

# **Violence Prevention And Crisis Response Guide For Parents**

Developed with the approval of the Three Village Central School District Setauket, NY by the Parent Violence Prevention Subcommittee of the District's Violence Prevention Committee.

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# **VIOLENCE PREVENTION**

## **FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SCHOOL VIOLENCE**

Factors contributing to school violence are numerous, complex, and community-related. America's children are exposed to a steady diet of verbal and physical violence that begins early and continues throughout their lives. Numerous reports have cited the fact that children in the U.S. spend more time watching television and participating in computer related activities than attending school. Most of what children watch is unsupervised and much of it is filled with scene after scene of unadulterated sex and violence. This can lead to a desensitization to violence. All too often children who behave violently are themselves victims of an overdose of violence.

In too many communities, children constantly send signals that they feel isolated from and maligned by society. These feelings know no geographic, social, or economic boundaries. Increasingly many youth come from communities where the vast majority of the experiences to which they have been exposed have been hostile. They have had to fight to simply survive. These young people are filled with rage and a sense of rejection and, as a result, do not believe that they owe society anything.

At the same time, an increasing number of children who have not grown up in mean, hostile environments are involved in acts of violence. They often cite boredom or the excitement of control as reasons for their actions. It is difficult to understand their rebellion against society.

### **Parenting Practices**

Some children receive mixed messages from parents and other adults about what is right and what is wrong. The use of material goods to persuade children to behave in one way or to dissuade them from behaving in another is one example of sending a mixed message. In such situations, children are "bribed" by promises of expensive clothing or toys. Parents' attitudes and actions convey strong messages about roles, responsibilities, and rights that must be learned in order to be as good citizens in a democratic society. How children learn these lessons is as important as what they learn.

In addition, with more and more parents working outside the home, students are very aware that it is sometimes difficult for school officials to contact their parents. Some parents may even refuse to come to school when asked, particularly if their child has been in trouble repeatedly. Parents may be so overwhelmed that they feel powerless to control their child or may blame the school for their child's problems. Sometimes parents do not respond because of their own negative school experiences; they view school as a hostile environment. Likewise, a parent who does come to school may support the child's disruptive/violent behavior as another form of "bribery" to gain the child's affection, particularly when the relationship between the two is strained. Further, educators have reported that there are even very young children who state that their parents have told them (the children) that they do not have to do what the teacher says or that if anyone tries to take something away from them, or insults or hits them, they should fight back. Unfortunately, some parents admit that they have so instructed their child.

These types of parenting practices are evident across the socioeconomic spectrum. Parenting that indulges, neglects, abuses, or ignores children, and that fails to provide strong, positive guidance, discipline, and nurturance, contributes to the spread of violence in schools.

### **Peer Pressure**

Children who have demonstrated violent behavior recognize that a lack of parental supervision at home is the major factor contributing to violence in schools. However, an equal number of children cite as a second major factor the presence of gang or group membership or peer group pressure as perhaps the fastest growing and most disturbing cause of acts of violence among youth, in or out of school. (*The American Teacher*, 1993; Toby, 1994: *U.S. Department of Justice*, 1991)

### **Drugs and Alcohol**

Children cite involvement with drugs and alcohol as the third major factor contributing to school violence. Those who reported the availability of drugs in school did not vary significantly by ethnicity, level of family income, or geographic location (U.S. Department of Justice, 1991). Although reports indicate that the use of drugs such as heroin, cocaine, marijuana, and crack is down among students in grades 6-12, the consumption of alcohol is not. Alcohol is the number one drug used by teenagers and young adults.

### **Bias**

Another emerging trend is the number of acts of violence related to race or religion. The 1993 Lou Harris Study on *Racism and Violence in American High School: Project Teamwork Responds* reported that racism and violence are rising significantly in America's high schools. Seventy-five percent of children surveyed reported seeing or hearing about racially or religiously motivated confrontations on a regular basis, up from 57 percent in an earlier survey (cited in *National Consortium for Academics and Sports*, 1993). This trend is particularly disturbing in light of the fact that diversity in America is rapidly increasing.

*Reprinted from the Center for the Prevention of School Violence - North Carolina State University.*

## **EARLY WARNING SIGNS**

There are early warning signs in most cases of violence to self and others. Certain behavioral and emotional signs that, when viewed in context, can signal a troubled child. But early warning signs are just that - indicators that a child may need help.

Such signs may or may not indicate a serious Problem; they do not necessarily mean that a child is prone to violence toward self or others. Rather, early warning signs provide the impetus to check concerns and address a child's needs. Early warning signs can assist parents to act responsibly by getting help for the child before the problems escalate. Parents are not professionally trained to analyze children's feelings and motives, however, you are on the front line when it comes to observing troublesome behavior.

By actively sharing information, a school community can provide quick, effective responses.

### **Principles for Identifying the Early Warning Signs of School Violence**

An ability to recognize early warning signs is established by close, caring, and supportive relationships with children and youth and getting to know them well enough to be aware of their needs, feelings, attitudes, and behavior patterns. Parents and educators together can review school records for patterns of behavior or sudden changes in behavior.

### **Early Warning Signs**

It is not always possible to predict behavior that will lead to violence. However, parents, educators, and sometimes students, can recognize certain early warning signs. In some situations and for some youth, different combinations of events, behaviors, and emotions may lead to aggressive rage or violent behavior toward self or others. A good rule of thumb is to assume that these warning signs, especially when they are presented in combination, indicate a need for further analysis to determine an appropriate intervention.

Research clearly indicates that most children who become violent toward self or others feel rejected and psychologically victimized. In most cases, children exhibit aggressive behavior early in life and, if not provided support, will continue a progressive developmental pattern toward severe aggression or violence. However, research also shows that when children have a positive, meaningful connection to an adult whether it be at home, in school, or in the community, the potential for violence is reduced significantly.

None of these signs alone is sufficient for predicting aggression and violence. Rather, the early warning signs are offered only as an aid in identifying and referring children who may need help. The following early warning signs are presented with the following qualifications: They are not equally significant and they are not presented in order of seriousness. The early warning signs include:

**Social withdrawal.** In some situations, gradual and eventually complete withdrawal from social contacts can be an important indicator of a troubled child. The withdrawal often stems from feelings of depression, rejection, persecution, unworthiness, and lack of confidence.

**Excessive feelings of isolation and being alone.** Research has shown that the majority of children who are isolated and appear to be friendless are not violent. In fact, these feelings are sometimes characteristic of children and youth who may be troubled, withdrawn, or have internal issues that hinder development of social affiliations. However, research also has shown that in some cases feelings of isolation and not having friends are associated with children who behave aggressively and violently.

**Excessive feelings of rejection.** In the process of growing up, and in the course of adolescent development, many young people experience emotionally painful rejection. Children who are troubled often are isolated from their mentally healthy peers. Their responses to rejection will depend on many background factors. Without support, they may be at risk of expressing their emotional distress in negative ways including violence. Some aggressive children who are rejected by non-aggressive peers seek out aggressive friends who, in turn, reinforce their violent tendencies.

**Being a victim of violence.** Children who are victims of violence including physical or sexual abuse in the community, at school, or at home are sometimes at risk themselves of becoming violent toward themselves or others.

**Feelings of being picked on and persecuted.** The youth who feels constantly picked on, teased, bullied, singled out for ridicule, and humiliated at home or at school may initially withdraw socially. If not given adequate support in addressing these feelings, some children may vent them in inappropriate ways including possible aggression or violence.

**Low school interest and poor academic performance.** Poor school achievement can be the result of many factors. It is important to consider whether there is a drastic change in performance and/or poor performance becomes a chronic condition that limits the child's capacity to learn. In some situations such as, when the low achiever feels frustrated, unworthy, chastised, and denigrated, acting out and aggressive behaviors may occur. It is important to assess the emotional and cognitive reasons for the academic performance change to determine the true nature of the problem.

**Expression of violence in writings and drawings.** Children and youth often express their thoughts, feelings, desires, and intentions in their drawings and in stories, poetry, and other written expressive forms. Many children produce work about violent themes that for the most part is harmless when taken in context. However, an over representation of violence in writings and drawings that is directed at specific individuals (family members, peers, other adults) consistently over time, may signal emotional problems and the potential for

violence. Because there is a real danger in mis-diagnosing such a sign, it is important to seek the guidance of a qualified professional such as a school psychologist, counselor, or other mental health specialist to determine its meaning.

**Uncontrolled anger.** Everyone gets angry; anger is a natural emotion. However, anger that is expressed frequently and intensely in response to minor irritants may signal potential violent behavior toward self or others.

**Patterns of impulsive and chronic hitting, intimidating, and bullying behaviors.** Children often engage in acts of shoving and mild aggression. However, some mildly aggressive behaviors such as constant hitting and bullying of others that occur early in children's lives, if left unattended, might later escalate into more serious behaviors.

**History of discipline problems.** Chronic behavior and disciplinary problems both in home and at school may suggest that underlying emotional needs are not being met. These unmet needs may be manifested in acting out and aggressive behaviors. These problems may set the stage for the child to violate norms and rules, defy authority, disengage from school, and engage in aggressive behaviors with other children and adults.

**Past history of violent and aggressive behavior.** Unless provided with support and counseling, a youth who has a history of aggressive or violent behavior is likely to repeat those behaviors. Aggressive and violent acts may be directed toward other individuals, be expressed in cruelty to animals, or include fire setting. Youth who show an early pattern of antisocial behavior frequently and across multiple settings are particularly at risk for future aggressive and antisocial behavior. Similarly, youth who engage in overt behaviors such as bullying, generalized aggression and defiance, and covert behaviors such as stealing, vandalism, lying, cheating, and fire setting also are at risk for more serious aggressive behavior. Research suggests that age of onset may be a key factor in interpreting early warning signs. For example, children who engage in aggression and drug abuse at an early age (before age 12) are more likely to show violence later on than are children who begin such behavior at an older age. In the presence of such signs it is important to review the child's history with behavioral experts and seek parents' observations and insights.

**Intolerance for differences and prejudicial attitudes.** All children have likes and dislikes. However, an intense prejudice toward others based on racial, ethnic, religious, language, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and physical appearance, when coupled with other factors, may lead to violent assaults against those who are perceived to be different. Membership in hate groups or the willingness to victimize individuals with disabilities or health problems also should be treated as early warning signs.

**Drug use and alcohol use.** Apart from being unhealthy behaviors, drug use and alcohol use reduce self-control and expose children and youth to violence, either as perpetrators, as victims, or both.

**Affiliation with gangs.** Gangs that support anti-social values and behaviors including extortion, intimidation, and acts of violence toward other students cause fear and stress among other students. Youth who are influenced by these groups such as those who emulate and copy their behavior, as well as those who become affiliated with them may adopt these values and act in violent or aggressive ways in certain situations. Gang-related violence and turf battles are common occurrences tied to the use of drugs that often result in injury and/or death.

**Inappropriate access to, possession of, and use of firearms.** Children and youth who inappropriately possess or have access to firearms can have an increased risk for violence. Research shows that such youngsters also have a higher probability of becoming victims. Families can reduce inappropriate access and use by restricting, monitoring, and supervising children's access to firearms and other weapons. Children who have a history of aggression, impulsiveness, or other emotional problems should not have access to firearms and other weapons.

**Serious threats of violence.** Idle threats are a common response to frustration. Alternatively, one of the most reliable indicators that a youth is likely to commit a dangerous act toward self or others is a detailed and specific threat to use violence. Recent incidents across the country clearly indicate that threats to commit violence against oneself or others should be taken very seriously. Steps must be taken to understand the nature of these threats and to prevent them from being carried out.

## **IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO IMMINENT WARNING SIGNS**

Unlike early warning signs, imminent warning signs indicate that a child is very close to behaving in a way that is potentially dangerous to self and/or others. Imminent warning signs require an immediate response.

No single warning sign can predict that a dangerous act will occur. Rather, imminent warning signs usually are presented as a sequence of overt, serious, hostile behaviors or threats directed at peers, staff, or other individuals. Usually, imminent warning signs are evident to the child's family.

**Imminent warning signs may include:**

**Serious physical fighting with peers or family members.**

**Severe destruction of property.**

**Severe rage for seemingly minor reasons.**

**Detailed threats of lethal violence.**

**Possession and/or use of firearms and other weapons.**

**Other self-injurious behaviors or threats of suicide.**

When warning signs indicate that danger is imminent, safety must always be the first and foremost consideration. Action must be taken immediately. Immediate intervention is needed when a child:

- Has presented a detailed plan (time, place, method) to harm or kill others, particularly if the student has a history of aggression or has attempted to carry out threats in the past.
- Is carrying a weapon, particularly a firearm, and has threatened to use it.

**GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS TO FOLLOW WHEN SUSPECTING  
EARLY WARNING SIGNS OF VIOLENCE**

You should be concerned when you notice warning signs in your child and it's even more appropriate to do something about those concerns. The following guidelines were developed to help parents communicate their concerns, when their child may be exhibiting early warning signs.

1. Become familiar with the early and imminent warning signs.
2. When you have a suspicion and/or concern about your child, this information should be communicated to the school psychologist, social worker, guidance counselor, and/or building administrator.
3. The school may provide outside counseling referrals.
4. The child's family will be consulted prior to implementing any interventions with the child.
5. In cases where school-based factors (e.g. environmental, social, emotional, academic) are determined to be causing or exacerbating the child's troubling behavior, the school will make an effort to quickly modify them.

## **CRISIS RESPONSE**

### **CRISIS GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS**

A crisis is an event of limited duration that is typically unpredicted and overwhelming for those, who experience it. The crisis may be violent in nature, a natural disaster, the death of a close friend or family member, a divorce, a suicide, a terminal illness, or a change in the environment.

The crisis can render a person with a sense of vulnerability and helplessness. With appropriate and successful intervention the equilibrium of the individual can be stabilized and a sense of security and safety can be restored.

The Three Village Central School District has a crisis response plan to deal with traumatic events in the school community. The primary goals of the District Crisis Response Plan are to:

1. Facilitate the grieving process.
2. Promote education and issues of bereavement and grieving.
3. Reduce fear among staff, parents, and students.
4. In the case of suicide, to prevent future suicides.
5. Provide violence prevention guidelines and procedures.

The Crisis Response Plan has been developed to provide a practical step by step outline of the tasks to be accomplished in coordinating the district's response to tragedy and violence prevention.

### **DEATH OF AN IMMEDIATE FAMILY MEMBER**

Children most deeply affected by a death in their immediate family are usually young children who lost their mothers or teenagers whose father died. However, any child, who has had death hit close to home, usually has a difficult time.

Let the family be together in a ritual of grieving. Older children can be pall bearers, younger ones can put flowers on the altar.

When one parent dies, the issue that almost always comes up is concern about the other parent. Be prepared to answer the question honestly and reassuringly. If life can be kept relatively stable it will be a lot easier.

As a parent, encourage the child to grieve. Share your own feelings and emotions.

## ACCIDENTS

When death is the result of old age, or is a slow, gradual death, the family is given some time to prepare for the inevitable. In the case of an accident, death comes as a shock. The family feels victimized. When there is an accident, the family is often laden with anger and guilt. Children are usually able to comprehend death from an accident more easily than just about any other kind of death because parents are always making such a big deal how they should avoid them. It is therefore important, when explaining death caused by an accident, to relate it back to something children have heard before. Explain what happened in the accident. Review the basic information about everybody being sad that the person died. Explain to younger children the person's body was so badly hurt it couldn't be fixed so it stopped working and the person died.

## SUICIDE

One of the most difficult kinds of death that a family ever has to cope with is one in which one family member feels directly responsible for the death of another. This is the case with suicide. The person who kills himself makes a statement he or she can't live anymore. The survivors feel they were abandoned and he or she didn't want to be around them anymore. It is the ultimate rejection for those who are left.

When you're faced with an actual suicide or suicide attempt, refusing to talk about it with your children or denying that it happened can be very traumatic. Younger children will create their own fantasies. Lying or withholding the truth destroys the child's not fully developed trust in those around him/her. Coping with suicide involves complex feelings and issues. Seeking professional help for the family is strongly recommended when addressing suicide.

Try to find out exactly what happened. If in fact the death was due to suicide, as a parent you can say the following to young children, " Sometimes a person's mind doesn't work right. He or she couldn't see things clearly and felt it was the only way to solve his/her problem. If he or she had waited, in time things would have gotten better." Reinforce the concept that for every problem there is a solution.

With older children you might state, "He had a serious problem and was in a lot of pain emotionally. This was the worst solution he could have chosen, but he wasn't thinking clearly."

## **BEHAVIORS/REACTIONS PARENTS CAN EXPECT FROM THEIR CHILD AFTER A CRISIS**

The manner in which a child reacts to a crisis situation is dependent upon a number of variables including personal history, personality, severity and proximity of the event, level of social support, and type and quality of interactions. While no two people respond to a crisis situation exactly in the same manner, the following is a listing of possible reactions to a crisis:

### **Physical Reactions:**

Fatigue	Shock
Dizziness	Numbness
Headaches	

### **Emotional Reactions:**

Increased Anxiety	Increased Fear
Depression	Irritability
Guilt and/or Grief	Inappropriate Emotions

### **Cognitive Reactions:**

Denial	Nightmares
Memory Problems	Loss of Orientation
Flashbacks	Raised or Lowered Attentiveness
Blaming Yourself and Others	Poor Problem Solving Ability
Hyper-vigilance	Memory or Concentration Problems
Poor Decisions	

### **Behavioral Reactions:**

Withdrawal	Emotional Outbursts
Acting Out	Pacing
Startle Reactions	Anger
Regression	Increased or Decreased Appetite
Decreased Academic Performance	Increased Aggression

Parents experience similar reactions to their children and are likely to be affected by the crisis situation either directly through exposure to the crisis or indirectly through the child's experience.

It is therefore imperative for parents to seek and receive support and guidance. Without such interventions, it may be difficult to meet the needs of your child successfully. Obtaining

## **DEVELOPMENTAL GUIDELINES IN ASSISTING CHILDREN DURING AND AFTER CRISIS**

### **Newborn to Three Years of Age:**

No matter how young, children sense when something is wrong even though they are unable to identify what is wrong. Children at this age cannot comprehend the concept of death. Some changes you may observe after a crisis are:

1. Crankiness
2. Altered sleep pattern.
3. Change in eating habits.

When you know what changes to look for in your children, you can respond more sensitively to their needs.

### **Three to Six Years of Age:**

Concepts like time and death are not fully developed. They think death is reversible. They cannot understand the concept of "finality" at this age. They will connect events that are not connected. For example, "Does this mean someone else is going to die?" "Old people die. Daddy is old, Daddy may die too." Explain the difference between seriously ill and just sick, and middle age and old age. It is important that your child not assume he/she is responsible in any way for the death. Children can feel responsible for a person's death for a number of reasons. They may have been told such things as, "You'll be the death of me yet" or "You're killing your father."

Discuss the emotions your child may be feeling and observing in others.

1. Crying is okay even for boys.
2. Feeling bad inside is okay.
3. Being mad is okay.
4. Some children may have trouble sleeping or

### **Six to Nine Years of Age:**

Most children in this age group will understand that death is final. They may need a more detailed explanation of why the person died. It is important to distinguish between a fatal illness and just being sick. Children at this age may have a greater fear of their parents dying. This concern is even greater when they are being raised by a single parent. They see death as something you catch or something that comes and gets you.

Discuss emotions your child may be feeling or observing:

1. Discuss that being angry and frightened is okay.
2. It may feel that something is missing.
3. Crying is okay even for boys.

Sometimes sharing your own feelings allows your child to share their feelings.

### **Nine to Twelve Years of Age:**

Children in this age group are more aware of the finality of death. Their feelings are quite close to those experienced by adults. These children may show more grief, anger, and guilt than younger children.

#### **Children may be angry at their parents for:**

1. Not telling them that the person who died was so sick.
2. Spending so much time with the sick person.

#### **Children may be angry at themselves for:**

1. Not intervening earlier.
2. Wishing the person would die.
3. Not saying good-bye.

#### **Children may be angry at the person who died for:**

1. Not taking care of himself or herself.
2. Abandoning them.

### **Teenagers**

Depending upon the teenager, he/she will show similar feelings of anger, grief, and guilt as the nine to twelve year old child.

#### **Teenagers may be angry at their brothers and sisters for:**

1. No apparent reason.
2. Grieving differently.
3. Not seeming to care.

Many people including teenagers feel guilt about death. This may stem from anger.

"How can I be angry at the person who died?"

"How can I be alive when he's dead?"

"I should have visited him or her before they died."

Emotions are like a roller coaster. There is a sense of feeling out of control. Teenagers often hate to have others see them cry.

Don't adhere rigidly to the developmental stages stated above. Use them as a guide. You know your child better than anyone else.

## **GENERAL SUGGESTIONS FOR INTERVENING AS A PARENT WHEN YOUR CHILD FACES A CRISIS**

Speak to your child regarding the crisis and provide them with accurate information regarding the crisis in a language he or she can understand.

1. Encourage your child to express his/her feelings.
2. Be a good listener.
3. Do not minimize or judge feelings.
4. Realize he/she may express anger - don't take it personally. A child will lash out at people he/she feels safe with.
5. Constantly reassure your child that things will get better - only make this statement if it is true.
6. Reassure your child you will "be there" for him/her.
7. Provide additional individual time and affection.
8. Reassure your child that he/she is safe, loved, and appreciated.
9. Monitor symptoms of depression, such as a change in overall functioning such as eating and sleeping patterns.
10. Monitor use of alcohol and drugs with older children.
11. Seek outside counseling if overall functioning deteriorates.

## **WHAT CAN SCHOOL PERSONNEL PROVIDE IN THE FORM OF SUPPORT AND INTERVENTION FOR YOUR CHILD**

If your child has experienced a loss or traumatic experience, contact the school social worker, psychologist, or guidance counselor. The staff will assist your child through the crisis by counseling or by providing referrals for outside counseling. All pupil personnel staff have a list of referring therapists who are available to work with you and your child. Also available is a listing of books on death and dying, suicide, divorce, and other issues.

It is strongly recommended that your child's teacher or teachers be informed of a traumatic event or crisis that your child has experienced. They see your child every day and can assess his/her functioning in the classroom. They can monitor your child and help determine when more individualized intervention is needed.

Information regarding a crisis or traumatic event does not become part of the child's cumulative record. Communication is kept confidential and the district goes to great lengths to insure the confidentiality of each case. If your child experiences a crisis such as suicidal thoughts, a parent will be notified as soon as possible. Therefore, it is important that your child have an emergency card on file with accurate phone numbers and information.

# DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

## PARENT/CHILD RELATIONSHIP HOW TO RAISE OPEN MINDED EMPATHETIC CHILDREN

Our goal as parents should be to raise emotionally healthy and productive children, who possess a sense of self-worth. We are not only responsible for teaching our children to be good students but good individuals with good values. Children with high self-esteem are tolerant, caring, and compassionate and can express their feelings in an appropriate manner. When we teach our children these skills, they learn to accept others, and ultimately, to accept themselves.

### **Tolerance**

We teach tolerance in the same way that we become tolerant: by practicing tolerance. Intolerant behaviors include gossiping, name-calling, violence, and rejection.

- All people are valuable. No one is better than anyone else.
- No one is perfect. All children, parents, and teachers make mistakes.
- All people, no matter who they are, where they come from, what they believe, how they act or what they look like - deserve respect and compassion.
- We should treat people the way we want others to treat us. Don't lie, threaten, or hit your child unless that's the way you want your child to treat others.

### **Feelings**

Teach appropriate expression of feelings.

- Feelings are not right or wrong. They are real and not to be judged.
- Help children identify their feelings, explain that we can share our feelings with others but we don't have the right to express them by hurting someone else.
- Argue fairly. An argument doesn't end in yelling, hitting, or pouting. An argument ends when everybody involved has expressed his or her opinion and tried to convince everybody else to agree. Unlike fights which have winners and losers, everybody walks away from an argument feeling like a winner.

### **Empathy**

**Teach sympathy and compassion.**

- Observe and talk about the acts of caring, sharing, and respect that you see in others.
- Explain the values and feelings behind your own acts of compassion . .
- Raise children's awareness of their own effect on other people. Have them look at what they do to make others feel good or bad and help them identify the reasons behind their actions.

## TIPS FOR PARENTS

*Parents can help create safe schools. Here are some ideas that parents in other communities have tried.*

- Discuss the school's discipline policy with your child. Show your support for the rules, and help your child understand the reasons for them.
- Involve your child in setting rules for appropriate behavior at home.
- Talk with your child about the violence he or she sees on television, in video games, and possibly in the neighborhood. Help your child understand the consequences of violence.
- Teach your child how to solve problems. Praise your child when he or she follows through.
- Help your child find ways to show anger that do not involve verbally or physically hurting others. When you get angry, use it as an opportunity to model these appropriate responses for your child - and talk about it.
- Help your child understand the value of accepting individual differences.
- Note any disturbing behaviors in your child. For example, frequent angry outbursts, excessive fighting and bullying of other children, cruelty to animals, fire setting, frequent behavior problems at school and in the neighborhood, lack of friends, and alcohol or drug use can be signs of serious problems. Get help for your child. Talk with a trusted professional in your child's school or in the community.
- Keep lines of communication open with your child - even when it is tough. Encourage your child always to let you know where and with whom he or she will be. Get to know your child's friends.
- Listen to your child if he or she shares concerns about friends who may be exhibiting troubling behaviors. Share this information with a trusted professional, such as the school psychologist, social worker, guidance counselor, principal, or teacher.
- Be involved in your child's school life by supporting and reviewing homework, talking with his or her teacher(s), and attending school functions such as parent conferences, class programs, open houses, and PTA meetings.
- Work with your child's school to make it more responsive to all students and to all families. Share your ideas about how the school can encourage family involvement, welcome all families, and include them in meaningful ways in their children's education.
- Talk with the parents of your child's friends. Discuss how you can form a team to ensure your children's safety.
- Find out if your employer offers provisions for parents to participate in school activities.

## **VIOLENCE PREVENTION/CRISIS RESPONSE MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED PARENT QUESTIONS**

### **1. Why do we need a Violence Prevention/Crisis Response Program? Aren't the schools in this district safe?**

Answer: yes. We feel the schools are very safe. However in light of the events taking place around the country, we want to be prepared for any type of crisis situation that could potentially occur. All school personnel have been trained in crisis intervention and violence prevention strategies.

### **2., Who exactly has received this training?**

Answer: All school personnel including teachers, administrators, monitors, aides, nurses, custodians, security guards, clerical staff, and bus drivers.

### **3. What is the main focus of this**

Answer: The primary focus of this training is:

- A. To prevent a chaotic situation from escalating into a potentially catastrophic one.
- B. To help those affected by the crisis to return, as quickly as possible, to pre-crisis functioning.
- C. To decrease the potential long-term effects of the crisis on functioning.

### **4. Why do we need such an organized Crisis Response Plan?**

Answer: In summary, a pro-active approach to a crisis is one that is organized, planned, and practiced. It more likely results in a response that reduces the short and long-term consequences of the crisis on the individuals in a school district.

### **5. What can we do as parents, to ensure that our children are safe?**

Answer: In nearly all cases of school violence, there are early warning signs, which can be both behavioral and emotional indicators that a student may need help. School staff are being trained to identify these early warning signs.

### **6. What are some of the early warning signs?**

Answer: Please refer to page 3.

### **7. What should I do if I notice any of these early warning signs?**

Answer: If you have a suspicion and/or a concern about your child, you should report this information to the school psychologist, social worker, guidance counselor, teacher, and/or building administrator, and you may also wish to consult your physician.

**8. If a crisis situation does occur, what types of behaviors/reactions can I expect from my child?**

Answer: The way students react to crisis situations is dependent on a number of variables. These may include personal history, personality variables, age of student, severity and proximity of the event, level of social support, student's relationship to those involved in the crisis, and the type and quality of intervention. While no two people respond to situations, including crisis situations, in exactly the same manner, the following are often seen as immediate reactions to a significant crisis:

- shock, numbness
- denial or inability to acknowledge the situation has occurred
- dissociative behavior - appearing dazed, apathetic, expressing feelings of unreality
- confusion
- disorganization
- difficulty making decisions
- suggestibility

**9. What can I do to help my child through a crisis situation?**

Answer: As parents you are probably the most influential factor in the recovery of your child from the emotional consequences of a crisis. Since you are the most emotionally involved with your child, your support, encouragement, and reassurance is of the utmost importance in your child's recovery. The following is a list of interventions that you can provide to address the reactions of your child to a crisis situation:

- Speak to your child regarding the crisis and provide him/her with accurate information regarding the crisis in a language that he/she can understand.
- Listen carefully to your child and show him/her that you understand what he/she is feeling.
- Your child needs constant reassurance that things will get better and that in the long term things will improve. This should only be stated if it is indeed true. No false statements regarding the future should be made in an effort to help your child feel better in the present. This will only lead to false hopes and distrust in the future.
- You will most likely need to keep in touch with your child's teacher(s) to monitor his/her academic progress.
- If at any time you feel worded or troubled about your child's behaviors don't hesitate to consult professionals in or out of school !**

**10. How can I get more involved in the school's Crisis Response/Violence Prevention program?**

Answer: Call the school psychologist, school administrator, and/or PTA/PTO president for further information.

