

TEEN TURNING POINTS



Teen violence

Just as teen violence occurs in the community, it also occurs in school. Students bring their own problems and methods of dealing with conflict with them. To be safe in school, teens may need extra help from adults.

During the teen years, children learn to be more independent. They may talk less to their parents and other adults as a way of learning to handle things by themselves. Parents need to let the process continue but be aware of what's happening in their teen's life. And they need to keep their teens safe, especially when adults aren't around.

Choose a calm time to talk to your teens about safety. And don't bring up other items – such as chores or broken rules – during this conversation. Save those for another conversation. These tips can help you keep your teen safe.

Dealing with anger

Since teens today more often carry weapons than in past generations, anger can quickly turn into violence. It can result in serious injury or death.

It's important that your teen learn to show anger in a way that doesn't hurt others and doesn't provoke violence.

How does your teenager show anger? Does he or she yell, threaten or hit? If so, talk to him or her about other ways to handle it. Suggest that he or she:

- Talk to someone or write a letter.
- Cool off by listening to music or exercising.
- Throw pillows or items that can't be broken.
- Count to 10.
- Take a bath.
- Play basketball.

As a parent, do a self-check. How do you handle anger? You are an important role model for your teens.

If caught in a violent situation ...

No matter how well your teens deal with anger, they may still find themselves in a violent situation. Talk to them about this possibility. Ask them how they would handle it.

Offer these suggestions:

- Stay in control. Don't let anyone force you into violence.
- Breathe deeply. Move slowly. Stay calm.
- Keep cool. Keep your voice low and calm.
- Put yourself in the other person's shoes. Try to understand what he or she wants, thinks and feels. It makes it easier to work things out and stand up for yourself if you can do this.

How to work things out

If your teen can remain calm in the face of violence, he or she can use certain strategies to avoid injury. Talk to your teen about the following strategies to diffuse a potentially violent situation.

Give the other person a way out. Remember that they want to save face. Don't back them into a corner.

- **Keep it light.** The less serious, the less likelihood of a fight. Be a joker, or point out that it isn't worth fighting about.

- **Apologize or excuse yourself.** Saying "sorry" or "excuse me" doesn't mean you're wrong and the other person is right. It's a way to diffuse an argument or fight.

Parents can help

- Parents can't watch over their teen-agers every minute of the day. But they can take precautions to keep their teens safe even when adults aren't around. Try these suggestions:
- Don't let your kids wear known gang colors on clothing. It could get them hurt or killed if they're in certain situations.
- Make sure your kids don't use alcohol or drugs. Violence is more likely to occur in these circumstances.
- Make sure your kids stay away from people who are using drugs or alcohol. Who do they "hang" with? Find out.
- Make sure your teens and their friends feel welcome at home. If kids don't feel safe and wanted at home, they'll find someplace else to go – and the other place may not be safe.
- Pay attention to your teen's emotions. Adolescence is hard for parents and teens. If your teen is hard to live with right now, remember that it's probably temporary. Work harder at making them feel welcome at home. Help them see their confusion/anger/unhappiness as part of growing up. Let them know that you remember it, too.
- Hug your teen-agers. They may resist this, but do it anyway. Touch is important, and they need to know that you love them even when they're not behaving their best.
- Negotiate rules, but make sure you have rules – and stick to them. Your teen will obey the rules more closely if he or she had some say in them.

Where to get help

Remember that teen-agers are trying to assert their independence but still need guidance to keep them safe. If you need more advice, 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. ©

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