



Protecting students from violence

For many students, school is the safest place they know, since it keeps them away from violence sometimes found in the community at large. However, violence can still erupt in the classroom and hallway, on the playground, on the bus or on the way to school.

Just the threat of violence can interfere with a child's emotional and intellectual development.

Students can be protected from violence with help from their parents, teachers, coaches and other adults.

Strategies

If you're a parent, coach, scout leader or other adult working with children, use the strategies listed below to protect children in your care.

- Talk to children. Get to know them. Find out their hobbies, their activities, their hopes, their fears.
- Be observant. Even if you flat-out ask, children usually won't tell you if they're in trouble or if they know of others in trouble. Most students think adults can't help them.
- Look for signs of trouble: Torn clothing, withdrawal, loss of interest in studies or hobbies, arriving early to school, leaving late. Ask students about any signs you see. Offer to help - confidentially. Refer them to a safe shelter or a counselor.
- If you're an adult in charge, show by example how to solve problems peacefully, without name-calling, threats or violence.
- Use your authority to establish rules, such as no hitting, no hitting back. Teach children to say, "I'm sorry."
- Don't let your children wear gang colors or symbols in school.
- Young children need your help to cope with violence they may witness. Through play, they can work through problems. Play "pretend" with them. Ask what they would do if they were in a frightening situation. Help them find solutions to possible problems.
- Encourage students to tell school authorities about dangerous activities – guns, knives, or other weapons in school; drugs; a fight planned for the weekend. Adults should talk to students, promise confidentiality (and deliver confidentiality) – and do so frequently. Find out from the principal and police how to handle such reports.
- Incorporate violence prevention and conflict resolution into activities. If kids are working on an art project at home or in a club, ask them to address one aspect of violence prevention. (What can parents do

to stop violence? What can kids do? What can teachers do? What is the cause of teen violence?) If it's a skit or play, ask the students to base a performance on conflict or conflict resolution. Use kids to reach other kids.

- Offer contests for essays, posters, songs, poetry, photos or speeches with a violence prevention theme.
- Involve other parents and adults. Ask them to help judge contests, to monitor activities, to supervise events.
- Do your part and volunteer to offer a wide variety of after-school activities to keep kids safe in a supervised setting. Offer to provide supervision so students can take part in recreational basketball or have access to the workout room. Arrange tutoring, or sponsor clubs. Ask other adults to help. Many have expertise and would be willing to share it with interested students.

When special help is needed

Prevention is the best protection for students, but sometimes, they're affected by violence anyway. If that's the case, arrange for counseling for the student. Such intervention is needed if any of the following occurs.

- Children witness violence.
- A funeral of a friend takes place.
- A student is frequently the bully or the victim in fights.
- Students' drawings, stories, songs or everyday play depict violence.

Where to get help

Talk to a school counselor or a member of the clergy. Or call Crisis Services, at (810) 257-3740 or toll free at (877) 346-3648, where a counselor is always available. TTY users call (810) 232-6310. © www.genhs.org