

LESSON 5



Avoiding and Preventing Violence



Quick Write

Write a short paragraph explaining why you think some young people resort to violence to settle differences.



Learn About

- violence in our society
- school and campus violence
- protecting yourself from rape or sexual violence

"Non-violence is not a garment to be put on and off at will. Its seat is in the heart, and it must be an inseparable part of our being."

Mahatma Gandhi, Nonviolent civil rights activist who led India's independence from British rule

Violence in Our Society

Hitting someone is clearly an example of violence, but what about threatening to hit or hurt someone? Is that violence? What about destroying property or yelling mean and hurtful words at someone? Is that violence? The answer is yes.

Violence is any act that causes physical or psychological harm to a person or damage to property. **Homicide**, the killing of one human being by another, is violence at its worst. While in recent years the numbers of homicides and other violent acts have statistically declined, the increase in acts of violence in schools is unacceptably high. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), homicide remains a leading cause of death among young people.

Violent crime has many costs. One cost is money; other costs are the physical and mental harm to people. Victims of violence may be hurt permanently. For example, injuries may cause permanent brain damage or leave an individual paralyzed. Victims of violence may also suffer from mental health problems. Witnesses of violent crime may be left with a feeling of fear and may never feel safe again.

Everyone ends up paying for violent crimes. The added costs for police officers, courts, and prisons go up each year. Federal and local governments are often forced to raise taxes to help pay for these additional costs. Everyone becomes the victim.

Various factors have been suggested as causes for the high rates of violence. Some people point to the violent acts shown on television, music, video games, movies, and on the Internet

as contributing factors. Others cite changes in family structure that tend to leave children unsupervised for hours at a time. Many also believe the availability of guns to be a major cause of violence. Poverty also plays a role in higher rates of violent crime. Communities with poor housing, high unemployment, and limited community services tend to have higher rates of violence.

Factors that Contribute to Teen Violence

Too much violence in America involves teenagers. In 2002, more than 877,700 young people ages 10 to 24 were injured from violent acts, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Of these, one out of every thirteen incidents required hospitalization. Teens are not just victims, however. Each year, more than 120,000 youths are arrested for committing violent crimes. Teen violence often involves bullying, gangs, guns, alcohol and drugs, or rape.

Bullying and Cyberbullying

Bullying can happen to anyone. Bullying behavior can be directed at the shy, quiet student, or the class tough guy. There is no one characteristic that determines who will be bullied. Someone who was bullied one day might be the person who makes fun of the shy girl the next day. Students who bully can be any size, age, grade, race, or gender.

In a 2009 study of students in grades 9 through 12, nearly 20 percent reported having been bullied on school property within the past year. **Bullying** is the use of threats or physical force to intimidate and control another person. A bully will choose as his or her victim someone who is less powerful in terms of physical strength or status among peers. Through name-calling, physical force, and pressure on others to isolate the victim, a bully's goal may be to **extort**, or obtain something by force, threats, or other unfair means, or simply take pleasure from someone else's embarrassment or humiliation. Three types of bullying occur in our society:

Vocabulary



- violence
- homicide
- bullying
- extort
- cyberbullying
- gang
- zero tolerance policy
- mediation
- peer mediation
- rape
- victim

1. Verbal bullying is saying or writing mean things. Verbal bullying includes:
 - Teasing
 - Name-calling
 - Inappropriate sexual comments
 - Taunting
 - Threatening to cause harm
2. Social bullying, sometimes referred to as relational bullying, involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships. Social bullying includes:
 - Leaving someone out on purpose
 - Telling other students not to be friends with someone
 - Spreading rumors about someone
 - Embarrassing someone in public
3. Physical bullying involves hurting a person's body or possessions. Physical bullying includes:
 - Hitting/kicking/pinching
 - Spitting
 - Tripping/pushing
 - Taking or breaking someone's personal belongings
 - Making mean or rude hand gestures

Are you a victim of bullying? What should you do? If you feel that you are being bullied or you witness someone else being bullied, here are some things you should do:



There is no place for bullying.

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- Talk to someone you trust, such as a teacher, school counselor, school administrator, parent, older relative, or friend.
- Be persistent. If the first person you talk to doesn't help, don't give up. Speak to someone else.
- If possible, write down everything that has been said or done to hurt you or someone else. Be careful to write down only things that have really happened.
- Ask the person you talk to not to do anything without telling you about it first. You have the right to know what is being done on your behalf.

- If you find it difficult talking to an adult, ask one of your friends to come with you, or ask someone to talk to an adult on your behalf.
- If you feel that the act of bullying may cause you or someone else immediate physical harm and you are not at school, call 911.
- Most importantly, do something! Sometimes it only takes action on your or someone else's behalf to stop the bullying. However, doing nothing will cause the bullying to continue until someone gets hurt.

Cyberbullying is bullying via email, text or instant messaging, Facebook®, or other social media outlets. It may not be immediately physical, but is especially damaging because the bullies can harass their victims at home or anywhere else at any time of day or night. Cyberbullies frequently will make threats or spread rumors about the victim.

Cyberbullying is different than other types of bullying because:

- Cyberbullying can happen 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and can reach the victim even when he or she is alone. It can happen any time of the day or night.
- Cyberbullying messages and images can be posted and distributed quickly to a very wide audience. It can be difficult and sometimes impossible to trace the source.
- Deleting inappropriate or harassing messages, texts, and pictures is extremely difficult after they have been posted or sent.

Just as with any type of bullying, when cyberbullying happens, it is important to document and report the behavior so it can be addressed. There are also additional actions you need to take to stop cyberbullies.

1. Steps to take immediately:

- Don't respond to and don't forward cyberbullying messages.
- Keep evidence of cyberbullying. Record the dates, times, and descriptions of instances when cyberbullying has occurred.
- Save and print screenshots, emails, and text messages. Use the evidence to report cyberbullying to web and cell phone service providers.
- Block the person doing the cyberbullying from your email or social media account.

2. Report the cyberbullying to online service providers:

- Review the terms and conditions or rights and responsibilities sections of Internet accounts. Cyberbullying often violates the terms of service established by social media sites and Internet service providers.
- Visit social media safety centers to learn how to block users and change settings to control who can contact you.
- Report cyberbullying to the social media site so they can take action against users abusing the terms of the service agreement.

3. Report cyberbullying to law enforcement—when cyberbullying involves any of the following activities, it is considered a crime:
 - Threats of violence.
 - Child pornography or sending sexually explicit messages or photos.
 - Taking a photo or video of someone in a place where he or she would expect privacy.
 - Stalking or hate crimes.
4. Report cyberbullying to your school:
 - Cyberbullying can create a disruptive environment at school and is often related to in-person bullying. The school can use the information to help with prevention and response strategies.
 - In many states, schools are required to address cyberbullying in their anti-bullying policy. Some state laws also cover off-campus behavior that creates a hostile school environment.



Cyberbullying is harmful.

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Any type of bullying produces a climate of fear and disrespect at schools. It can cause increased levels of anxiety and depression in not only the victims, but also in other students, teachers, and administrators. While most victims suffer in silence, a few strike back, usually causing further harm to themselves and others.

Bullying can have devastating consequences; teen suicide is one. There are too many stories of young people bullied to the point that they see no way out but to take their own lives. The following story is just one of the many examples of someone who felt this way.

Sarah Lynn Butler, a seventh grader from Hardy, Arkansas, committed suicide on September 26, 2009. Sarah, who had just been voted Queen for her upcoming Fall Festival, was teased at school, and later on received bullying messages on her social networking page.

Sarah's mother said she often checked her daughter's social network page to make sure there wasn't anything inappropriate being sent or received. When she noticed that Sarah was getting some messages about rumors at school, she talked with her about it. But Sarah then removed her mother from her list of friends and she was no longer able to read her page.

On the morning of her suicide, Sarah stayed home while her family was out and logged on to her social networking page. The last message Sarah read said that she was easily forgotten, and that she was just a stupid little naive girl and nobody would miss her.

When her parents returned home, they found that Sarah had hanged herself. She left a suicide note that said she couldn't handle what others were saying about her.

No one should have to pay the price of another person's careless hatred. The best way to deal with bullying is to stop it before it starts and get others involved. A bully who senses that others perceive his or her actions as unacceptable will quickly lose motivation.

For further resources on preventing bullying and cyberbullying, go to the US Department of Health and Human Services website at <http://www.stopbullying.gov/>.



Gossip harms relationships, and that's why it's bad. What seems innocent can eventually cross the line and become bullying if it damages friendships and causes people to dislike or harm someone.

Gangs

Although gang activity was once associated with large cities, it is now a national problem. A **gang** is a group of criminals who associate with one another to take part in criminal or antisocial activity. Gangs will display their membership and unity by wearing similar types of jewelry and clothing and using certain types of language and hand signals. Typical gang activities include vandalism, graffiti, robbery, and drug dealing. Because gangs don't readily associate with people they perceive as different, their members are often isolated from the rest of the community.

In recent years, gangs have started recruiting younger members because young offenders receive less severe penalties. Many young people join gangs due to the influence of their classmates, neighbors, or family members. Some young people join gangs for excitement; they feel bored at home or they don't receive positive feedback from parents or guardians.

Because gang members often carry weapons, they make areas unsafe for everyone. In addition, some of their actions, such as random shootings, are unpredictable. As a result, innocent people are injured or killed. The presence of gangs in a school or community causes people to live in fear instead of confidence about their safety.



Gangs hurt communities.

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Gang members, especially recruits, often know of no way other than gang membership to gain a sense of belonging. However, once in a gang, members often find themselves caught in an environment of intimidation and crime they may not be able to escape. One way to reduce gang violence is to offer other choices, such as Community Boys and Girls Clubs, sports, school-supported clubs and activities, and JROTC, which do not lead to violence.

Guns

While many people disagree about the relationship between weapons and violence, most agree that when weapons are used in fights, fights are more deadly. This is especially the case with firearms.

According to NBC News Research, in the United States, handguns are used in the majority of homicides and suicides. Every 17 minutes someone in the United States dies from a gunshot wound. Firearm injuries are the second leading cause of death for young people ages 10 to 24. For every one person killed by a firearm, four are wounded. A survey of young people who had been shot revealed that 35 percent of them were carrying guns when they were wounded.

Strategies to prevent firearm accidents include controlling gun ownership and installing safety devices on guns. Gun owners are also advised to keep their firearms unloaded and to store ammunition in a separate, locked place. When people buy guns for hunting or protection, they are highly encouraged or may be required to take a safety course to learn how to handle the guns.

Alcohol and Drugs

Alcohol, drugs, and violence tend to go hand in hand. Drug users who are desperate for money to support their drug habit often turn to illegal and violent behavior. Drugs also affect a user's ability to think clearly and have good judgment. While under the influence of drugs, a person might shoplift, steal a car, or commit a violent crime.

Although alcohol is not legal for purchase or consumption for individuals under the age of 21, this has not stopped the problem of underage drinking. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, alcohol use by persons under the age of 21 is a major public health problem. Alcohol is the most commonly used and abused drug among youth in the United States, more than tobacco and illegal drugs. One study conducted by the US Department of Justice found that alcohol was a factor in 40 percent of all violent crimes. Another study published in the *Annual Review of Public Health* examined drinking on college campuses over a two-year time frame. This study reported that 600,000 students reported being hit or assaulted by another student who'd been drinking.

According to a study conducted by the Surgeon General of the United States, each year approximately 5,000 young people die as a result of underage drinking. Sixteen hundred of these deaths are a result of homicides.

Underage drinking affects everyone, including those who don't drink. Everyone can make a difference to help eliminate alcohol and illegal drugs from schools and communities. Schools and communities should deliver a message that alcohol and illegal drugs are not okay. When young people are actively involved in sports programs, school academic programs, or community projects, they are less likely to become involved in alcohol or illegal drugs.

School and Campus Violence

School violence is not easy to understand. There is no single reason why students become violent. Some follow behavior they have seen at home, in their neighborhoods, or on TV, movies, and video games. Sometimes, young people who have been the victim of bullying can't take it anymore and will do anything to make it stop. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides a list of risk factors for those who commit violent crimes on school campuses:

- History of violent abuse
- Attention disorders, such as hyperactivity or learning disorders
- History of early aggressive behavior
- Involvement with illegal drugs, alcohol, or tobacco
- Poor behavior control
- High emotional distress
- Emotional problems
- Antisocial beliefs and attitude
- History of violence and conflict in the family
- Gang involvement
- Social rejection by classmates

Incidents of violence in schools have led to increased security measures. Many schools now keep all or most doors to the school locked. In some schools, students must pass through metal detectors to enter the school. School officials may search lockers and students' belongings if they have reasonable suspicion that someone is planning a violent act.



School violence gets a lot of publicity, but the vast majority of schools experience little or no violence.

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Many schools have adopted a zero tolerance policy for weapons or weapon look-alikes, illegal drugs, and violent behavior. A **zero tolerance policy** is a policy that makes no exceptions for anybody for any reason. Any student found guilty of bringing any prohibited items to school, or of behaving violently, is automatically expelled.

Become an Advocate for Preventing Violence

Schools work very hard to create a safe, supportive environment for students to be academically and socially successful. Students must also help with keeping schools and campuses safe from violent acts. You can help prevent school violence by acting responsibly and encouraging others to do their part. Here are some actions that you can take and advocate.

- Refuse to bring a weapon or weapon look-alike to school, to carry a weapon for another person, or to keep silent about those who carry weapons.
- Immediately report any violent incidents or threats of violence to school authorities or the police.
- Learn how to manage your own anger.
- Help others settle arguments through proper conflict mediation. **Mediation** is both sides in a dispute working to reach a peaceful agreement.
- Welcome new students and get to know students who are often left out.
- Sign (or start) a pledge of non-violence in which students promise to settle disagreements using mediation and to work toward a safe campus.

Peer Mediation Programs

Many schools use peer mediation to help reduce the risk of violence that occurs from unresolved conflicts. **Peer mediation** is a process in which trained students help other students find fair ways to resolve conflicts and settle their differences. Such programs are effective because they are kept confidential and help prevent or reduce punishment for those students involved. By putting pressure on those who are involved in a conflict to settle their differences peacefully, you have taken a step in the right direction to prevent violence and become a mediator. To become a mediator, check with your school about their peer mediation program and the possibility of joining or starting one. All mediators and involved students should follow a checklist and set guidelines during the mediation process. Below are some guidelines to follow to successfully mediate a conflict:

- Let both sides know that you are not taking either side of the conflict.
- Set some rules, such as using calm, reasonable talk.
- Let each person state his or her feelings without being interrupted.
- Allow each person to ask reasonable questions of the other.

- Encourage both people to figure out different ways to solve the problem.
- Ask both people to discuss each way and to agree on one idea.
- Work at finding a compromise; do not let them give up without really trying.

Even with the best intentions, violent conflicts still happen. If other people get into a fight, do not cheer them on. Having people around and cheering on the situation raises the chances that things will quickly get out of control. Do not try to end any violent conflict yourself because you may get hurt. You should be the one who seeks assistance from a school administrator or other school staff member.

Ways to Protect Yourself from Violence

No one ever wants to be the victim of violence or crime, and there are some things you should do to reduce your chances of becoming a victim. You can protect yourself from violence and unsafe situations. First, develop self-protection habits by being alert to what is going on around you and trusting your instincts. If a situation feels dangerous, it probably is. Be ready for threatening situations before they arise by anticipating possible problems and planning appropriate responses. With the adults in your family, identify some dangerous situations that could happen. Figure out what you could do to get out of those situations safely. If you suspect or hear a student talking about violence, report it to school authorities. Many cases of school violence could have been prevented because the attackers provided information to others about their intentions.

Choosing your friends wisely is another way to protect yourself. Avoid people who have a low commitment to school, participate in illegal activities, or use alcohol or drugs. Figure 2.14 suggests other ways to protect yourself from violence.

Protecting Yourself from Rape or Sexual Violence

Rape is *any kind of unlawful sexual intercourse against a person's will*. Over half of all rape victims know their attackers. Whenever a person is forced to have sex, whether with someone he or she knows or with a stranger, a rape has occurred. Rape is always an act of violence, and never legal. To protect yourself from rape, avoid situations in which an attack is possible. Here are some suggestions:

- If you go out alone with someone, make it clear that you're not interested in any sexual activity.
- Always let your parents or guardians know where you will be.
- Avoid secluded places.
- Don't drink alcohol or use other drugs, and don't date people who do.
- Always carry money so you can take a cab or bus home if you feel unsafe.

Follow these precautions to protect yourself from violence.

OUTDOORS

- Do not walk alone at night.
- Avoid poorly lit streets.
- If you think someone is following you, go into a store or other public place.
- Never hitchhike or accept a ride from strangers.
- Avoid entering an elevator alone with a stranger.
- Don't look like an easy target. Stand tall and walk with confidence.
- If someone wants your money or possessions, give them up.
- If you are attacked, scream and get away any way you can.
- Do not carry a firearm or other weapon.
- Do not loiter or give the appearance that you are lost.
- If you are on public transportation, avoid displaying expensive items such as smartphones, watches, and jewelry.

AT HOME

- Lock doors and windows when you are home alone.
- Open the door only to people you know well.
- Do not give personal information over the telephone or computer.
- Never agree to meet alone with a person you met online.
- If someone comes to the door or window and you are frightened, call 911 or the police.
- Never shoot firearms or pick them up, even if they are unloaded.
- When you come home, have your key ready before you reach the door. Do not enter if the door is ajar or appears to have been tampered with.
- Never tell a stranger that you are home alone. Instead, say that your parents are busy and can't come to the door or phone.

FIGURE 2.14

Reduce your chances of becoming a victim—know your surroundings.

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What You Should do if You are a Victim of Sexual Violence

Young people ages 16 to 19 are more than three times as likely to be a victim of sexual violence than people aged 20 or older. Reporting a rape or other sexual violence is often very hard for the victim. A **victim** is *someone who is hurt by somebody or something, especially in a crime, accident, or disaster*. Experts think that only half of these violent acts are reported. Sometimes, the victim may know the attacker and doesn't want to get them into trouble. Unfortunately, many times the victim is afraid that the attacker will come after them again. Fear or the thought of getting someone into trouble does not stop the need to report any acts of sexual violence.

Schools and many communities have police officers who are trained to help and talk with victims. The individual who has suffered an attack needs to know they are the victim. While most states and schools provide different reporting procedures for victims of sexual violence, the following information is provided for those individuals who do not know what to do:

- Get to a safe place: home, school, police station, fire station, or hospital.
- Report the crime; notify the police or a trusted adult.
- Call a friend, family member, or someone you can trust.
- Get medical care as soon as possible.
- If you suspect you have been given any type of drug, ask the hospital or medical care provider to check for drugs.
- Write down everything you can remember, including a description of the attacker.
- Talk to a counselor who is trained to assist victims of sexual violence or contact the closest rape crisis center in your area.

CHECKPOINTS

Lesson 5 Review

Using complete sentences, answer the following questions on a sheet of paper.

1. Define violence.
2. List two things you should do if you are victim of bullying.
3. Name two examples of cyberbullying.
4. List three risk factors that contribute to violent crimes on school campuses.
5. What happens to a student who violates a school's zero tolerance policy?
6. Name two things you can do to help keep your school campus safe.
7. What are three basic ways you can protect yourself from violence?
8. List two actions that you can take to help protect yourself from rape.
9. List three actions you should take if you are a victim of sexual violence.

APPLYING YOUR LEARNING

10. In one paragraph, describe what can be done in your community to discourage teens from joining gangs.