The Middle Years
(6–12 years)

Developmental Overview

The middle years of childhood represent a period of enormous social growth and marked intellectual development. Children become noticeably better at logical thinking, reasoning, and problem solving during these years. With new skills in hand, children experiment with what they have learned at home as they venture into the outside world. They compare their skills, beliefs, and values with those of their friends and acquaintances. Feelings of self-worth are tested and reinforced daily as children search to find a place within their peer group. The habits developed and lessons learned during these years will strongly influence their overall health and their success at school, at work, and in relationships.

Children fine-tune their social skills during the elementary school years through practice, observation, and discussion. While the family remains the child's foundation and a critical source of emotional and physical security, children gradually increase the amount of time spent away from the family. The ability to enter into a group of peers, make and keep good friends, deal with teasing and provocation, manage conflict, and develop empathy for others becomes an essential aspect of their lives.

Children's continuing social and intellectual development during the middle years often leads them to begin to question adult guidelines and expectations. Doing so helps children learn about themselves, express their individuality, and achieve a sense of autonomy. Patterns of family communication and parental discipline remain very important. A parenting approach that exercises considerable control, holds high but appropriate expectations for behavior, and demonstrates warmth and affection contributes to children's healthy development. When it encourages appropriate levels of responsibility and the use of reason and negotiation in resolving

The ability to enter into a group of peers, make and keep good friends, deal with teasing and provocation, manage conflict, and develop empathy for others becomes an essential aspect of children's lives.

differences, this kind of approach accommodates the growing maturity of the child.

During the preschool years, parents control most of their child's connections with others, but during the middle years, children begin to expand the number and depth of their relationships with peers and other adults. Parents and families still remain central to providing children with a sense of belonging, a source of emotional and physical support, and consistent guidance, even while children gradually become more self-reliant [43].

This section of the *Guide* addresses areas in which parents have opportunities to encourage their child's

healthy, caring development; increase their child's range of strategies to negotiate problems; and meet their child's emotional needs. The topics discussed in this section are peer relationships, popular entertainment media, appropriate after-school care and monitoring, encouraging school success, conflict management skills, and connections with caring people within the community.

As in the first section of this *Guide*, in these six areas a complex interplay of various conditions, including parental influence, may work to increase or decrease a child's risk for involvement in violence as perpetrator or victim. Each of these six areas is influenced by individual factors, family factors, school factors, peer-related factors, and neighborhood factors [26].

These areas are not meant to be a comprehensive list of the factors affecting aggression in children. Parenting style, family strengths, and biological functions such as temperament also contribute to patterns of aggression in children. These factors are discussed briefly in the introduction to this *Guide*. The areas discussed here, however, are ones in which there are particular risks that may contribute to the development of aggressive behavior in children and upon which parents can have a strong influence. Brief research summaries are included about each area to help parents understand the role each one plays in violence prevention. Resources follow, so that parents can find out where to get additional information and help.

Most parents can see the importance of social competence as children grow and develop. Prosocial skills are also discussed in the preschool section, and peer influences are discussed in more detail in the adolescence section.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Peer Relationships

How do peer relationships fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

During the school years, friendships are very important to the child's development. Friends are emotional and intellectual supports for children. Through friendships, children learn how to cooperate, solve problems, negotiate, resolve conflict, and manage stress. Children learn how to develop and sustain new relationships through their experiences with friends [25]. Given the number of hours that most children spend with their friends, it is not surprising that children who have healthy friendships report higher levels of self-esteem, emotional well-being, and school success. It is also not surprising that children who are disliked by other children report lower self-esteem and depression, and do less well in school. In fact, early signs of ongoing rejection by other children suggest that a child is at risk for a variety of poor outcomes later in life. Those risks include dropping out of school, juvenile delinquency, and mental health problems [3; 37].

Children who are consistently rejected by other children see the world as a hostile, unfriendly place. Rejected children may become loners or make friendships with other children who are antisocial or impulsive [6]. Unfortunately, ongoing rejection may lead to a negative cycle during the middle years. Aggressiveness leads to rejection by others, which in turn leads the child to find other antisocial children. These groups of children become the training ground for later delinquency [14]. In fact, aggressive-rejected boys are a significant part of the "early-starting antisocial group," a relatively small group that accounts for nearly half of all adolescent delinquency ([15], p. 831).

A recent Surgeon General's report on youth violence defines the terms "early-onset" and "late-onset" violence. People who commit their first act of serious violence as a child and do not outgrow aggressive behavior are defined as having "early-onset" violence. "Late-onset" violence describes people who commit their first act of violence as an adolescent. The early-onset group represents only a small percentage of the population who may go on to commit violence as an adult. However, researchers believe that early identification and intervention can go a long way in preventing future acts of aggression, particularly for children who have problems with aggression [11].

> *Rejected children are more likely to become loners or make friendships with other children who are antisocial or impulsive.*

Parents and caregivers can help children with making healthy friendships by simply encouraging them to play with other children during their free time. In some neighborhoods, children can still wander down to a friend's house or ride bicycles in the street, but in a growing number of communities, this type of informal free time is not possible. However, parents may want to get together to supervise free play at the neighborhood park, within their own homes, or at local recreation centers. As with most other skills, children learn about good friendships through practice. The more time children have to be together, with an adult available to provide needed supervision, the more likely it is that children will learn healthy negotiation skills and develop healthy social groups.

Bullying is another pattern that may appear during the middle years (or it may also begin as early as preschool). Bullying includes a particular set of aggressive behaviors such as teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting, or stealing. The aggressive behaviors are a way of physically or psychologically intimidating others. Bullies need to feel powerful and in control, and they may gain satisfaction from harming people or animals. They may show little

empathy for their victims. Those who repeatedly bully others may also become defiant toward adults. The bully will often disregard rules at school and become antisocial [4]. Acts of bullying are usually related to feelings of peer rejection [14], and research suggests that children who regularly bully others may have difficulty maintaining good relationships as adults [4]. Research also indicates that bullies are selective. They tend to not choose people who are total "wimps," but rather those people who may react but do not really put up strong resistance. It is important for parents to be on the lookout for bullying or victimization in their children, and to intervene accordingly.

The interaction of several sets of factors is considered largely responsible for aggressiveness and bullying in children. One set of factors includes poor child-rearing practices such as lack of warmth and caring from parents, inadequate limits for child behavior, or harsh discipline methods. Another set of factors includes the child's temperament and activity level. Other factors, such as violence and bullying behavior seen on TV and in other media and the acceptance of bullying by friends and other adults, might be viewed as environmental [40].

Many children who bully simply outgrow the behavior. However, the outlook for those who do not is troubling. One study looked at 870 third-grade children in the Midwest. The researchers found that children who were unusually aggressive at 8 years old had a one-in-four chance of having a criminal record at age 30, as compared to the one-in-twenty chance most children have. This study also found that children who were bullies were more likely to be convicted of serious crimes later in life. They had more moving traffic violations and convictions for drunken driving. They were more likely to have been high school dropouts or not to have had school success. Adults who were childhood bullies were also more abusive to their spouses and children and had children who were more often bullies themselves. The results of this compelling study "were independent of children's social class and IQ at age 8" ([40], p. 80).

Boys are more likely to physically bully. Girls are more likely to focus their aggression on relationship issues with their friends. This kind of aggression, defined as "relational aggression," is done with the intention of hurting another child's feelings and her place within a social group. Although relational aggression is more typical of girls, it is not exclusive to girls. The physical aggression that is more characteristic of boys has received much attention in recent years. Relational aggression also may contribute to social and emotional problems including loneliness, depression, poor self-esteem, and rejection. While boys and girls may show their aggression or cruelty in different ways, the impact on their social and emotional development can be equally damaging [16; 17; 18].

> *While boys and girls may exhibit their aggression or cruelty in different ways, the impact on their social and emotional development can be equally damaging.*

The future of childhood bullies is not necessarily bleak. Getting help and support at home and in school, early in life, has been shown to help prevent the onset of violence [40]. Effective prevention includes schoolwide strategies for aggressive behavior that are clearly stated and enforced for everyone, and understandable consequences for any misbehavior. Parents also play an important role by taking bullying behaviors seriously and responding in ways that discourage aggressive tendencies. This will help to prevent early bullying behaviors from evolving into something more serious [40].

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about their child's peer relationships?

School counselors or social workers, teachers, pediatricians, other health care professionals, parenting educators, and family counselors are good sources of information and support about peer relationships.

**Your Thoughts
and Notes**

Resources on the Web

Having Friends, Making Friends, and Keeping Friends: Relationships as Educational Contexts
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00372/n00372.html

Bullying in Schools
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00416/n00416.html

Bullying Resource List
http://ericeece.org/pubs/reslist/bully01.html

Easing the Teasing
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1999/freed99.html

Girls, Aggressive?
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew700/int700d.html

How to Help Your Child Avoid Violent Conflicts
http://npin.org/library/1998/n00072/n00072.html

Keeping Schoolyards Safe from Bullies
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/bullying/DOCS/bullies.htm

Violence and Violence Prevention: A Review of the Literature
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/violence/docs/litrview.htm

Teaching Children Not to Be—or Be Victims of—Bullies
http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/npin/library/pre1998/n00142/n00142.html

Aggression and Cooperation: Developing Constructive Strategies
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1992/jewett92.html

Mobbing, Bullying, and Peer Rejection
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/bullying/DOCS/mob_bull.htm

Loneliness in Young Children
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1998/bulloc98.html

Children without Friends, Part 1: Their Problems
http://www.nncc.org/Guidance/dc26_wo.friends1.html

Children without Friends, Part 2: The Reasons for Peer Rejection
http://www.nncc.org/Guidance/dc31_wo.friends2.html

Children without Friends, Part 3: Learning about a Child's Strengths and Weaknesses
http://www.nncc.org/Guidance/dc32_wo.friends3.html

Children without Friends, Part 4: Improving Social Skills
http://www.nncc.org/Guidance/sac32_wo.friends4.html

Bullying in School: It Doesn't Have to Happen
http://www.britannica.com/bcom/magazine/article/0,5744,228177,00.html

What Should Parents and Teachers Know about Bullying?
http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/e-resources/ebooks/records/834.html#top

Boys and Girls Are Cruel to Each Other in Different Ways—But Effects Are Equally Harmful
http://www.apa.org/releases/cruel.html

What about Girls? Are They Really Not Aggressive?
http://www.hec.ohio-state.edu/famlife/bulletin/volume.3/bull26b.htm

Popular Entertainment Media

How does popular entertainment fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

Children today are immersed in the popular entertainment media. The average American child grows up in a home that has three TVs, three tape players, three radios, two VCRs, two CD players, one video game player, and one computer. American children spend almost 38 hours a week using entertainment media of all types outside of school or for homework [30].

Television, music, movies, video games, and the Internet are powerful teachers. Together they are often defined as the popular media. Media can broaden our children's world in productive ways or expose our children to harmful images. In his book *Selling Out America's Children: How America Puts Profits before Values—and What Parents Can Do,* David Walsh [46] talks about the harmful messages children learn from popular media. The messages include the acceptance of violence. For example, the average child in the United States sees over 200,000 acts of violence on television by the time he or she is 18 years old. Many popular shows encourage aggressive and disrespectful behavior. Walsh notes that there is glorification of an "in your face" approach to relationships that shows aggression and disrespect as funny and attractive. Images of violence in the popular media contribute to what some have called the "socially toxic environment" of today's youth. This glorification of violence is believed by many researchers to contribute to children's violent behavior [22; 23].

Reviews of the effects of violent television shows on children overwhelmingly confirm the negative consequences of violent programs [1]. Movies and violent videos, which are often more graphic than cable or broadcast TV, also have an effect on children. When children have a steady diet of violent graphic images, they can become desensitized to real violence [12; 31; 35].

In addition, boys and girls may learn different lessons about violence and aggression from the popular media. Boys learn that violence in the pursuit of justice is acceptable and perhaps even desirable. The violence shows that boys are strong and macho [31]. Girls, on the other hand, learn that men often abuse women. Many of the stories in movies, music videos, and popular music show images of women enjoying sexual aggression. Some research suggests that these violent images contribute to attitudes that are tolerant of rape and other forms of sexual abuse in real life [31].

> *Popular media are powerful teachers of our youth.*

Parents can help children make better use of media by setting media time limits for watching TV and videotapes, playing video and computer games, and surfing the Internet. Parents can also set family guidelines for media content. Television sets, VCRs, video games, and computers should be kept out of children's bedrooms to increase the likelihood that family guidelines are followed. Parents should also try, whenever possible, to use popular media as a part of a family activity [2].

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about the effects of popular entertainment on their child?

The entertainment industry, cable and commercial station networks, manufacturers of music and game videos, advertisers, and retailers who are part of marketing media violence to youth are part of the problem, but they are also responsive to parents' complaints. If parents are concerned that their child may be unusually affected by aggressive or violent shows, or has a lot of difficulty breaking away from television, they may wish to talk with their child's school counselor or a psychologist.

**Your Thoughts
and Notes**

Resources on the Web

Video Games: Research, Ratings, Recommendations
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00366/n00366.html

Television Violence: Content, Context, and Consequences
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1997/aidman97.html

Television Violence and Behavior: A Research Summary
http://npin.org/library/1997/n00155/n00155.html

Are Our Boys All Right?
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew300/int300a.html

Parents Guide to the Internet
http://npin.org/library/1998/n00005/n00005.html

Kids & Media @ the New Millennium: Some Findings
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew500/int500d.html

Is Media Violence Invading Your Home?
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/violence/docs/pmedia.htm

Violent Kids: Can We Change the Trend?
http://www.nifi.org/violent.html

Children Now's Boys to Men: Entertainment Media
http://www.childrennow.org/media/boystomen/index.html

Taming the Media Violence Hysteria
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/violence/docs/hysteria.htm

The Influence of Music and Rock Videos
http://www.aacap.org/web/aacap/publications/factsfam/musicvid.htm

More Chills Than Thrills: Protecting Children from Frightening Mass Media
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew599/int599e.html

The Parent's Guide: Use TV to Your Child's Advantage
http://npin.org/library/1998/n00049/n00049.html

Selling Out America's Children: How America Puts Profits before Values and What Parents Can Do
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew1198/int1198d.html

THE MIDDLE YEARS

Appropriate After-School Care and Monitoring

How does the availability of after-school care and monitoring fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

Almost five million children are home alone after school hours. These children are in families where both parents are working outside the home. The after-school hours are when violent juvenile crime peaks and when youth are most likely to experiment with alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and sex [13; 47]. Some older children successfully care for themselves after school for an hour or two until a parent comes home. However, it is not surprising that children and youth who begin their self-care earlier, and spend more time on their own, are significantly more likely to take risks.

Some parents do not use after-school programs because they are not available or because they are expensive or of poor quality. However, children gain important benefits from high-quality after-school programs. Some of the benefits include stronger friendships, enhanced emotional adjustment, and better grades and behavior during school hours [33]. Studies suggest that when older children and young teens attend enriching after-school activities, they are less likely to get involved in risky behavior. They are also more likely to have higher self-esteem and higher grades and are usually better able to handle conflict than youth in self-care [33; 36; 47]. Enriching after-school activities can provide children with the time they need to develop important relationships with their friends or with other caring adults. Children can also mentor younger children or learn more about their community and culture in after-school programs [24].

The term "after-school programs" is a broad term that includes a variety of programs. After-school programs might include activities at the home of a family member or neighbor. They may also include unstructured "drop-in" programs that are offered by community organizations. Licensed programs that are located at schools have may highly structured

activities and also help with homework. Some neighborhoods use both school and community resources in a combined program [24]. The Quantum Opportunity Program (QOP) is one example of a promising integrated after-school program for youth. QOP is a multi-service project that includes education and tutoring, mentoring, life-skills training, and community service projects [34]. Outcomes from this after-school project include reduced delinquency and decreased juvenile crime.

> *Studies suggest that preadolescents and young teens who attend enriching after-school activities are less likely to engage in risky behavior and are more likely to have higher self-esteem and higher grades.*

Many different individuals and groups can provide successful after-school programs. However, parents will want to look for some of the important features of a high-quality after-school program. High-quality programs include clear goals and intended outcomes. The program content is both age-appropriate and challenging. There are opportunities for active learning in a positive and safe environment where there are adequate materials and facilities. The staff is well-prepared and culturally competent. The program should include diverse groups of children and adolescents and encourage parental involvement. Staff will show a willingness to work with other community resources and partners and to continually evaluate and improve their services [34].

Older children and young teens may resist programs that look too much like child care or activities that appear to be "too supervised." Parents may also feel uncertain about how much freedom is needed for older children and youth. However, the Research Institute on Addictions suggests that healthy youth

development requires a lot of adult supervision. Their recent report indicates that when children are raised in a family that has lots of empathy, and parents actively monitor their children's activities, the children will have fewer problem behaviors. According to sociologist Grace Barnes: "Monitoring means knowing where your kids are, who their friends are, when they are coming in, and so on" [5]. The research also notes a critical gap between supervision of boys and girls. Although boys are more likely than girls to have risky behavior, have serious accidents, and engage in criminal activity, boys are monitored much less than girls.

Since there is such a great need for high-quality after-school care programs, the U.S. Department of Education has created a number of funding programs (see the resources at the Department's Web site: http://www.ed.gov/21stcclc/). Other groups involved

> *The development of high-quality after-school programs for older children and teens is the best way to 'shut down the prime time for juvenile crime.'*

in increasing national awareness of after-school care and monitoring include the National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC) and the *National School and Youth Violence Prevention Plan* developed by the Fight Crime: Invest in Kids coalition. This coalition is led by police chiefs, sheriffs, and attorneys from around the country. Members of the Fight Crime coalition believe that the development of high-quality after-school programs for older children and teens is the best way to "shut down the prime time for juvenile crime" ([32], pp. 68–72).

Parents play an important role in keeping their own children and the children in their community safe. One way a parent can help is by supporting efforts to increase the number of after-school care programs in their community. Sometimes a parent has no option but to have the child in self-care after

school. In those situations, the parent should take steps to prepare the child for the responsibility and be sure that the child knows what to do and whom to contact in case of an emergency.

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about the availability of after-school care for their child?

Local Child Care Resource and Referral agencies (CCR&Rs) can assist parents in understanding their after-school program options. CCR&Rs typically have information about subsidies available to help parents pay for care as well as resources on how to know when a child is ready for self-care. Parents can also talk with their child's school principal or the local school board to encourage the development of after-school programming within the elementary and middle school settings.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Enriching Children's Out-of-School Time
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1999/coltin99.html

After-School Programs for Urban Youth
http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/digests/dig114.html

Urban After-School Programs: Evaluations and Recommendations
http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/digests/dig140.html

Latchkey Children
http://npin.org/pnews/pnew597/pnew597e.html

Perspectives on Rural Child Care
http://npin.org/library/1998/n00019/n00019.html

Expanded After-School Options Still Leave Parents with Tough Choices
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew900/int900c.html

Planning for Children in Self-Care
http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/npin/library/1998/n00028/n00028.html

The Potential of After-School Programs
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/SafeandSmart/chapter1.html

When School Is Out
http://www.futureofchildren.org/

Fact Sheet on School-Age Children's Out-of-School Time
http://www.wellesley.edu/WCW/CRW/SAC/factsht.html

Afterschool.gov
http://www.afterschool.gov/

Bring Education to After-School Programs
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/After_School_Programs/

Safe and Smart
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/SafeandSmart/

Working for Children and Families: Safe and Smart After-School Programs
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/SafeSmart/

Keeping Schools Open as Community Learning Centers
http://www.ed.gov/pubs/LearnCenters/

Beyond the Bell Toolkit
http://www.ncrel.org/after/bellkit.htm

Report on Youth Violence Indicates Need for After-School Care
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew198/pnew198h.html

Encouraging School Success

How does school success fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

"Falling behind in school and frequent truancy are strong predictors of dropping out and are associated with all the high-risk behaviors" ([20], p. 29).

There is a connection between poor school performance and risky behaviors such as substance abuse, delinquency, teen sexual activity, and violence. This connection suggests that if a child has a pattern of early school failure that includes frequent absenteeism, then the child is more likely to get involved in risky behaviors. Those behaviors include dropping

> *When parents are consistently present at their child's parent-teacher conferences and school activities and available when teachers have problems or concerns, their son or daughter is more likely to see that education is important.*

out of school, criminal activity, and violence. However, children who succeed and are attached to the school through their friendships are less likely to get involved in serious crime, substance abuse, or violence. Successful children are often linked to the school through school activities, such as clubs, music, or athletics [20; 27]. Children who have a commitment to school can usually recover from an occasional "set-back" with friends or grades.

Parents provide a lasting and important support that can contribute to their child's school success and emotional growth. Parents can attend their child's parent-teacher conferences and school activities. Parents should also be available when teachers have problems or concerns. When children see their

parents and teachers working together, they begin to understand that education is important. It is also less likely that children will have ongoing difficulties or "slip through the cracks." School success does not mean that every child is an "A" student. But all students should feel that they are making progress that is consistent with their abilities. Students should also feel that their school environment is safe and caring with lots of opportunities to make lasting friendships [27].

Parents can influence several areas that impact a student's successful school experience. These areas include:

Connectedness: Students' attachment to caring adults such as parents, grandparents, teachers, or mentors. For example, keeping the child with the same teacher for two or more grade levels, called "looping," often improves the child's school success and encourages lasting friendships.

Competency: The developing ability to solve problems, make friends, and make independent decisions. For example, parents can encourage their child to participate in an organized activity such scouting, sports, or playing an instrument.

Aspirations: The ability to set goals and develop strategies for a successful future. For example, rather than simply going out and buying a pet for a child, parents might help him or her understand the commitment of caring for a pet by reading books from the local library. Then parents can help the child make a daily schedule for pet care, including a plan that identifies the steps for achieving the goal of owning a pet.

Effective schools: A supportive, safe learning environment that challenges all students to excel. For example, parents can stay involved with the school by belonging to their parent-school organization or by expressing their willingness to help on school improvement committees. Parents bring an important

47

voice to the table that helps school staff understand the many issues that may be affecting students' learning [20].

Parents also play an important role in helping teachers identify any possible learning and social difficulties in their child. Some schools may hesitate to intervene unless a child's school performance is lagging two or more grade levels behind similarly aged students. However, the evidence suggests that early intervention is critical. The farther behind a student falls in his or her school performance, the more likely the student will fail and begin to develop the sense of hopelessness that leads to risky behaviors [20].

While some schools may hesitate to intervene unless a child's academic performance is lagging two or more grade levels behind their peers, the evidence suggests that early intervention is critical.

Parents are an important part of their child's teaching team. Parents can help teachers spot potential problems early on by sharing their concerns if they feel that their child is struggling in school. Parents can also help by sharing important parts of their child's history and their view of their child's personality and abilities. These are qualities about the child that may not be seen in the classroom setting. Parents can also take the lead and ask for an assessment if they are concerned that their child might have a learning disability or another undiagnosed condition. When parents, teachers, and school staff work together, most difficulties can be resolved and strategies can be developed that will support a successful educational experience.

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about their child's successful school experience?

Teachers, principals, special education coordinators or support staff, school counselors, school superintendents, pediatricians or other health care providers, parenting educators, other parents, and the child are important sources of information and support.

Your Thoughts and Notes

**Your Thoughts
and Notes**

Resources on the Web

When Retention Is Recommended, What Should Parents Do?
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1997/robert97.html

If an Adolescent Begins to Fail in School, What Can Teachers and Parents Do?
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1997/rober97b.html

Failure Syndrome Students
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1998/brophy98.html

Preventing and Resolving Parent-Teacher Differences
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1996/lketal96.html

When Should Parents Contact the Teacher? How Effective Parent-School Partnerships Can Prevent School Difficulties
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew1199/feat1199.html

How Parents and Peers Influence School Success
http://npin.org/pnews/2000/pnew900/int900e.html

Reducing the Risk of Failure by Easing Transitions and Providing Connections within the School Environment
http://npin.org/pnews/1997/pnewo97/pnewo97h.html

Toward More Productive Parent-Teacher Conferences
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew1198/int1198c.html

Teacher-Parent Partnerships
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1992/swick92.html

Learning Disabilities: Glossary of Some Important Terms
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00162/n00162.html

Position Statement: Student Grade Retention
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00348/n00348.html

Grade Repetition/Social Promotion—What the Research Indicates
http://ericae.net/faqs/grade_rep/grade_rep.htm#Digests

Homework—Policies, Practices, and Guides for Helping Parents and Teachers to Help Students
http://ericae.net/faqs/homework.htm

ADD/ADHD: What Does It Mean for Parents and Families when Their Child Is Diagnosed with This Condition?
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew598/pnew598d.html

Central Auditory Processing Disorder (CAPD) and Children's School Performance
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew999/feat999.html

Conflict Management Skills

How do conflict management skills fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

Getting along with peers and successfully resolving conflicts are two important skills for children to learn, especially during the middle years as children gradually become more concerned about friends and being accepted into a peer group [19; 41]. There is a relationship between peer rejection and aggression in children that has been heavily researched [41] and discussed earlier in this *Guide*. The problem is that it is hard to establish what comes first—the hostility that leads to rejection, or the reverse. Those children who treat other children in a hostile or angry way will have difficulty making or keeping friends and belonging to a peer group where aggression is not accepted. Parents need to help children learn new skills to make healthy friendships.

Children learn and practice negotiation and conflict management skills through playing with their friends, by watching how their parents talk and manage disagreements, and through their relationships with brothers and sisters. Children who are aggressive are often rejected by other children who have better coping skills. Aggressive children may become loners or find their way into a group of children who have the same difficulty with skills of negotiation, compromise, and discussion. Unfortunately, this behavior is likely to create a cycle leading to further hostility, antagonism, and social rejection [41].

Many teachers are concerned about the limited resources available to teach children how to resolve disputes without aggressive language, postures, or violent actions [9; 10]. In response to this need, violence prevention curricula and conflict resolution programs have been developed and tried in schools to help teach children basic conflict management skills [28; 45]. These school-based programs vary in techniques and outcomes. The most successful programs view conflict as a naturally occurring process necessary for human growth and development [29].

Research suggests that students trained in conflict management and peer mediation are more likely to use a problem-solving approach to resolving conflicts. For example, they might focus on a joint goal rather than a personal one [29]. In one research study, students who did not receive training in conflict resolution and peer mediation were more likely to withdraw from conflict rather than try to resolve it appropriately. Untrained students were also more likely to use coercion, manipulation, or intimidation in their approach to conflict. Positive outcomes for students who learn to resolve conflicts constructively include higher levels of self-esteem, mental health, self-regulation, and resilience [38].

> *Parents and families play a critical role in fostering effective responses to conflict by modeling appropriate negotiating strategies.*

Conflict resolution strategies are also learned at home. Parents and families play a critical role in fostering responses to conflict by modeling appropriate negotiating strategies. Parents can listen to their children, use developmentally appropriate negotiation, and compromise as a way to discipline. Parents should also refrain from physically aggressive discipline such as slapping or spanking. They might also give reasons for rules and request rather than demand compliance when it is appropriate. When children see their parents using negotiation skills, they are more likely to learn to use compromise and negotiation during difficult moments with their brothers and sisters, as well as with their friends [19; 44].

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about their child's conflict management skills?

School counselors or social workers, teachers, pediatricians, other health care professionals,

parenting educators, and family counselors are excellent sources of information and support in this area.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Helping Young Children Deal with Anger
http://npin.org/library/2000/n00450/n00450.html

Easing the Teasing
http://npin.org/library/2000/n00440/n00440.html

School Violence Prevention
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/violence/digests/ed379786.htm

How to Help Your Child Avoid Violent Conflicts
http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/npin/library/1998/n00072/n00072.html

Understanding Violent Acts in Children: An Interview with Dr. Edward Taylor
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew998/featu998.html

A Community Guide to Youth—Anti-Bias and Conflict Resolution Programs
http://npin.org/library/1998/n00076/n00076.html

Trends in Peace Education
http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed417123.html

Peer Conflicts in the Classroom
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1994/wheele94.html

Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew1198/int1198a.html

Pathways Project: An Interview with Gary Ladd
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew799/int799c.html

Creating the Peaceable School: A Comprehensive Program for Teaching Conflict Resolution
http://npin.org/pnews/1998/pnew1198/spot1198.html

Anti-Bias and Conflict Resolution Curricula
http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/digests/dig97.html

Cooperation, Conflict Resolution, School Violence: A Systems Approach
http://iume.tc.columbia.edu/choices/briefs/choices05.html

Conflict Resolution Education: A Guide to Implementing Programs in Schools, Youth-Serving Organizations, and Community and Juvenile Justice Settings
http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/conflict/docs/cre/tableoc.htm

Youth Violence & Conflict Resolution, Chinook Newsletter, University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension
http://www.uwyo.edu/AG/CES/NEWLTRS/Bsnov94.PDF

Helping Young Adolescents Cope with Stress
http://www.nncc.org/SACC/sac42_adolesc.stress.html

Caring Connections

How do caring connections fit into the violence prevention puzzle?

Resilience is defined as the ability to face, overcome, and be strengthened by adversity. Information on resilience in children discusses "protective factors" in the family, school, and community that can help reverse or minimize poor outcomes for children. For example, one protective factor for children is having a multigenerational network of friends, teachers, and relatives [8]. Resilient children frequently spend more time in a few extracurricular activities (rather than a little time in several activities), and they develop meaningful relationships with others. Consequently, they have a larger group of people to turn to for support or advice in times of trouble [8].

Building protective factors into a child's life includes making sure there is a "caring and supportive relationship with at least one person" and "ample opportunities to participate in and contribute meaningfully to one's social environment" ([21], p. 2). The SEARCH Institute, a nonprofit organization that supports the healthy development of children and teens, has researched resilience and protective factors. In their survey of over 100,000 youth in 200 communities, they found that caring and connecting with others are critical building blocks for healthy development. At this point, SEARCH has identified 40 critical factors or "assets." The more assets that are present in a child's life, the easier it is for the child to resist risky behaviors. Assets also help promote the child's positive attitudes and activities. The list of assets can be split into two different groups. "External" assets focus on positive experiences that children receive from their families, peers, teachers, and other community supports in their lives. "Internal" assets focus on the internal strengths, values, and commitments needed to make responsible choices and decisions.

SEARCH has also identified a growing number of "deficits" in children's lives. When a child has a number of deficits present in his life, it may be more

difficult for the child to resist taking harmful risks. Deficits include watching TV for more than three hours a day and spending long periods of time at home alone. SEARCH found that children and teens who have between 20 and 30 external and internal assets, along with fewer than 3 deficits, are less likely to participate in unhealthy, risk-taking behaviors [7]. The lengthy list of possible assets and deficits in a child's life is on the SEARCH Web site (http://www.search-institute.org). The majority of youth who

> *Important to the child's resilience is the presence of a multigenerational network of friends, teachers, and relatives.*

had 10 or fewer assets said they were involved in 3 or more violent acts in the previous year. Only a minority of youth having 31 or more assets reported participating in violence. This pattern seems to remain consistent with children surveyed across the country. Youth with fewer assets and more deficits are more likely than others to be involved in substance abuse, sexual activity, depression and attempted suicide, violence and other antisocial behavior, school problems, and gambling [39].

Understanding that the community can be a unique network of support, where relationships and resources are shared, helps us see that our children benefit from being connected to the community as they grow. Outcomes for children and youth are better when communities support their "Constructive Use of Time" through participation in leadership and service activities that promote positive values ([39], p. 39). A study of a number of Chicago neighborhoods showed that overall violence was reduced, even in the poorest neighborhoods, when community residents raised their level of involvement with youth and increased the number of positive activities for children [42]. When parents work with other

neighbors to build a safe environment and then encourage their children to connect to their community in meaningful ways, it helps to develop positive outcomes for even the most vulnerable youth.

Who can parents talk to if they are concerned about their child's caring connections?

Religious leaders and clergy, school counselors, local youth clubs, YMCA/YWCAs, park district organizations, Boy/Girl Scouts, and the Urban League offer information and resources to parents concerned about these issues.

Your Thoughts and Notes

Resources on the Web

Turning It All Around: From Risk to Resilience
http://resilnet.uiuc.edu/library/dig126.html

Cultivating Resilience: An Overview for Rural Educators and Parents
http://resilnet.uiuc.edu/library/edorc945.html

Enriching Children's Out-of-School Time
http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1999/coltin99.html

Building a Healthy Community
http://npin.org/pnews/pnew197/pnew197c.html

SEARCH Institute's Asset Approach: Protecting Youth through Community Collaboration
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew999/spot999.html

Extracurricular Activities in Children's Lives
http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew1199/int1199c.html

The Search Institute
http://www.search-institute.org/

Learning How to Care: A Paradigm Shift in School, Home, and Community
http://npin.org/library/2000/n00471/n00471.html

References

[1] Aidman, Amy. (1997). *Television violence: Content, context, and consequences*. ERIC Digest. Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. (ERIC Document No. ED414078)

[2] American Academy of Pediatrics. (2001). Media matters: A national media education campaign [Online]. Available: http://www.aap.org/advocacy/mmcamp.htm

[3] Asher, Steven, & Williams, Gladys. (1993). Children without friends, part 2: The reasons for peer rejection [Online]. Available: http://www.nncc.org/Guidance/dc31_wo.friends2.html

[4] Banks, Ron. (1997). *Bullying in schools*. ERIC Digest. Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. (ERIC Document No. ED407154)

[5] Barnes, Grace. (1995). Parents can help prevent teen alcohol, drug use. Support, monitoring, key to prevention, study finds [Online]. Available: http://www.ria.org/summaries/rib/rib955.html

[6] Barnet, Ann B., & Barnet, Richard J. (1998). *The youngest minds: Parenting and genes in the development of intellect and emotion*. New York: Simon & Schuster. (ERIC Document No. ED422120)

[7] Benson, Peter L.; Galbraith, Judy; & Espeland, Pamela. (1998). *What kids need to succeed*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit. (ERIC Document No. ED423076)

[8] Bushweller, Kevin. (1995, May). The resilient child. *American School Board Journal, 182*(5), 18–23. (ERIC Journal No. EJ502924)

[9] Carlsson-Paige, Nancy, & Levin, Diane E. (1992). Making peace in violent times: A constructivist approach to conflict resolution. *Young Children, 48*(1), 4–13. (ERIC Journal No. EJ454918)

[10] Carlsson-Paige, Nancy, & Levin, Diane E. (1992). When push comes to shove—reconsidering children's conflicts. *Exchange, 84*, 34–37. (ERIC Journal No. EJ443464)

[11] Center for Mental Health Services. (2001). Youth violence: A report of the Surgeon General [Online]. Available: http://www.mentalhealth.org/youthviolence/surgeongeneral/SG_Site/home.html

[12] Cesarone, Bernard. (1998). *Video games: Research, ratings, recommendations*. ERIC Digest. Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. (ERIC Document No. ED424038)

[13] Children's Defense Fund. (1999). *State of America's children yearbook: 1999*. Washington, DC: Author.

[14] Coie, John D.; Dodge, Kenneth A.; Terry, Robert; & Wright, Virginia. (1991). The role of aggression in peer relations: An analysis of aggression episodes. *Child Development, 62*(4), 812–826. (ERIC Journal No. EJ436390)

[15] Coie, John D., & Dodge, Kenneth A. (1998). Aggression and antisocial behavior. In *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 3. Social, emotional, and personality development* (pp. 779–862). New York: Wiley.

[16] Crick, Nicki R. (1996). The role of overt aggression, relational aggression, and prosocial behavior in the prediction of children's future social adjustment. *Child Development, 67*(5), 2317–2327. (ERIC Journal No. EJ539853)

[17] Crick, Nicki R., & Grotpeter, Jennifer K. (1995). Relational aggression, gender, and social-psychological adjustment. *Child Development, 66*(3), 710–722. (ERIC Journal No. EJ503787)

[18] Crick, Nicki R.; Casas, Juan F.; & Mosher, M. (1997). Relational and overt aggression in preschool. *Developmental Psychology, 33*(4), 579–588. (ERIC Journal No. EJ549585)

[19] Crockenberg, Susan, & Lourie, Andrea. (1996). Parents' conflict strategies with children and children's conflict strategies with peers. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 42*(4), 495–518. (ERIC Journal No. EJ533049)

[20] Dryfoos, Joy G. (1997). Prevalence of problem behaviors: Implications for programs. In Roger P. Weissberg, Thomas P. Gullota, Robert L. Hampton, Bruce A. Ryan, & Gerald R. Adams (Eds.), *Enhancing children's wellness. Healthy children 2010, 8*. (ERIC Document No. ED416960)

[21] Finley, Mary. (1994). *Cultivating resilience: An overview for rural educators and parents*. ERIC Digest. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. (ERIC Document No. ED372904)

[22] Garbarino, James. (1999). Lost boys: Why our sons turn violent and how we can save them. *Brown University Child and Adolescent Behavior Letter, 15*(4), 1, 5–6.

[23] Garbarino, James. (1998, July-August). Raising children in a socially toxic environment. *Child Care Information Exchange, 122*, 8–12. (ERIC Journal No. EJ575977)

[24] Gootman, Jennifer Appleton. (2000). *After-school programs to promote child and adolescent develop-*

ment: Summary of a workshop. Washington, DC: National Academy.

[25] Hartup, Willard W. (1992). *Having friends, making friends, and keeping friends: Relationships as educational contexts*. ERIC Digest. Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. (ERIC Document No. ED345854)

[26] Hawkins, J. David; Herrenkohl, Todd I.; Farrington, David P.; Brewer, Devon; Catalano, Richard F.; Harachi, Tracy W.; & Cothern, Lynn. (2000, April). Predictors of youth violence. *Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Juvenile Justice Bulletin* [Online]. Available: http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/jjbul2000_04_5/contents.html

[27] Hawkins, J. David. (1997). Academic performance and school success: Sources and consequences. In Roger P. Weissberg, Thomas P. Gullota, Robert L. Hampton, Bruce A. Ryan, & Gerald R. Adams (Eds.), *Enhancing children's wellness. Healthy children 2010,* 8. (ERIC Document No. ED416968)

[28] Henrich, Christopher C.; Brown, Joshua L.; & Aber, Lawrence J. (1999). Evaluating the effectiveness of school-based violence prevention: Developmental approaches. *Society for Research in Child Development, 13*(3), 1–17.

[29] Johnson, David W., & Johnson, Roger T. (1996). Conflict resolution and peer mediation programs in elementary and secondary schools: A review of the research. *Review of Educational Research, 66*(4), 459–506. (ERIC Journal No. EJ542076)

[30] Kaiser Family Foundation. (1999). *Kids & media @ the new millennium* [Online]. Available: http://www.kff.org/content/1999/1535/pressreleasefinal.doc.html

[31] Levine, Madeline. (1996). *Viewing violence: How media violence affects your child's and adolescent's development*. New York: Doubleday. (ERIC Document No. ED402085)

[32] National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2000). Police leaders call for investment in quality programs to fight crime. *Young Children, 55*(2), 68–72.

[33] National Institute on Out-of-School Time. (2000). Fact sheet on school-age children's out-of-school time [Online]. Available: http://www.wellesley.edu/WCW/CRW/SAC/factsht.html

[34] Olsen, Darcy. (2000). 12-hour school days? Why government should leave afterschool arrangements to parents. *Cato Institute Policy Analysis, 372*. (ERIC Document No. ED442891)

[35] Osofsky, Joy D. (1997). Children in a violent society. New York: Guilford. (ERIC Document No. ED408056)

[36] Otterbourg, Susan. (2000). *How the arts can enhance after-school programs*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

[37] Patten, Peggy. (1999). Pathways project: An interview with Gary Ladd. *Parent News, 5*(4) [Online]. Available: http://npin.org/pnews/1999/pnew799/int799c.html

[38] Perry, Constance M. (1999). Proactive thoughts on creating safe schools. *School Community Journal, 9*(1), 9–16. Available: (ERIC Journal No. EJ589411)

[39] Roehlkepartain, Eugene C. (1998). *Building assets in congregations*. Minneapolis, MN: SEARCH Institute.

[40] Ross, Dorothea M. (1996). *Childhood bullying and teasing: What school personnel, other professionals, and parents can do*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association. (ERIC Document No. ED402527)

[41] Rubin, Kenneth H; Bukowski, William; & Parker, Jeffrey G. (1998). Peer interactions, relationships, and groups. In *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 3. Social, emotional, and personality development* (pp. 619–683). New York: Wiley.

[42] Sampson, Robert J., & Morenoff, Jeffrey D. (1997). Ecological perspectives on the neighborhood context of urban poverty: Past and present. In *Neighborhood poverty: Vol. 2. Policy implications in studying neighborhoods* (pp. 1–22). New York: Russell Sage Foundation. (ERIC Document No. ED427120)

[43] Schor, Edward L. (1995). *Caring for your school-age child: Ages 5 to 12*. New York: Bantam. (ERIC Document No. ED391606)

[44] Stormshak, Elizabeth A.; Bellanti, Christina J.; & Bierman, Karen L. (1996). Quality of sibling relationships and the development of social competence and behavioral control in aggressive children. *Developmental Psychology, 32*(1), 79–89. (ERIC Journal No. EJ524925)

[45] Walker, Dean. (2000). School violence prevention. *ERIC Review, 7*(1). (ERIC Document No. ED440640)

[46] Walsh, David. (1994). *Selling out America's children: How America puts profits before values—and what parents can do*. Minneapolis, MN: Fairview. (ERIC Document No. ED411089)

[47] When school is out [special issue]. (1999). *Future of Children, 9*(2). (ERIC Journal No. EJ600557)