- In an emergency situation or if your teen refuses help, contact local police for assistance or take your teen to the nearest emergency room for evaluation.
- Evaluation for mental illness and treatment may be recommended.

- If your teen is exhibiting a number of chronic warning signs, you need to arrange for her to be seen by a mental health professional experienced in working with teens and their families. The goals of treatment focus on helping the teen to
  - Learn how to control their anger.
  - Express anger and frustrations in appropriate ways.
  - Be responsible for her actions.
  - Accept consequences.

### What can you do to prevent youth violence?

As parents, you want to feel secure in the knowledge that your children and their friends will be safe from harm when they go about their daily activities, such as attending school, shopping at the mall, or participating in sports. You can play a central role in preventing youth violence, not just in your own children's lives but also in the lives of children in communities across the nation. Some recommendations are listed as follows:

- Give your teen consistent love and attention. Every teen needs a strong, loving, relationship with a parent or other adult to feel safe and secure and to develop a sense of trust.
- Communicate openly with your teen and encourage her to talk about all aspects of her life. You should show genuine interest in her school and social activities as well as her interests and concerns. Listen respectfully and solicit her opinions. Then, if a problem or crisis arises, she will be more likely to come to you.
- Set clear standards for your teen's behavior and be consistent about rules and discipline. Involve your teen in the setting of rules whenever possible and discuss the reasons for rules with her. Make sure she understands what you expect and the consequences for disobedience, and then enforce rules consistently.
- Make sure your teen is properly supervised. Insist on knowing where she is at all times and who her friends are. Get to know your teen's teachers, her friends' parents, and other people involved in her life. Encourage your teen to participate in supervised after-school activities, such as sports teams, tutoring programs, or organized recreation.
- Promote peaceful resolutions to conflict by being a good role model. Deal with conflict at home calmly, considerately, and quickly, and manage your anger without violence. Talk with your teen about handling disagreements and help her learn how to examine and find nonaggressive solutions to problems.

- Talk to your teen about the negative consequences of drug, alcohol, and weapon use; gang participation; and violence. Explain in detail how getting involved with these activities can result in injury, jail, and even death. Also, try not to have weapons in the house. If they are in the house, make sure that all weapons are kept out of the reach of teens.
- Try to limit your teen's exposure to violence in the media. Monitor the programs she watches, the music she listens to, and the video games she plays. Take time to watch television programs with her and discuss any violence with her. Is the violence realistic? What would be the real-life consequences of such violence?
- Try to limit your teen's exposure to violence in the home or community. Work toward making your home a safe, nonviolent place, and always discourage violent behavior or hostile, aggressive arguments between family members. If the people in your home physically or verbally hurt and abuse each other, get help from a psychologist or counselor in your community. If your teen is exposed to violence in the street, at school, or at home, she may need help in dealing with these frightening experiences. A psychologist, a counselor at school, and a member of the clergy are among those who can help her cope with her feelings.
- Take the initiative to make your school and community safer. Join up with other parents, through school and neighborhood associations, religious organizations, civic groups, and youth activity groups. Talk together about your concerns regarding youth in the community, including issues related to alcohol, drugs, and violence and share your common parenting concerns. Support the development and implementation of school and community plans to address the needs of youth.
- Remember, violence can be prevented. The earlier we recognize and respond to situations where violence is learned or occurs, the better we can help, educate, and protect our teens. There are many resources to help you learn more about how to prevent violence, the warning signs, and ways to help you and your teen learn to prevent youth violence.

## 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](http://www.acog.org)

### **American Medical Association**

Telephone: (800) 621-8335

Web: [www.ama-assn.org](http://www.ama-assn.org)

### **American Psychological Association**

Telephone: (202) 336-5500 or (800) 374-2721

<http://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](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/YVP/default.htm)

### **Focus Adolescent Services**

Web: [www.focusas.com](http://www.focusas.com)

### **National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center**

Telephone: (866) 723-3968

Web: [www.safeyouth.org/scripts/index.asp](http://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](http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov)

