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ABSTRACT

Children should be taught as early as possible how to handle disagreements with each other without letting their anger get out of control. As they get older, they should be helped to apply the conflict-solving methods they learned as children to the more complicated problems that appear in adolescence. Children's attitudes are influenced by all the adults in their lives, but what they learn at home is especially important because their families are their first role models. Parents should examine their own attitudes to make sure that they do not lead their children to think it is acceptable to be violent. The best thing parents can do is to teach their children to be nonviolent by example. Children should be helped to learn methods to control personal anger and to think beforehand of the consequences of their actions. Respect for others; rejection of racial, social, religious, and sexual bias; and willingness to compromise contribute to nonviolent resolution of conflicts. (SLD)

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for parents/about parents

**HOW TO HELP
YOUR CHILD
AVOID VIOLENT
CONFLICTS**

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Why Nonviolent Conflict Solving Is Necessary

Children need to be taught as early as possible how to handle disagreements with each other without letting their anger get out of control, and without using violence. As they get older, they should be helped to apply the conflict-solving methods that worked for them in childhood to the more complicated problems that appear in adolescence. Here are some reasons why learning to settle disputes fairly and nonviolently is important:

- Guns and other weapons are easily available, and young people don't have a good sense of the consequences of their actions. So, they may think that an easy way to win an argument is to threaten their opponents, which can lead to accidental injury or death, or even to the intentional use of a weapon.
- Youth who learn to solve problems fairly and nonviolently are respected in their community, make friends more easily, and become role models for others.
- Youth who use violence may die young or spend their lives in prison.
- Youth who don't know any ways to deal with disagreements will always be the victims of bullies.
- Unless youth learn to reject and avoid violence, they may encourage the violence of others just by being

willing to watch it without trying to help the participants find another way to settle their dispute.

- In communities where youth witness a great deal of violence, they may grow up thinking that using violence is the best or the only way to end a disagreement, unless they are shown other equally effective methods.

How Parents Can Teach Alternatives to Violence

Children's attitudes about violence are influenced by all the adults in their lives (including the people they see on television), but what they learn at home is especially important, because their families are their first role models. Some parents, for example, never become violent, and try to avoid the violence of others.

Other parents, because of their upbringing or their experiences in life, believe that there is no way to avoid violent confrontations, and that it is all right to use violence to express their anger or to solve conflicts.

Parents' Attitudes

Parents may have attitudes toward violence that can lead their children to think it is all right to be violent. Here is a checklist of some of these attitudes:

- You must win an argument, no matter what the cost.
- Walking away from a dispute, even if it doesn't really affect your life, is a sign of weakness.
- Compromising to settle a disagreement is a loss you can't live with.
- "Real men" are aggressive, and it is important to encourage aggressive behavior in sons.
- "Real women" are submissive and dependent, and shouldn't protect themselves from abuse, and daughters should learn to defer to the men in their lives.

Parents' Teachings

The best thing parents can do is teach their children to be nonviolent by example. However, even if you do not reject violence all the time, you can help your children learn to solve disputes without using violence and without allowing themselves to become victims. This is particularly important because of such easy access to weapons. It is necessary to teach your children that relying on violence to solve problems can have deadly consequences.

Here are some principles that parents can teach:

- Figure out what methods to control personal anger work (like leaving a tense situation temporarily or finding a calm person to talk to), and use them before losing control.

- Think beforehand what the consequences of different actions will be: anger and violence versus walking away from a dispute or compromising.
- Use humor to cool hostility.
- Never fight with anyone using drugs or alcohol, or likely to have a weapon.
- Get as much information about a disagreement as possible, to help solve it and to head off feelings of uncontrollable anger.
- Try to think of solutions to a dispute that will give both sides something, and try to understand an opponent's point of view.
- Show respect for an opponent's rights and position.
- Don't make bias against an opponent's race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation a reason for a dispute.
- Show character by rejecting the bait for a fight, or accepting a compromise to a dispute, rather than responding with violence.
- Don't coerce a partner or be violent in a relationship; this behavior causes distance, loss of respect and love, and feelings of fear and guilt, in addition to the more obvious consequences of physical harm to the victim and arrest of the abuser.
- Show that people like and respect nonviolent problem-solvers more than bullies, and be a nonviolent problem-solver yourself.

*This guide was written by Wendy Schwartz. The information in the guide was drawn from the October 1994 (volume 94, number 4, part 2) issue of **Pediatrics**, the journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics. It is a special issue devoted to the role of the pediatrician in violence prevention, based on a conference sponsored by the Johnson & Johnson Pediatric Institute.*

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Other guides to help parents help their children learn can be found on the National Parent Information Network (NPIN) on the Internet. You will find these guides in the Urban/Minority Families section of the Urban Education Web (UEweb), at <http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu>. You can reach other sections of the NPIN Web through UEweb or at <http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/npin/npinhome.html>. The NPIN Gopher is at ericps.ed.uiuc.edu. Ask someone in your local library, your children's school, or your parent center how to see the information on this network.

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