

Understanding Violent Behavior In Youth

There is great concern about the incidence of violent behavior among children and adolescents. This complex and troubling issue needs to be carefully understood by parents, teachers, and other adults. Children as young as preschoolers can show violent behavior. Parents and other adults who witness the behavior may be concerned, however, they often hope that the young child will "grow out of it." Violent behavior in a child of any age always needs to be taken seriously. It should not be quickly dismissed as "just a phase they are going through!"

Range of Violent Behavior

Violent behavior in children and adolescents can include a wide range of behaviors: explosive temper tantrums, physical aggression, fighting, threats or attempts to hurt others (including homicidal thoughts), use of weapons, cruelty toward animals, fire setting, intentional destruction of property and vandalism.

Factors Which Increase Risk of Violent Behavior

Numerous research studies have concluded that a complex interaction or combination of factors leads to an increased risk of violent behavior in children and adolescents. These factors include: Previous aggressive or violent behavior, Being the victim of physical abuse and/or sexual abuse, Exposure to violence in the home and/or community, Genetic (family heredity) factors, Exposure to violence in media (TV, movies, etc.), Use of drugs and/or alcohol, Presence of firearms in the home, Combination of stressful family socioeconomic factors (poverty, severe deprivation, marital breakup, single parenting, unemployment, loss of support from extended family), Brain damage from head injury.

What Are The "Warning Signs" For Violent Behavior In Children?

Children who have several risk factors and show the following behaviors should be carefully evaluated: Intense anger, Frequent loss of temper or blow-ups, Extreme irritability.