



Helping Kids Stay Safe from Violence: Facts & Tips for Caring Adults

Caring adults want the kids in our lives to be able to grow up free of violence and fear of violence. But protecting them, and helping them to protect themselves, can seem like an impossible task. We're here to help! Thousand Waves offers self-defense programs for kids and Keeping Kids Safe programs for adult caregivers (as well as self-defense for adults). Contact us for scheduled programming or to set up a program for your community.

Facts:

Stranger Danger is rare. The vast majority of assaults against kids are perpetrated by someone they know and trust. According to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, of 800,000 missing children in 1999, only 115 were kidnapped by strangers or acquaintances.

(<http://www.missingkids.com/>). And according to the National Institute of Justice, 74% of sexual assaults on children were perpetrated by someone the child knew well, and only 23% were strangers (<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/194972.pdf>).

Girls are at greater risk of sexual assault; boys are at greater risk of physical assault. According to the same NIJ report referenced above, 13% of girls experience sexual assault, compared to 3.4% of boys. However, 21.3 % of boys experienced physical assault, compared to 13.4% of girls.

Race and socio-economic status There is a perception that victimization happens less often to kids who are white and/or come from middle class backgrounds. What's more likely is that children whose families have less access to institutional supports and resources are more likely to be identified by authorities. Anything that stresses a family increases the risk of abuse, but because abusers are likely to come from the same social milieu as their victims, it makes sense that those with less social power are over-represented.

Violence against children is often unreported The NIJ's 2003 Youth Victimization Report states that 86% of sexual assaults and 65% of physical assaults against youth went unreported.

(<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/194972.pdf>)

What You Can Do:

Here are some practical strategies that you can use to help your children stay safe:

Recognize the inherent power dynamic within the adult-child relationship. The power dynamic can be an added barrier to clear communication on both sides.

Take the lead in exploring issues of violence. Don't expect the child to seek you out, especially around difficult issues. If a topic makes you uncomfortable, it is likely to also be hard for the child, who is less able to rise above that discomfort and seek guidance.

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Ask specific questions that foster communication with the child. For example, with a teen girl who has begun dating, ask what her boyfriend does that makes her feel loved, respected and special. Ask if there are things he does that don't make her feel good.

Create a "TAKE TEN" policy in your family or school. Created by Anne Parry, this system can reduce, prevent, and teach alternatives to violence. Talk it Out, Walk it Out, and Wait it Out" are the strategies that everyone can implement when they're about to be violent—in words or deeds.

Listen actively and compassionately. Stay calm and matter-of-fact. Use self-calming techniques to control your own emotional response and allow you to hear your child's concerns without the haze of your own anger or fear.

Believe your child if they tell you about an incidence of violence/abuse.

Share your own stories. This shows both your own difficulties in being assertive, as well as positive outcomes of assertive action.

Share others' stories about assertive communication and action under difficult situations.

Learn and model techniques for conflict resolution. Use them between yourself and your partner or colleagues, between you and the child, and for the child to use with peers. Teach "I statements" which are not blaming but are assertive. Consider the value of the 3-parts of resolving problems: 1) describe what happened, 2) say how it made you feel, 3) tell what you need in order to move forward.

Get specific about problem solving. Often children need to be led through what exactly to say and do in different situations. Assertive communication is difficult; teach and practice phrases children can use. Consider using role-plays to help them prepare for real life. (First you play the child's role and the child plays the person they need to set a boundary with, then switch roles.)

Develop a code word Anti-abduction experts recommend using this if there is ever a need for someone other than a parent to pick up the child from school. The child should know never to go with anyone – even someone they know – if that person doesn't use the code word.

Partner with the child to guide them in increased independence. Remember that this is a gradual, step-by-step process that will continue as the child grows. Explain that increased independence is a reward as the child shows increased responsibility. When freedom is earned, guide the child and use rehearsals. (e.g. When a child is ready to walk alone: first walk with them, review the route, explain where and how to cross the street; next have them do it alone, but have them call as soon as they arrive; finally you will come to a time when it's no longer necessary for the child to call.)

Seek support from your social network, school community, or neighborhood. Remember that systemic problems need collaborative solutions.