

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

A report released earlier this month again confirmed 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.

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