

Helping Young People Cope

Battling Bullies *The VIRTUS® Programs*

It is sad to say, but children are likely to encounter bullies at some point in their lives. The best way to deter them, according to the National Association for the Education of Young Children, is to start early and teach children appropriate, assertive behavior. For example:

- Teach children to ask for things directly and respond directly to each other.
- Let children role-play assertive behavior (such as saying “no” to another child's unacceptable demands) using puppets or dolls.
- Teach children to say, “Stop doing that” and to stand up for themselves when they are being treated unfairly.
- Remind children that they can ignore routine teasing by turning their head or walking away, but encourage them to seek help in severe cases or if they are threatened physically.
- With young children, get involved if you see a situation deteriorating, and suggest ways for them to compromise or to express their feelings in an appropriate way.

How to help kids cope with school shooting news

School shootings seem to be in the news more often. Should parents talk to their children about these tragedies and the possibility of such an event happening at their own school? Will such discussions frighten children unnecessarily?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says it's natural for both kids and parents to worry about such events, and talking about them together can help children see the violence in a more balanced context. If a school shooting occurs and is in the news, give your children the opportunity to talk about it so they know their anxieties and fears are reasonable and understandable.

Keep abreast of what's going on with your children. If your children don't bring the subject up, then take care to pay attention to any changes in their behavior. Are they having trouble sleeping? Do they seem to be withdrawing? Are they behaving any differently as a result of the news or experience they've been exposed to? If you notice a change in their behavior, check in again in a week, and then again in a month. The best thing you can do is listen and stay open and understanding to whatever your children are experiencing emotionally.

It's also a good idea to stay in touch with other parents about any issues or stress your children may be experiencing. If your children seem worried about potential violence erupting in their own school, here are some warning signs that violence may indeed be on the horizon:

A young person...

- Heard of a peer who is threatening to bring a weapon to school.
- Know of a hit list at school or online.
- Are aware of disturbing essays or other writings by a peer.
- Know of another student's odd behavior or mood swings.
- Are worried about another student's difficulty controlling anger or handling conflict.
- Are aware of another student who is being bullied or isolated in some way.

According to the National School Security Technology Center—a federal program established in 1999, the same year as the Columbine High School shootings—most incidents of school violence occur in May. Mary Green, a security analyst for the center, says one of the most effective things a school can do to prevent such outbursts is to set up a hotline so that students can leave anonymous tips about potentially violent situations, such as another student threatening to bring a gun to school. “Parents need to talk to their children’s schools about setting up hotlines,” she says. While school shootings are a terrifying prospect, the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice says schools are the safest place for children—safer than the street, the mall, or even the home. “The chances of a child being killed at school are less than one in a million,” says the center.

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