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INTRODUCTION

“Being on either end of a violent situation, whether you seem to have come out with the upper hand or whether you don’t seem to, it doesn’t resolve anything. It escalates the problem. Hatred leads to more hatred. Violence leads to more violence.” – Adam Yauch of the Beastie Boys

Violence. It’s the act of purposefully hurting someone. And it’s a major issue facing today’s young adults. One in 12 high schoolers is threatened or injured with a weapon each year. If you’re between the ages of 12 and 24, you face the highest risk of being the victim of violence.

At the same time, statistics show that by the early 1990’s the incidence of violence caused by young people reached unparalleled levels in American society.

There is no single explanation for the overall rise in youth violence. Many different factors cause violent behavior. The more these factors are present in your life, the more likely you are to commit an act of violence.

Factors that contribute to violent behavior include:

• peer pressure
• need for attention or respect
• feelings of low self-worth
• early childhood abuse or neglect
• witnessing violence at home, in the community or in the media
• easy access to weapons

Reasons for Violence

What causes someone to punch, kick, stab or fire a gun at someone else or even him/herself?

There is never a simple answer to that question. But people often commit violence because of one or more of the following:
Expression
Some people use violence to release feelings of anger or frustration. They think they are no answers to their problems and turn violence to express their out of control emotions.

Manipulation
Violence is used as a way to control others or get something they want.

Retaliation
Violence is used to retaliate against those who have hurt them or someone they care about.

Violence is a learned behavior
Like all learned behaviors, it can be changed. This isn’t easy, though. Since there is no single cause of violence, there is no one simple solution. The best you can do is learn to recognize the warning signs of violence and to get help when you see them in your friends or yourself.

Recognizing violence warning signs in others
Often people who act violently have trouble controlling their feelings. They may have been hurt by others. Some think that making people fear them through violence or threats of violence will solve their problems or earn them respect. This isn’t true. People who behave violently lose respect. They find themselves isolated or disliked, and they still feel angry and frustrated.

If you see these immediate warning signs, violence is a serious possibility:

• loss of temper on a daily basis
• frequent physical fighting
• significant vandalism or property damage
• increase in use of drugs or alcohol
• increase in risk-taking behavior
• detailed plans to commit acts of violence
• announcing threats or plans for hurting others
• enjoying hurting animals
• carrying a weapon
If you notice the following signs over a period of time, the potential for violence exists:

- a history of violent or aggressive behavior
- serious drug or alcohol use
- gang membership or strong desire to be in a gang
- access to or fascination with weapons, especially guns
- threatening others regularly
- trouble controlling feelings like anger
- withdrawal from friends and usual activities
- feeling rejected or alone
- having become a victim of bullying
- poor school performance
- history of discipline problems or frequent run-ins with authority
- feeling constantly disrespected
- failing to acknowledge the feelings and rights of others

What Can You Do If Someone You Know Shows Violence Warning Signs?

When you recognize violence warning signs in someone else, there are things you can do. Hoping that someone else will deal with the situation is the easy way out.

Above all, be safe. Don’t spend time alone with people who show warning signs.

If possible without putting yourself in danger, remove the person from the situation that’s setting them off.

Tell someone you trust and respect about your concerns and ask for help. This could be a family member, guidance counselor, teacher, school psychologist, coach, clergy, school resource officer or friend.

If you are worried about being a victim of violence, get someone in authority to protect you. Do not resort to violence or use a weapon to protect yourself.
The key to really preventing violent behavior is asking an experienced professional to help. The most important thing to remember is don’t go it alone.

25 WARNINGS SIGNS OF ABUSERS

(Batterers, Acquaintances & Emotional)

1. **Boundaries.** Intimidates by getting too close. Touches, pinches, grabs you against your will.
2. **Quick Involvement.** Desperately pressures you for a commitment.
3. **Controlling Behavior.** Says he’s angry you’re “late” because he “cares” Controls you.
4. **Jealousy.** Angry about your relationships with other men, women, even children & family.
5. **Abusive Family of Origin.** He sees violence as normal behavior, a natural part of family life.
6. **Low Self-esteem.** Damages your self-esteem, demeans your growth, demands your silence.
7. **Alcohol/Drug Abuse.** Abuses alcohol/drugs; tries to get you drunk; berates you if you won’t get drunk.
8. **Difficulty Expressing Emotions.** He displaces anger at himself onto you.
9. **Blames other for His Feelings or Problems.** Blames you for everything that goes wrong.
10. **Hypersensitivity.** Quick temper; unable to handle frustration without getting angry; easily insulted.
11. **Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde.** Seems like two different people with mood swings from nice to explosive.
12. **Unrealistic Expectations.** Very dependent on you for all his physical & emotional needs. “You’re all I need.”
13. **Rigid Gender Rules.** He thinks it’s okay for men to keep women ‘in line’ or intimidation.
14. **Rigid Religious Beliefs.** Justifies rigid gender roles & the physical/emotional/sexual domination of women & children with strict or distorted interpretations of scripture.

15. **Disrespect for Women in General.** Ridicules & insults women; sees women as stupid & inferior to men.

16. **Emotional Abuse.** He may ignore your feelings, continually criticize you and call you names like, fat, stupid or ugly, or manipulate you with lies, contradictions, humiliate you in public or private.

17. **Isolation.** He alienates you from your family and friends.

18. **Reliance on Pornography.** They may want you in their interest by photographing you or taking you to pornographic movies or shops.

19. **Sexual Abuse.** Refuses platonic relationship if dating; uses ‘playful’ force in sex; uses sulking or anger to manipulate you into having sex.

20. **Cruelty to Animals, Children, or Others.** Teases, bullies, abuses, or harshly punishes animals or others people.

21. **Past Violence.** ANY history of violence with anyone to “solve” problems. Justifies hitting or abusing women in the past- “they made me do it.” Friends or relatives say he’s abusive.

22. **Fascination with Weapons.** Plays with guns, knives, or other lethal weapons, threatening to get even with others.

23. **Threats of Violence.** Any threats of physical force to control you or make you do something should be taken seriously.

24. **Breaking or Striking Objects.** Punishes you by breaking loved objects, terrorizes you into submission. He beats on tables, throw objects at you to threaten you. The message is “You’re next! You’re just an object I can control and I can break you easily.”

25. **Any Force During an Argument.** Hurts you in anger or in ‘play,’ pushing, shoving, pulling, grabbing you by the collar, holding you down, restraining you from leaving the room, slapping, punching, hitting, kicking or burning. This cycle of violence is followed by the ‘honeymoon’ period, then an escalation of tension and more violence. The episodes of violence will get more frequent, more intense, and will not stop on their own.
MANAGING VIOLENT AND DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

I. WHAT YOU CAN DO TO MANAGE VIOLENT OR DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR?

A. When you and your relative are BOTH calm, explain to him/her what kinds of behaviors you will not tolerate, as well as the specific consequences upon which you (and other family members) have decided (and agreed) for specific violent or disruptive behaviors.

   Example: “Next time you threaten to harm any of us, the police will be called.”

B. Get to know and recognize cues that your relative is becoming violent or disruptive. (Your own uneasiness or fear is usually a good cue.)

C. Tell your relative that his/her behavior is scaring you or upsetting you. This feedback can defuse the situation, but proceed with the next suggestion if it does not. Saying you are scared does NOT mean you act scared.

D. If you (and other family members) have made a limit-setting plan, now is the time to carry out the consequences. If you have not already warned your relative of the consequences when he was calm, use your judgment and past experience to decide whether to warn him/her or to just go ahead with the plan without saying anything.

E. Give your relative plenty of space, both physical and emotional. Never corner a person who is agitated unless you have the ability to restrain him/her. Verbal threats or hostile remarks constitute emotional cornering and should, therefore, be avoided.

F. Give yourself an easy exit, and leave the scene IMMEDIATELY if he/she is scaring you or becoming violent.

G. Get help! Just bringing in other people, particularly the police, can quickly defuse the situation.

H. If you or someone else has witnessed your relative committing a violent or dangerous ACT, whoever witnessed that act can petition for involuntary commitment.
II. WHAT YOU SHOULD DO:

A. Do NOT try to ignore violent or disruptive behavior. Ignoring only leads your relative to believe that this kind of behavior is acceptable and “repeatable.”

B. Do NOT give your relative what s/he wants if the way s/he is trying to get it is through bullying you. Giving in reinforces this bullying behavior and makes it likely that s/he will use it again. Only give in if it is the ONLY way out of a dangerous situation.

C. Do NOT try to lecture or reason with your relative when s/he is agitated or losing control.

D. NEVER be alone with someone you fear.

   Example: Do not drive him/her to the hospital by yourself.
Acknowledgment

This booklet was produced in partnership between Dr. George Fenigsohn LPC, the Thomas Nelson Community College Threat Assessment Team and the Violence Prevention Committee. Additional copies of the booklet can be obtained by contacting the Office of Student Development-Hampton.

Dr. Fenigsohn is currently an adjunct professor at Thomas Nelson Community College and an associate of Rock Landing Psychological Group, PLC located in Newport News, Virginia. Formerly, he was a counselor and family life teacher with York County Public Schools and Poquoson City Schools.

Resources

The Training and Education Center Network Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Family-to-Family Education Program

American Psychological Association (ASA)

Sandy Meadows, Women’s Center, ODU, (10/92)
The Thomas Nelson Community College Threat Assessment Team (TNCCTAT) and Violence Prevention Committee were established to provide guidance, uphold policies and address student, faculty, and staff safety needs.

The members of this team consist of the following:

- Vice President for Finance and Administration
- Chief of Police
- Dean of Student Success-Hampton
- Dean of Student Services-HT
- Human Resources Manager
- Safety Officer
- Counseling Center Staff and
- VCCS General Counsel when needed.

If you feel there is an immediate threat, dial ext. 3511 or call Thomas Nelson Community College Police at 757-825-2732 (Hampton) or (Williamsburg); if it is after hours call 757-879-3649 (Hampton) or 757-508-3449 (Williamsburg). If you are making a referral online, go to http://tncc.edu/police/tat/.