

Facts on Violence and Youth

"Keeping children safe takes a community effort. We must make sure that children have somewhere to turn before they act out in violence --- either against themselves or others."

-Michael Faenza, President and CEO,
National Mental Health Association

The National Mental Health Association believes youth violence is a complex, yet preventable, problem. An understanding of prevention and access to good prevention and treatment services are essential in building nonviolent communities. But first, communities must know the facts:

- In 1996-1997, 10% of all public schools reported at least one serious violent crime to the police or a law enforcement representative. Serious violent crimes included: murder, rape or other form of sexual battery, physical attack or fight with a weapon, suicide or robbery. (U.S. Departments of Justice and Education)
- In the 1990s, homicide became the second leading cause of death among adolescents. It became the leading cause of death among African American male adolescents. (U.S. Department of Justice)
- In 1989, 15% of students reported gangs present in their schools. By 1995, this percentage had risen to 28%. (U.S. Departments of Justice and Education)
- Nearly a million students took guns to school during 1998. (Parents Resource Institute for Drug Education)
- The peak time for violent victimization involving juveniles begins at 3:00 p.m., the end of the school day for most students. (U.S. Department of Justice)
- The rate of suicide for five to 24-year-olds has tripled since 1960, making it the leading cause of death among adolescents and the second leading cause of death among college-age youth. (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry)
- Studies suggest that of the one million youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system, as many as 60% of those incarcerated may have a mental health disorder and as many as 20% may have a severe disorder. As many as 50% may have substance abuse problems. (NMHA's Justice for Juveniles Initiative)
- Ninety-four (94) percent of youth arrests are for nonviolent offenses. (National Center for Juvenile Justice)
- Ninety (90) percent of people with a current mental illness are not violent. (National Institute for Mental Health)

What Families and Communities Can Do

- Learn about warning signs for potential violent behavior or gang involvement.
- Know the warning signs for mental health problems, suicide and substance use.
- Know your own community.
- Learn about neighborhood resources that support families and communities such as nonprofit organizations, annual celebrations and events, extended family relationships, faith communities and places of worship, after school sports and arts activities, parent involvement with the schools, car pools, preschools and babysitting cooperatives.
- Promote resilience in children by helping them develop effective social and communication abilities, including decision-making and problem-solving skills.
- Ensure that protective factors --- such as good physical healthcare and safe home environments --- exist for children in your home and community.

- Advocate for and help build broad-based prevention programs that include families, schools, business and faith communities, schools and universities, media, police, local and national not-for-profit organizations, and other parties concerned with the healthy development of children.
- Know that help is available. Your local mental health association or other child/family advocacy groups can help you locate services and programs in your community. Many of the national resources listed below have state and local chapters as well.

For More Information

For a free and confidential mental health screening, go on-line to www.mhacolorado.org.

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry. (800) 333-7636 <http://www.aacap.org> ---

professional membership organization of psychiatrists that provides resources for parents and teens.

Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice. (202) 944-5300 <http://www.air-dc.org/cecp> --- provides useful publications, including Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools.

Center for Mental Health Services. (800) 789-2647 <http://www.mentalhealth.org/child>. --- a Federal Government clearinghouse for mental health publications for families, children and adolescents in English and Spanish.

Center for School Mental Health Assistance. (888) 706-0980 <http://csmha.ab.umd.edu> --- provides information on intervention strategies for dealing with school violence, risk factors of violent behavior in children, aggression, and delinquency.

Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence. (303) 492-8465 <http://www.colorado.edu/cspv> --- provides fact sheets and other materials on reducing school violence, safe school planning and a summary of the book, Violence in American Schools.

National Association of School Psychologists. (301) 657-0270 <http://www.naspweb.org/> ---provides useful materials for parents, community leaders, teachers and other caregivers; the web site contains the full-length text of Early Warning, Timely Response.

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol & Drug Information. (800) 729-6686 <http://www.health.org> --- helps children, teens and families find appropriate resources and publications related to alcohol and drug use education and prevention.

National Institute of Mental Health. (301) 443-4513 <http://www.nimh.nih.gov> --- the mental health research component of the National Institutes of Health, which provides printed and online materials such as "Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Violence and Disaster."

Nawojczyk Group Inc. (501) 390-1393 <http://www.gangwar.com> --- provides information on the prevention and intervention of youth gangs, including a guide for parents and educators on the warning signs of gang activity.

UCLA School Mental Health Project. (310) 825-3634 <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu> --- provides schools and teachers with resources including the Resource Aid Packet "Responding to a Crisis at a School."