

10 Things You Can Do to Prevent Violence in Your School Community

Discussing Hate and Violence with Children

1. Talk to Your Children

Keeping the lines of communication open with your children and teens is an important step to keeping involved in their schoolwork, friends, and activities. Ask open-ended questions and use phrases such as "tell me more" and "what do you think?" Phrases like these show your children that you are listening and that you want to hear more about their opinions, ideas, and how they view the world. Start important discussions with your children—about violence, smoking, drugs, sex, drinking, death—even if the topics are difficult or embarrassing. Don't wait for your children or teens to come to you.

2. Set Clear Rules and Limits for Your Children

Children need clearly defined rules and limits set for them so that they know what is expected of them and the consequences for not complying. When setting family rules and limits, be sure children understand the purpose behind the rules and be consistent in enforcing them.

Discipline is more effective if children have been involved in establishing the rules and, oftentimes, in deciding the consequences. Remember to be fair and flexible—as your children grow older, they become ready for expanded rights and changes in rules and limits. Show your children through your actions how to adhere to rules and regulations, be responsible, have empathy toward others, control anger, and manage stress.

3. Know the Warning Signs

Knowing what's normal behavior for your son or daughter can help you recognize even small changes in behavior and give you an early warning that something is troubling your child. Sudden changes—from subtle to dramatic—should alert parents to potential problems. These could include withdrawal from friends, decline in grades, abruptly quitting sports or clubs the child had previously enjoyed, sleep disruptions, eating problems, evasiveness, lying, and chronic physical complaints (stomachache or headaches).

4. Don't Be Afraid to Parent; Know When to Intervene

Parents need to step in and intervene when children exhibit behavior or attitudes that could potentially harm them or others. And you don't have to deal with problems alone—the most effective interventions have parent, school, and health professionals working together to provide ongoing monitoring and support.

5. Stay Involved in Your Child's School

Show your children you believe education is important and that you want your children to do their best in school by being involved in their education. Get to know your child's teachers and help them get to know you and your child. Communicate with your child's teachers throughout the school year, not just when problems arise. Stay informed of school events, class projects, and homework assignments. Attend all parent orientation activities and parent-teacher conferences. Volunteer to assist with school functions and join your local PTA. Help your children seek a balance between schoolwork and outside activities. Parents also need to support school rules and goals.

6. Join Your PTA or a Violence Prevention Coalition

According to the National Crime Prevention Council, the crime rate can decrease by as much as 30 percent when a violence prevention initiative is a community-wide effort. All parents, students, school staff, and members of the community need to be a part of creating safe school environments for our children. Many PTAs and other school-based groups are working to identify the problems and causes of school violence and possible solutions for violence prevention.

7. Help to Organize a Community Violence Prevention Forum

Parents, school officials, and community members working together can be the most effective way to prevent violence in our schools.

8. Help Develop A School Violence Prevention and Response Plan

School communities that have violence prevention plans and crisis management teams in place are more prepared to identify and avert potential problems and to know what to do when a crisis happens. The most effective violence prevention and response plans are developed in cooperation with school and health officials, parents, and community members. These plans include descriptions of school safety policies, early warning signs, intervention strategies, emergency response plans, and post-crisis procedures.

9. Know How to Deal With the Media in a Crisis

Good public relations and media relations start with understanding how the media works and what they expect from organization's that issue press releases, hold press conferences, and distribute media kits.

10. Work to Influence Lawmakers

Writing an editorial for the local newspaper, holding a petition drive, speaking before a school board meeting, or sending a letter to your legislator can be effective ways to voice your opinion and gain support from decision makers for violence prevention programs in your community. Working with other concerned parents, teachers, and community members, you can influence local, state and even federal decisions that affect the education, safety, and well-being of our children.