

When Violence Touches Our Lives



The tragic events that occurred on April 16, 2007 at Virginia Tech are not isolated to Blacksburg, Virginia. They have concerned Americans across the country and been felt throughout the global community. While law enforcement officials continue to piece together the reasons that led to such a gross loss of life, we recognize that you may have questions that need to be answered.

This special edition of our monthly newsletter is devoted to helping people understand that violence happens every day within our communities and even within our homes. These resources focus on helping people recover from violent incidents, find ways to support those who have been affected by violence, and provide suggestions for small changes that can have a big impact on how we keep ourselves safe on a daily basis.

Take a moment and explore the articles prepared for this special edition. Share them with your loved ones, friends, or anyone that may be unsettled by these recent events. We've even included information to help you discuss what has happened with your children and ease any fears they may have about being vulnerable at school.

While no one can absolutely predict when a violent incident will take place, we can prepare ourselves to respond with understanding and support. We can reach out to those who have suffered and help guide them away from their pain.

Our dedicated staff of consultants are available **24 hours everyday** to address your needs. Appointments can normally be scheduled within **two working days**. **After hours** and **weekend** sessions can be arranged, if needed. Crisis calls are always handled immediately. Services are **confidential** to the extent permitted by law. To access these services call First Sun EAP at 1-800-968-8143 or in Greater Columbia (803) 376-2668. For more information on this topic as well as the other benefits you receive from First Sun EAP, please see our website at: www.firstsuneap.com.

Common Stresses and Solutions: When Violence Touches Loved Ones

If someone close to you has been the victim of violence, you might be wondering how you can help. Some people have a natural ability to set their own feelings aside and be unconditionally supportive. Others, however, experience a range of their own emotions which can get in the way of being supportive at this traumatic time. You can be supportive by identifying and acknowledging your own feelings about the crime, respecting the victim's decisions, and providing support and suggestions for help.

Acknowledge Your Feelings

You may be inclined to deny that the violence happened, or even be angry with and blame the victim. After all, if you accept that your loved one is a victim, then you have to accept that the same violence could happen to you. It's very scary and makes you feel unable to protect yourself, much less those you love. In some ways it's easier to pretend that the violence never happened, or to lash out at or blame the victim.

If you find yourself experiencing these emotions, it can help to speak with someone at your community mental health crisis center. Being able to identify and deal with your own emotions about the situation can help you be the supportive person on which your loved one needs to rely.

The Victim Decides

If not incapacitated, an adult victim of violence must make many decisions quickly. These include cooperating with the authorities, hiring an attorney or choosing medical care.

Sometimes, it's very difficult for others to understand the victim's decisions, especially when we're sure we would handle things differently. Allow an adult victim to make as many decisions as he or she feels capable. Being a victim temporarily diminishes one's feelings of self-esteem and control over one's own life. The desire to make decisions for oneself is a step to recovery.

Unconditional Support

By acknowledging to yourself your own negative feelings about the violence, and actively listening to the victim and respecting his or her decisions, you'll be able to provide unconditional support. You or others might want to suggest that the victim take advantage of professional counseling and victims' assistance groups in your area. Together, all can help the victim regain self-esteem and control and resume a healthy life.

Talking to Your Kids About: Violence

Violence is becoming a fact of life for many children. Even in neighborhoods where violence is low, children should know how to respond to dangerous and potentially violent situations. Talk with you school-age children about safe street behavior, focusing on the following suggestions:

- Avoid dark, deserted, or dangerous streets-even if it means taking the long way around.
- Pay attention to what's going on around you. Walk away from possible danger, such as groups of older kids or adults behaving in a threatening or suspicious way. If you get scared, go into a store, restaurant, or gas station where other people are around.
- Let your parents, a trusted neighbor, or a police officer know about anything going on in your neighborhood that doesn't seem quite right.
- If you're mugged, give the mugger what's demanded. Don't fight back or talk to the mugger. Better to lose your possessions than your life. Report the incident to the police.
- If someone tries to hurt you or you think someone is going to hurt you, run away or scream to get attention. Shouting "Fire" helps to draw attention.
- Use a buddy system - go places with friends whenever possible.
- Always try to settle arguments with words, not fists or weapons. When someone you know tries to take advantage of you, stand up for your rights by saying "No" in a loud and firm voice. Report any threats or violence against you to a teacher, school administrator, or the police.

Safety at Home

At home, encourage your children to keep doors and windows locked and to check to see who's there before opening the door. Set a good example by doing this yourself. Teach your children how and when to use 911 or your local emergency number. Practice making emergency calls with a make-believe phone.

Listen to Your Children

Let your children know that they can talk to you about any fears they have. If your child is being seriously bullied or threatened at school, stand up for your child's safety by talking to school authorities about it. Although many children worry that "telling" on a bully will make things worse, bullies are more likely to leave your child alone if they know you will back your child up.

A Violence-Free Attitude

Your attitude toward violence can affect the way your child responds to potentially violent situations. Do you believe that boys who do not fight are sissies? That it's important to win at all costs? That "nice guys" finish last? Or, do you let your children know that it's OK to walk away from a fight, and back your words up with your own actions?

Is your home a violence-free zone, where family problems are solved without using violence or threats? Do you help your child to learn nonviolent ways to deal with frustration, anger, and conflict?

Children who learn to handle conflict without using violence are much less likely to become victims of schoolyard or street violence.