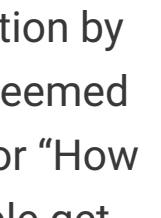


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How To Talk To Kids About Violence



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in the media, in our communities and even in our schools. Our kids are exposed to images and stories that are unavoidable and can be very frightening for them.

As parents, the best thing we can do to help our kids cope with violent issues is to be available to talk, give reliable and accurate information and instill our family values about the issues.

Here are some tips to help you talk to your kids so they can cope with violence.

Encourage your kids to talk about what they see and hear. Tune in to your child’s feelings and encourage them to discuss what they’ve seen and heard. You might initiate a conversation by saying “That TV show we just watched seemed pretty scary to me, what did you think?” or “How do you feel after watching so many people get injured? I feel very sorry for them, what about you?” and see where the conversation leads.

Your kids will feel better when they talk about their feelings. It lifts the burden of facing fears on their own.

If your child feels depressed, angry or persecuted, it is very important to reassure them that you love them and talk about their worries.

If your child has been violent or a victim of violence, provide them with a safe place to express their feelings.

Find out what your kids have heard at school. If needed, give them factual information to dispel any misconceptions.

Give information at age appropriate levels and put events into context. Explain that even though frightening things happen sometimes to people, most times people go about their day without any harm.

Limit exposure to violence. Research has proven that children who watch a lot of violence on TV, movies or video games feel less safe than those that don’t or it may desensitize them to violence.

Try to be involved with your kids and talk about the things you see and play together. For example, remind your kids that the heroes they see on TV such as Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger are acting a part. If they acted like that in real life they would end up in big trouble.

Let your child know your values, for example “Violence just isn’t funny to me. I know that games and movies are not real, but when people get seriously hurt in real life it is terribly sad for everyone involved”. Watching the news and movies together provides opportunities to reinforce the consequences of violence.

Ways to tone down the effects of violent messages are:

Limit TV viewing to appropriate programs;

Go on-line together and choose fun sites that are appropriate;

Supervise your child’s exposure to all forms of media;

If needed – install monitoring tools to block inappropriate material on the internet and TV;

Take notice of TV ratings provided for programs and movies and act accordingly.

Reassure your child. Kids who see or hear about violent acts can become anxious and fearful that a similar act may happen to them or a loved one.

Always reassure your child by telling them they are safe and lots of people are here to watch them. For example, you may reassure them by giving them options of what to do if they ever feel unsafe when they’re not at home. Like go to a trusted adult, a teacher or family friend.

Remind them that they can always tell you when they are afraid in any situation. Talk about the police and what a fantastic job they do at dealing with these sort of problems and keeping the community safe.

Provide a consistent and supportive environment to help reduce your kids fears and anxieties.

Stand firm. The values you wish to instill in your kids need to be clear and consistent. Don’t fall for the “everybody else does it” or “everyone else is allowed to watch it” trick. You need to explain to your kids why you do not allow violence in your home so they can accept your decision.

For example you might say “Your father and I don’t agree with the message that show sends. Watching violence is not enjoyable and we don’t tolerate it in our family”.

Let your kids know your standards. Talk to your kids about teasing and its limits. Let them know that teasing can be bullying and can go further than what you sometimes intend. Tell them that in your family you have zero tolerance for bullying or roughhousing.

If your child is violent towards another, put them on “time-out” or whatever disciplinary strategy you prefer. Once they are calm, ask them about why they have behaved ore reacted in that way. Together, work out a peaceful way using words to resolve problems without using violence.

Offer tools to cope with feelings. Suggest ways that your child could cope with feelings if they are prone to getting violent. Insist the importance of using words and not being physical! For example, you could say “When Jose takes your toy, you could first ask her nicely for it back. If that doesn’t work you could walk out of the room and begin playing with something else. Ignoring her might stop her next time ” or “Take a few deep breaths and come and chat to me about it, you will feel better if you talk about it”.

Talk about groups. When an appropriate time arises, discuss with your child why kids form gangs. They’re people who need to belong to a particular group and feel supported by others. Find out what they know about gangs. Use their stories to branch off into further discussion. You can talk about how these kids feel that it is cool to create hurt in numbers, but it is not.

Explain that the problem is, many kids in gangs end up getting more hurt themselves, even killed as they put themselves in dangerous situations. Wise kids choose friends who are fun to be with and care for each other.

Educate your kids. Give them options and prepare them for what to do if they are faced in situations where they feel unsafe. For example if they see a gun at a friend’s place or at school, to NEVER touch it and walk away. Tell an adult straight away as this will keep you and your friends safe.

If another child seems to be picking on your child, explain to them that bullies usually feel unhappy about something. Picking on others is a way they try to make themselves feel better, therefore they should realise that the bully has some problems to deal with.

Encourage your kids to not let a bully provoke them and not to get down to their level. Calmly stand tall and say something like “I’m not going to argue or fight with you”. Remind your kids that they don’t ever have to handle these types of situations on their own. You are there for them as support and can intervene if the situation becomes a problem.

Control your own behavior. Examine how you approach conflict and know that your child is learning from you and may model the same behaviors. Ask yourself – how do you settle an argument? When you’re angry, how do you deal with it? You must model the right behavior if you want your child to avoid being violent.

Seek support. If you feel as though you need more information and help, do seek support from your doctor, members of the community and other parents.

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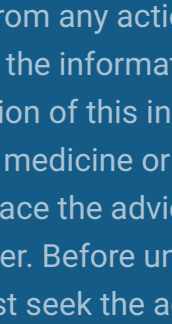
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