

Talking to Your Child About School Violence

You've probably heard some disturbing things about schools in America today. It's hard to miss the reports of student-led assaults on classmates. When you're concerned for your children's safety, how can you help them address *their* fears of being safe at school?

The facts on school violence

The U.S. Department of Justice reports that one out of every 10 public schools reported at least one serious violent crime from 1996 to 1997. Perhaps even more frightening, almost 1 million students took a gun to school in 1998, according to the Parents Resource Institute for Drug Education.

Despite such alarming figures, the American Medical Association maintains that children are rarely killed as a result of school violence when compared to the violence they are exposed to outside of school, in the home and community. School remains a safe place for your child.

Should I bring it up?

Regardless of any actual threat to your child's safety, he likely is aware of school violence and may fear for his safety. If you don't talk to him about it, he may rely on other sources for information, such as television, movies, the Internet or friends—sources that may not provide him with the facts or values that you can provide.

According to a recent survey of parents and children ages 10 to 15, more than 80 percent of parents talked to their children about violence and 93 percent of their kids were glad that they did. In most cases, parents began the discussions. And almost half of the children still wanted more information about how to handle potentially violent situations and what to do if someone brings a gun to school.

When should I bring it up?

If you're unsure of the right time to start a discussion about school violence, look for a real event to provide an opener. For instance, after watching a news report on school violence, ask your child how she feels about the issue. It's also important to talk about the subject more than once, giving your child time to think about her feelings between discussions.

If you have young children, start the habit of discussing these tough issues as early as possible. Studies show that children who start talking with their parents when they're young continue to do so when they're older, instead of relying so heavily on peers and other outside influences for answers.

What should I say?

If you're like many parents and feel you don't know what to say, seek help from your family doctor, member of the clergy, school or other parents. But don't worry about having all the answers—it's OK to admit that you don't know something. That provides a great opportunity to research the solution together.

Often your child just needs to share his concerns and isn't really looking for solid answers. Listen to your child's fears. He may share your own fears. Don't attempt to downplay them. Instead, discuss them honestly using language that your child will understand. Most importantly, assure him that you will do your very best to help keep him safe.

Sources:

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