

Youth Violence Is a Serious Problem

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News headlines show that violent behavior among children and adolescents is a serious problem. Homicide is the second leading cause of death for youths ages 10 to 24, and a large fraction of high school students report that they recently carried a knife, gun, or other weapon, increasing the likelihood that confrontations will escalate into lethal violence. For the victims, the physical and emotional toll of violence affects them in different ways. Some young people turn to substance abuse, while others become violent themselves. Recognizing the signs and symptoms, such as a student's tendency to be verbally abusive or have anger flare-ups, is the first step in preventing youth violence.

As the headlines show, violence kills. Homicide is the second leading cause of death among young people ages 10 to 24, says the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In a recent survey, more than one-sixth of high school students surveyed had recently carried a knife, gun, or club.

Carrying weapons increases the risk that a fight will become fatal. Fifteen-year-old Kamal Singh was apparently try-

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ing to get away from a fistfight. But instead of letting the Bronx teen run away, other teens chased Kamal and shot him.

Even if an attack isn't fatal, violence can cause serious injury. Permanent disability can change a teen's life forever. Less serious attacks cause significant pain too.

In Stafford Springs, Connecticut, parents pressed charges against a high school football star who attacked their son in the locker room. The boy needed nine stitches to stop the bleeding on his back. The football player had bullied the boy several other times too. It was time to stop the violence.

Victims' Reactions Vary

Beth was in ninth grade when Katy shoved her down some stairs. Beth fell into her friend Donna. "I felt angry—and incredulous," says Beth. Instead of hitting back, Beth helped Donna. Then she went to the high school dean. After that, Katy stayed away from Beth.

Anger and shock are typical responses to violence. But fortunately, they didn't stop Beth from handling her problem effectively. Other teens feel embarrassed or powerless. Still others want to get revenge against their attackers.

Fear is another common response. "Sometimes the fear is worse than the actual physical harm," says Lara Murray of the National Center for Victims of Crime. "Physical harm ends. Bruises heal. But that feeling of fear can last a long time—even long after the bully has gone away."

Violence is demeaning. It's a direct attack on someone's self-esteem and value as a human being. In Northbrook, Illinois, high school seniors "hazed" some juniors [in spring 2003]. Fueled by alcohol, the senior girls punched and brutalized the other students. They spread urine, feces, pig intestines, and fish guts on them. Videotape captured the event for the whole country to see.