

Avoiding Guns, Gangs, and Violence

Children & Teenagers

Tips for Avoiding Guns, Gangs and Violence

- Tell a responsible adult (parent, neighbor, police officer) if you feel threatened
- Avoid wearing gang colors, particularly in places where gang members hang out
- Avoid obviously dangerous places where there is criminal activity
- Avoid drug use
- Avoid alcohol use
- Avoid confrontations
- Don't be a bully
- Participate in positive activities and get home at a reasonable hour

What You Can Do
To Avoid Gangs
and
Help Solve the Problem

Find Positive Ways to Spend Your Time and Energy

- Many teens join gangs because they are bored, lacking in purpose, or looking for a way to belong.
- But there are other options.
- Sports, recreational, and after-school programs give you a great chance to meet new people, explore new interests, develop new talents and skills, and to connect with people that really care about you and your well-being.

Stay Away From Gangs and Gang Members.

- Be aware of clothing, colors, and symbols used by gangs in your area, and avoid them.
- If you look like a gang member or are seen with a gang member, other gangs may mistake you for a real gang member.
- You have a very good chance of being the innocent target of violent gang behavior.

Do Not Carry a Gun or Other Weapons.

- Carrying a gun is not likely to make you safer.
- Guns often escalate conflicts and increase the chances that you will be seriously harmed.
- If someone is threatening you and you feel that you are in serious danger, do not take matters into your own hands.
- Find an adult you can trust and discuss your fears, or contact school administrators or the police.
- Take precautions for your safety, such as avoiding being alone and staying with a group of friends, if possible.

Find Out About Gang Activity in Your Community.

- Find out about gangs, gang recruitment, activities, signs, and colors.
- Then share the information, publishing an article in a school or local newspaper, or talking to community groups, parents, or groups of students.

Steps Teens Can Take to Avoid Violence or Injury

- Recognize situations or events that are likely to escalate into violence.
- Stop whatever you are doing and count to 10 backward. This will help you think about your feelings before they get out of control.
- If you can't control your anger, get away. Take a time out.
- Think about the options and consequences of your actions. For example, hitting someone could result in suspension from school or injury.

- If necessary, get help from a third party to solve differences.
- Cool off. Make sure you are calm and then talk to the person.
- Listen carefully to the other person's opinion.
- Be assertive, not aggressive. Stand up for your ideals. Begin every sentence with "I" For example: "I feel this way..." or "I don't like it when..."
- Be willing to admit and be responsible for something you may have done wrong.
- Respond with your HEAD, not your fists, threats, or weapons.

What Families Can Do

Teens and Violence Prevention

- Parents and others who care for young people can help them learn to deal with emotions without using violence.
- Because violence results from conflicts between people, it can be prevented by learning nonviolent ways to control anger and solve problems.
- Teaching your teen, through words and actions, that violence is never an acceptable form of behavior is very important.
- The tips provided here can help you.

Tips for Parents

- Start talking about ways to reduce or eliminate violence.
- Team up with other parents and get involved in your community; join your neighbors in activities to reduce violence.
- Talk to your teen about ways to solve arguments and fights without weapons or violence.
- Advise your teen to talk to you or a trusted adult to avoid potentially violent situations.
- If you suspect a problem with your teen, start talking about it.

- Be close to your children, express affection, and share your values and high expectations for their success in school and life.
- Discuss, clearly and honestly, tough issues, such as alcohol and illegal drugs, smoking, gangs, and sexual involvement.
- Set and enforce reasonable standards of behavior, and praise good behavior.
- Model positive behavior.
- Monitor after-school time and locate after-school programs and mentors for your children.
- Know who your children's friends are and discourage any involvement with gang members, gang clothing, or gang symbols.
- Seek professional help if you suspect your child may be involved with, or threatened by, a gang.

Monitor the Media.

- Limit the amount of television your teen watches to 1 to 2 hours a day (including music videos and video games).
- Do not allow your teen to watch violent movies or TV programs.
- If something violent comes on the TV, talk about what is wrong with the program and how the situation could have been handled in a nonviolent way.

Be a Role Model by Handling Problems in Nonviolent Ways

- Don't hit your teen. Model non-physical solutions to problem solving.
- Count to 10. Cool off. If you can't control your anger, tell your teen you need some time to get your thoughts and feelings under control.
- Problem solve with your teen. Think together about options and consequences for behaviors.
- Set limits, make sure your teen knows the rules and consequences, and follow through.
- Don't carry a gun. This sends a message to your teen that using guns solves problems.

Reduce the Threat of Gun-related Violence to Your Teen

- Make certain your teen does not have access to guns. If you have a gun, remove it from your home or store it unloaded and locked up. Lock and store bullets separately.
- Tell your teen to stay away from potentially dangerous situations and from guns in homes of friends or places where he or she may visit or play.
- Keep in mind that teens don't always follow the rules. Also, teens are attracted to guns and see guns as symbols of power. Since you can't always count on teens to stay away from guns, you have to keep guns away from them.

Help Your Teen Deal With Anger

- Anger is a normal feeling. Anger does not have to be bad if it is expressed appropriately.
- Teach your teen that it is okay to be angry, but it's not okay to throw a punch.
- People must control their anger before they can control a situation.
- Sometimes counseling is necessary to help teens deal with their anger appropriately.

For Children Ages 3-8, You Might Say

If You See a Gun at a Friend's House

- Get away from the gun.
- Tell a grown-up.
- Tell your friend not to touch the gun.
- Call your mom or dad and/or go home.

For Children Ages 3-8, You Might Say **If You're in a House and Hear Gunshots**

- Duck and cover.
- Stay away from windows.

For Children Ages 3-8, You Might Say

If You're Outside and You See a Gun

- Do not touch the gun.
- Leave the area right away.
- Tell your parents or an adult.

FOR CHILDREN AGES 8-10 YOU MIGHT SAY

If you're at school and a friend or another student
takes out a gun

- Don't touch the gun.
- Try to get away safely.
- Tell an adult whom you trust.
- Tell your friend that you don't want to be around guns because someone could get hurt or killed.

FOR TEENAGERS, YOU MIGHT SAY:

If a friend carries a gun

- It puts you in danger.
- Too many things can go wrong, especially if there are drugs and/or alcohol involved, or if there's an argument.
- The result can be deadly.
- The best thing to do is separate yourself from any person with a gun.
- About 80 percent of people killed with a gun knew the person who pulled the trigger.
- Make sure your friend knows you're not stupid enough to think that carrying a gun is cool.

FOR TEENAGERS, YOU MIGHT SAY:
**If you feel you are in danger and think about
getting a gun for protection**

- Understand that you can protect yourself in other ways.
- When someone carries a gun, it is more likely to be used against him or someone he knows rather than against an unknown attacker.
- Walk in well lit areas after dark and avoid walking alone; take a self defense class; carry a personal/body alarm.

FOR TEENAGERS, YOU MIGHT SAY:

To stay safe

- Avoid people and places where you suspect violence might flare up easily, such as parties where there will be a lot of drugs and alcohol or "hang out" areas where violence has erupted before.

FOR TEENAGERS, YOU MIGHT SAY:

Have willpower

- If you become involved in a conflict, refuse to resort to violence as a means of resolving it.
- Learn about conflict resolution and mediation — take a course, then teach your friends.

It may be difficult to talk to teenagers about a subject like this.

Here are some suggestions that may make it easier to discuss guns and gun violence:

- Take a firm stand, but don't be self-righteous and overly judgmental.
- Be patient. Don't rush it.
- Learn from them about their experience, feelings and knowledge about gun violence.
- Be persuasive rather than demanding and overbearing.
- If they tell you something in confidence, keep it confidential. If you feel that you can't, let them know before you pass on the information

- Remember that it is especially important to protect the anonymity of someone who has told you about a gun-related incident.

Some discussion questions you might use with teenagers:

- Do they know or have they heard about anyone who has been shot?
What happened?
- Do they know about kids at school having guns or being involved in violent activities? What are these kids like? What happened?
- What are their own fears and opinions about guns?

- Remember that it is especially important to protect the anonymity of someone who has told you about a gun-related incident.

Some discussion questions you might use with teenagers:

- Do they know or have they heard about anyone who has been shot? What happened?
- Do they know about kids at school having guns or being involved in violent activities? What are these kids like? What happened?
- What are their own fears and opinions about guns?

- Have they ever been approached by anyone to buy a gun?

How did they respond?

How did they feel?

- Have they ever seen a real gun?

How did that feel ?

Under what circumstances did this occur?

- Do they feel any pressure to get involved with gun activity?

In Summery

- Protection from teen violence largely comes back to the Family
 - lead by example
 - good communication with all family members
 - develop strength of character so teens have the strength and willpower to say “NO”
 - remember violence is not an acceptable or safe method of solving issues
 - parents, family members, teachers, police, peers are main resources for teens threatened with violence
 - use “anger management” courses if you feel it can help

Questions