



# Some Myths and Facts about Violence

*Tips on How  
You Can Help*





**MYTH** Most homicides result from crimes or drug dealing.

**FACT** According to the FBI, less than 40% of violent deaths are associated with another crime. Most violence, including homicide, results from arguments or conflicts between friends, acquaintances, lovers, and spouses.

**MYTH** Most violence is racially motivated.

**FACT** Most assaults and murders involve two people of the same race.

**MYTH** Carrying a gun gives protection.

**FACT** Carrying a weapon can result in a sense of boldness that leads to irrational behaviors. If another person sees the gun, he may draw and shoot first. Carrying a gun can give a false sense of protection; it may actually make a person less safe!

**MYTH** "I would be safer with a gun in my home because there is so much violence."

**FACT** A person with a gun at home is nearly three times more likely to be killed than a neighbor who doesn't have a gun. Shootings at home often occur when a friend or family member is mistaken for an intruder, when a fight between those living in the home gets out of control, or when a child finds a gun. All have potentially deadly consequences.

**MYTH** Young children don't use guns.

**FACT** Young children may not know the difference between toy guns and real guns. Their curiosity is stronger than their awareness of danger; they need protection from guns. Even young children are strong enough to pull the trigger.

**MYTH** Adolescent violence is restricted to fighting and bullying.

**FACT** All forms of violence occur throughout America.

Among 10- to 24-year olds, homicide is the leading cause of death for African Americans; the second leading cause of death for Hispanics; and the third leading cause of death for Asian/Pacific Islanders, American Indians, and Alaska natives.

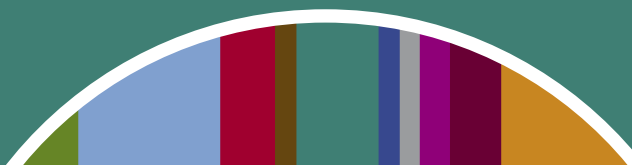
**MYTH** Kids who fight well — the ones who are good with their hands — are safest.


**FACT** The safest, most popular kids are problem-solvers. They know how to use their minds and mouths to solve a problem, rather than their fists. Kids who fight a lot — even if they're good at it — eventually run into someone who is bigger and stronger or has a weapon.

**MYTH** In order to gain respect from peers, boys have to be willing to fight.

**FACT** Youths who are neither bullies nor aggressors — who are called problem-solvers by their peers — are the most successful and popular kids in school.

*Source for statistics: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, GA*





In order to change behavior, it is important to identify the risk factors that apply to that child. Following are some specific tips for counseling youth at risk for violence.

## Counseling Youth at Risk

**TIP** When a youth gets into a fight, parents and other adults should always ask how the fight started. Help youths think about what led up to and caused the fight and help them find alternative words or actions that could have prevented the fight. In the long run, a youth will be safer by avoiding fights through problem-solving than by winning them. Knowing how a fight ended can also be important. Did the fight end when someone gave up? Did someone have to break up the fight? Did an adult come by and stop it? Teach children and adolescents how to settle differences and conflicts without fighting.

**TIP** The safest home for children is a home without handguns. If a gun is in the home, it must be kept unloaded and locked with the ammunition stored and locked separately.

**TIP** Encourage youths to develop other skills and interests in order to reduce the amount of time spent watching violence on television and in the movies.

**TIP** Support initiatives to get guns off the streets and out of the hands of children.

**TIP** Get involved in your neighborhood. Encourage adolescents to get involved as well. Communities with active opportunities for teenagers are the safest communities for them. Teenagers who are involved in their communities, with the schools, with athletics or arts, or with their churches, mosques or synagogues, are safer.

**TIP** Encourage schools to teach youths about conflict resolution, to set up peer mediators, and to teach youths how to de-escalate a threatening situation. Know your local schools' policy on violence, bullying, and weapons.

**TIP** Be aware of the warning signs for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Children who have experienced or witnessed violence can get PTSD, just like soldiers returning from war. Children who suffer from PTSD often have trouble sleeping (sometimes with nightmares), concentrating, and controlling their anger. They may be less interested in daily life, or act as if they are always on alert or afraid. Anyone experiencing symptoms of PTSD can get help! Contact a health care provider or mental health counselor.



# Violence is a Learned Behavior

Children and adolescents learn from their experiences. A balanced approach of protective factors (called positive youth development) and reduction of risk factors helps keep young people from becoming involved in violence.

**Individual risk factors** include a history of early aggressive behavior, involvement with drugs, alcohol or tobacco, poor behavioral control, antisocial beliefs and attitudes, and exposure to violence and conflict in the family.

**Individual protective factors** include having a trusted adult to confide in, the ability to use humor to diffuse tense situations, and engagement with school or community.

**Family risk factors** include harsh, lax, or inconsistent disciplinary practices, low emotional attachment to parents or caregivers, parental substance abuse or criminality, poor family functioning, and poor monitoring and supervision of children.

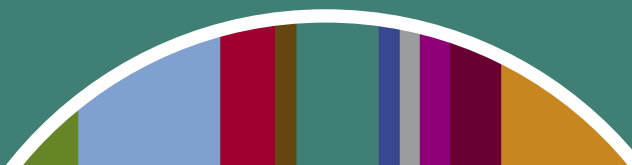
**Family protective factors** revolve around open communication in a supportive environment. Regular opportunities for communication, such as family dinners, provide young people with the opportunity to discuss challenges with loving adults.

**Peer/social risk factors** include association with delinquent peers, involvement in gangs, social rejection by peers, lack of involvement in conventional activities, poor academic performance, and low commitment to school.

**Peer/social protective factors** include active engagement in school and the feeling of mastery over a domain of life. For example, young people who are actively involved in the arts in community organizations or athletics are less likely to be involved in violence.

**Community risk factors** include a high concentration of poor residents and transiency, low levels of community participation, and socially disorganized neighborhoods.

**Community protective factors** have best been described by the Search Institute ([www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)), which outlines 40 positive social assets. Communities that have abundant opportunities to engage young people and a local culture that values this participation generally experience less violence.



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