

Tips for Parents: Violent Kids

School violence isn't new. We all grew up having to deal with the school bully. Playground fights and “trash talking” have been with us for years. What is new is that the methods students are choosing to deal with their problems are increasingly violent.

- More and more students aren't just mouthing off to fellow students, they are now verbally abusing teachers.
- Fighting has increased. In particular, fighting among girls has increased over 50 percent.
- Fistfights are increasingly becoming gunfights.

Why is this happening? Speculations abound regarding what makes a kid act violently. Situations that cause violence in one child may not affect other children in the same way. Experts say there are a number of factors that can contribute to school violence, but they are not *predictors* of violent behavior:

- Lack of parental involvement in a child's life
- Violence in the home
- Consumption of large amounts of violent media such as video games, television, and movies
- Anti-social behavior
- Living in a high crime, poverty stricken area
- Poor academic success

What are schools doing? Media coverage of violence in schools has brought the issue to the attention of school administrators across the country. Parents are demanding a safe learning environment for their children and some schools have responded by installing metal detectors and providing a police presence, especially in inner-city schools. The consequence of this high security approach is that kids often resolve their violent issues elsewhere.

A more effective approach

The child exhibiting violent behavior is someone's baby; maybe yours. As parents, the best place to start is with our own children:

Be actively involved in your child's education. This involvement should begin in kindergarten and continue through your child's academic career. By doing so, you are sending a powerful message about what's important early in life. Instilling good values at an early age teaches children that violence is wrong.

Spend quality time with your children. Find out about events that take place in school. Do your children feel safe? Are their fears of violence standing in their way of learning? Build a

sense of trust with your children so that communication remains open between you. This way, if your children have concerns, they will feel free to share them with you. As a result, you will be able to discuss these issues with school officials.

Serve as a role model. Many children imitate their parents' behavior. Therefore, parents should speak to one another and to their children in a polite, respectful manner. Emphasize the importance of tolerance. Teaching children to respect and appreciate the differences in other students helps foster better interpersonal skills.

Become involved in your school's parent-teacher organization. Discuss your concerns with other parents and teachers. Share your opinions with one another about what the school should do to help solve the problem. Discuss what you can do as parents. The more support you have, the more likely your message will be heard by school officials.

Talk to administrators. Contact your child's principal and discuss your concerns. Suggest the need to develop a school-wide system of conflict resolution. Find out if negotiation techniques are taught throughout the curriculum.

Influences from entertainment

Monitor the programs your children watch. Set limits about which programs they can and can not view. Talk to your children about the violence they see on television and in the movies. Explain to them that violence in entertainment shows is not reality. Because violence is highly glamorized in the media, it is important for parents to play an active role in de-glamorizing the idea of violence.

Contact media sources. Share your concerns with local stations, national networks, and movie production companies. Let them know, by letter or phone call, what you think they need to do about violence in the media.

For more information:

Web links:

<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/crimeindicators/>

<http://www.keepschoolssafe.org/>

<http://www.ncdjdp.org/cpsv/>

<http://www.safeyouth.org>

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