

CHOOSE

Recognizing and Preventing Youth Violence

PEACE



STOP

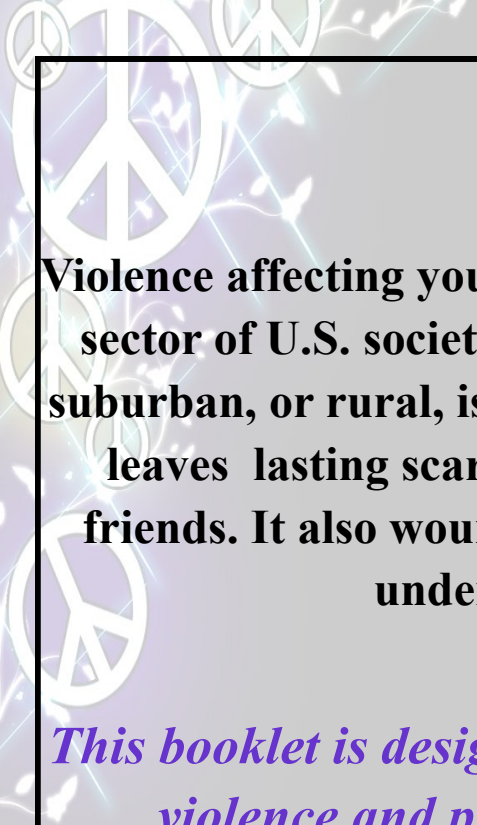
Parent Guide

VIOLENCE



Community members have begun a movement to create a violence free Broward County by informing, engaging and empowering the entire Broward community to choose peace and stop violence. This effort will bring together communities, organizations, and community-wide structures already in place to identify and implement proven strategies that will reduce youth violence.





Violence affecting youth is a high-visibility, high-priority concern in every sector of U.S. society. No community, whether affluent or poor, urban, suburban, or rural, is immune from its devastating effects. This epidemic leaves lasting scars on victims, perpetrators, and their families and friends. It also wounded entire communities and, in ways not yet fully understood, the United States as a whole.

This booklet is designed to help parents recognize the signs of youth violence and provides tips on how to talk to their children.

Source of Information:

(Recognizing and Preventing Youth Violence: www.massmed.org/)



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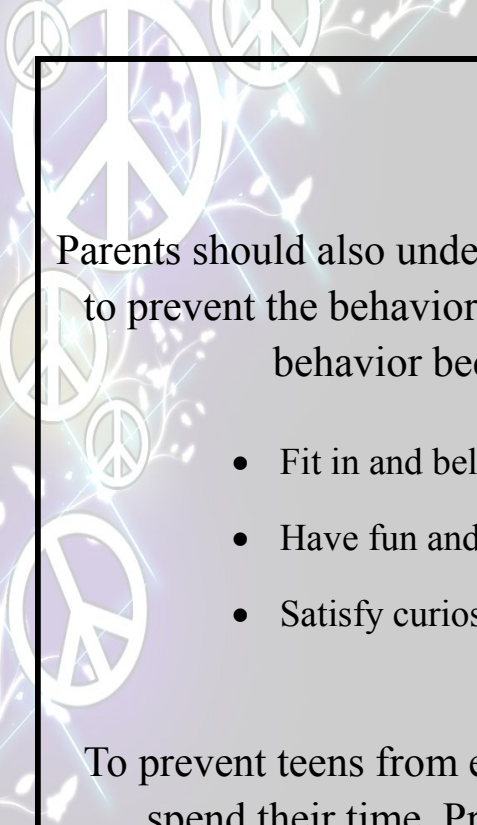


How can parents protect their children from **violence**?

Ideally, we'd like to shield our children from exposure to violence but there is no "one size fits all" answer here. Factors to consider include the age of the child, what he or she has already been exposed to, and what his or her concerns are. Some kids will come out and ask questions, and adults should answer them as honestly as is appropriate given their age.

Parents can use the tips below to start conversations with teens about violence.

- Find time to speak with teens every day, even if only for few minutes. Ask teens open-ended questions; this encourages conversation.
- Talk with teens about staying safe; remind them of previous conversations you have had concerning violence prevention.
- Let teens know about your expectations for their behaviors, and make sure that you are a positive role model.
- Learn about pertinent issues and warning signs of harmful behaviors. Share your concerns with your teens and ask questions about their lives.



Parents should also understand why teens experiment with harmful behaviors, in order to prevent the behaviors from occurring. Teens may become involved in delinquent behavior because they think that doing so will allow them to:

- Fit in and belong,
- Have fun and feel good,
- Satisfy curiosity,
- Take risks,
- Imitate older people,
- Express independence.

To prevent teens from engaging in harmful activities, discuss new ways for them to spend their time. Provide opportunities for positive activities and encourage involvement in sports, volunteering, etc.



When Children Witness **Violence**

Children see, hear, and remember more than adults think they do. When children witness violence in the home, they are often profoundly affected by it.

A child's overall environment provides the most important information regarding the risk for involvement in violence. Effective parenting practices and a warm family environment teach early childhood behaviors that help children become nonviolent problem solvers.

Parents can ask their children if their friends are pressuring them to do something just because others are doing it (or say they are). The pressure to do what others are doing can be powerful and hard to resist. Peer pressure can influence a person to do something that is relatively harmless — or something that has more serious consequences.



Here are 6 strategies that can help your child stand up to peer pressure:

A.S.S.E.R.T.

A – *Assert yourself with physical confidence.* Teach your child to stand up for his beliefs and not back down by using confident posture: stand tall with feet slightly apart, head high, and look the person straight in the eye.

S – *Say no firmly.* Once your child decides not to do what is being asked, stress that he must say no to the person using a friendly but firm and determined voice and then not give in. Remind your child that his job is not to try changing the other person's mind, but to keep himself out of trouble and follow his beliefs.

S – *Say goodbye* and leave.

Emphasize that standing up to a friend isn't easy. Stress that he may face intimidation, teasing, or rejection for his choice, but that's what courage is all about. Sometimes the best option is to walk away from the situation.

Set up a policy with your kid that whenever he feels unsafe in a situation, he should phone, and you agree to pick them up with no questions asked.

E – *Give a reasonable excuse.* Your child could give the peer an excuse: "I have homework," or "I promised my friend I'd come by." Tell your kids it's okay to use you as an excuse: "My mom will ground me for life if I did that!"

R – *Repeat your decision.* Tell your child it's sometimes helpful to repeat his decision several times like a broken record: "No, it's not right," "No, it's not right." It makes him sound assertive and helps him not back down from his stand.

T – *Tell reasons.* Thinking about the possible consequences of the choice helps strengthen your child's convictions not to proceed with what they're asked to do. So tell your child to give the person the reason he's saying no: "It's illegal," "I'll be grounded," or "I could get hurt."

Pulling the Plug on TV **Violence**



Children learn both good and bad habits from their TV heroes. This page discusses how violence seen on television affects children.

According to an article in *Pediatrics*, children see over 12,000 violent acts per year on TV. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a maximum of two hours a day of total screen time. Talk openly about your objections to viewing violence with youth, and encourage age-appropriate alternatives such as the following:

- After-school activities — playing with friends, organized sports, reading
- Listening to music or writing in a diary
- Playing a musical instrument
- Mentoring programs



Violence-Related History

The F.I.S.T.S. strategy helps parents identify factors that place youth at risk for involvement in violence and provides specific tips for counseling.

Parents can discuss with children strategies for avoiding or resolving interpersonal conflicts with friends and peers as well as what constitutes a safe dating relationship. Using the FISTS mnemonic to ask about ***Fighting, Injuries, Sex, Threats and Self-Defense*** provides the basis for an assessment of an adolescent's risk for involvement in violence.

F.I.S.T.S: Fighting — Injuries — Sex — Threats — Self-Defense

Use the questions below to determine if your child is at risk of becoming involved in violent situations at home, in school, or in the neighborhood:

Fighting-

- How many fights have you been in during the past year?
- When was your last fight?

Injuries-

- Have you ever been injured in a fight?
- Have you ever injured someone else in a fight?

Sex-

- Has your partner ever hit you?
- Have you ever hit (hurt) your partner?
- Have you ever been forced to have sex against your will?

- Do you think that couples can stay in love when one partner makes the other one afraid?

Threats-

- Has someone carrying a weapon ever threatened you?
- What happened?
- Has anything changed since then to make you feel safer?

Self-Defense-

- What do you do if someone tries to pick a fight with you?
- Have you ever carried a weapon in self-defense?



The next three pages will help you understand the answers your child has given.

Low-Risk Youth

- Has not been in a fight in the past year
 - Does not report use of drugs
 - Is passing courses in school
 - Does not carry weapons
- **Intervention & Prevention Ideas**
 - Reward good behavior
- Ask about how the teen resolves conflicts while successfully avoiding fights



Moderate-Risk Youth

- Talks about recent fights
- Is struggling with school work

Intervention & Prevention Ideas

- Take time to discuss the most recent fight and the kinds of strategies that can be used to de-escalate future situations. This is the opportunity to discuss anger management strategies and offer information about community resources.
- Consider referring your child to a counselor to further discuss the issues and risky behaviors identified.
- With the teen's consent (although consent is not required), consider discussing intervention ideas with professionals.



High-Risk Youth

- Has been in more than four physical fights in a year
 - Is failing or dropping out of school
 - Reports drug use

Intervention & Prevention Ideas

- Talk about the recent fights and discuss ways to avoid confrontations in the future.
 - These may include anger management strategies, leaving a dangerous group of friends, and learning to walk away.
 - Youth at high risk may require intervention. Referrals to the appropriate mental health or social service resources may be required.



Recognizing gang activity in your child's behavior

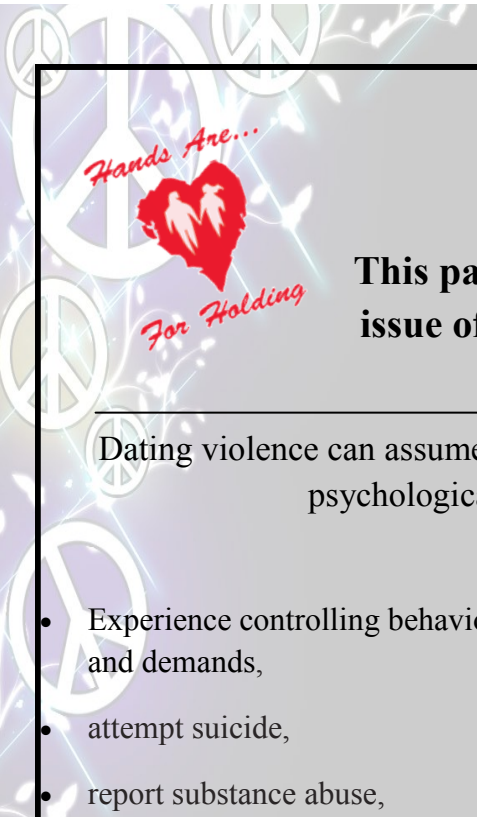
If you think your child's school or social group is immune from gang activity, think again.

A youth gang is a group of people who get together on a regular basis to carry out violent, illegal or anti-social activities, including intimidation, assault, vandalism, burglary and even murder. Gang members generally tend to be male teenagers, but they can also be female and even as young as 7 years old.

Look for these signs that may indicate a child may be involved with a gang:

- The child begins hanging out with a new group of friends.
- There's a marked change in the child's habits or personality.
- You find evidence of or suspect drug or alcohol abuse.
- The child frequently shows signs of being bruised or injured.
- You observe the child using unusual hand signs, nicknames or street language.
- The child is carrying guns, knives or other weapons.
- You observe strange symbols or graffiti on notebooks and folders.
- The child withdraws from family members or friends.
- Grades fall and/or incidents requiring discipline become more frequent.
- The child obtains money without your knowledge.
- The child dresses in the same color clothing every day or wears tattoos, unusual jewelry, hairstyles, or clothing that could identify a particular gang.

If you suspect gang involvement, contact your school's resource officer, the school's administration or speak with a BSO deputy at (954) 321-4100.



Teen Dating Violence



This page offers a comprehensive introduction to the issue of teen dating violence and the role that parents can play in its prevention.

Dating violence can assume a number of forms that include physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, and psychological violence. **Make yourself aware of the warning signs.**

Teens:

- Experience controlling behavior and demands,
- attempt suicide,
- report substance abuse,
- become pregnant,
- experience forced sex,
- ride in a car with a drunk driver,
- develop eating disorders,
- demonstrate risky sexual behaviors (including those with same gender partners),
- use illicit drugs,
- show increased depression,
- show an increase in antisocial behaviors such as the use of violence against others.

If your child is a victim of abuse, seek help. Contact **the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline at 1-866-331-9474** (1-866-331-8453 for the hearing impaired) or online at www.loveisrespect.org. They offer immediate, confidential assistance 24/7 where you can find support as well as referrals to local resources in your hometown to provide you with the help that you need.



Street **Violence** — Your Child Has Been

Hurt — What You Can Do?

This page is designed to help parents use an injury as an opportunity to prevent future — and possibly more serious — injuries.

Ask questions. Find out if the fight is over. The following questions may help to get this current situation resolved:

- Is the conflict settled?
- Are you thinking about revenge?

Programs that offer job training, recreation opportunities, and spiritual/religious support, play an important role as well. Since youth are at a substantial risk for a recurrent violence-related injury there are programs that teach skills such as:

- conflict resolution
- anger management
- sensitivity



Protecting Your Child From **Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse symptoms to look for:

Sexual abuse is most often committed by a trusted adult — an immediate or extended family member, family friend, or a member of the child’s school, church, or athletic team community.

Sexually abused children may show nonspecific symptoms such as:

- changes in sleep patterns
- weight gain
- provocative behavior
- fear of a physical exam
- sexualized play
- precocious knowledge of sexual activity
- act fearful of previously routine contacts, such as a hug

If you think your child may have been sexually abused, it is okay to talk to your child about it. It is important to remain calm in speaking to children who may have been sexually abused. You can ask children directly if anyone has touched their bodies in a way that they did not like or was forced to do things that they did not want to do. If you are concerned about talking to your child about abuse, you might want to seek help from your child’s pediatrician or a mental health provider who is knowledgeable about child sexual abuse.



Protect your children against abduction

It's a sad fact that thousands of children are reported missing each year. Know how to protect your children against abduction by strangers.

Teach your children to:

- never leave home without your permission. Very small children should play only in areas away from the street, such as a backyard, or in a play area supervised by a responsible adult.
- never wander off, to avoid lonely places, and to avoid shortcuts through alleys or deserted areas. They are safer walking or playing with friends.
- come straight home from school unless you have made other arrangements.
- never enter anyone's home without your approval.
- scream, run away and tell you or a trusted adult if anyone attempts to touch or grab them, or if a stranger offers them a ride.
- never give any information over the telephone including their name and address, or indicate they are alone.
- keep doors locked and admit only authorized people into the house.



Bullying — It's Not Okay

Ways to recognize if your child has been bullied.

- Comes home with damaged or missing clothing or other belongings
- Reports losing items such as electronics, clothing, or jewelry
- Has unexplained injuries
- Is very hungry after school from not eating their lunch
- Runs away from home
- Loses interest in visiting or talking with friends
- Is afraid of going to school
- or other activities with peers
- Often feels like they are not good enough
- Suddenly has fewer friends
- Avoids certain places.

Stay calm and avoid over-reacting. Tell your child that you are confident about providing help and support and that you will do whatever is necessary to stop the bullying. This is a time to show unconditional love and acceptance. If there has been a physical attack, or threat of one, the school should be contacted before the young person returns to class. Your child should not be encouraged to retaliate, as there may be a risk of injury especially if there is a gang involved. Report the incident to the police, particularly if the assault took place outside the school grounds.

Resources:

Get Connected. Get Answers.
Call:

2-1-1 Broward

954-537-0211

(Available 24 hrs)

For Teen Dating Violence:

www.LoveIsRespect.org

Hotline:

1-866-331-9474

Domestic Violence Hotline:

1-800-500-1119

To report a case of child abuse,
call the Florida Child Abuse
Hotline:

1-800-96-ABUSE

(1-800-962-2873)

Broward Sheriff's Office
Stranger Danger Program

954-321-4100

(Ages 4 and older)

To report bullying call:

Broward Public School District's
Emergency Hotline:

754-321-0911

www.TeenHelp.com

www.troubledteensinfo.com

www.safeyouth.gov

www.futureswithoutviolence.org

www.thesafespace.org

www.teencentral.net



Notes:



Nancy Vaniman

Choose Peace / Stop Violence

An initiative of Project Bridge

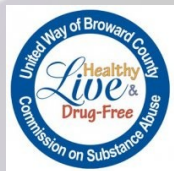
“Creating Partnerships for Safe, Healthy Schools and Communities”



For more information please visit:



www.unitedwaybroward.org



www.drugfreebroward.org



www.teenspace211.org



www.browardchd.org



www.cscbroward.org



www.sheriff.org



www.dcf.state.fl.us



www.browardprevention.org



www.djj.state.fl.us



www.browardschools.com



www.mhs.net



www.broward.org