



Talking to young people

There is no perfect way to do this, but here are some useful suggestions based on work from public health and psychology researchers.

Prepare

There are no scripts for difficult or tricky topics like violence. It can be useful to prepare these topics before your child asks. Working out key points about anger, aggression, consequences and impacts beforehand can help.

- Think about the difference between angry feelings and aggressive behaviour. Angry *feelings* are completely acceptable.
- How might anger feel. What does it look like in others?
- How do you know you are angry?
- Aggressive behaviour, however, is not OK. Have examples. Think about what aggressive behaviour looks like – throwing things, slamming doors or breaking stuff because we feel angry.
- Where does violence lead?
- Physical injury/permanent injury/death
- People don't like to be friends with violent people
- Crime and punishment
- Hidden consequences – criminal records can impact travel plans, getting jobs, doing things with their own children later in life
- Focus on the behaviours rather than on the character of violent people

Starting

Parents can have many opportunities to talk with their child about how people behave in social situations and how people get on with each other and use this to introduce talking about conflict or arguments.

Talk About Everyday Stuff — and Do It Every Day

The more you do something, the easier it gets. Talking about everyday stuff builds a bond that can smooth the way for when you need to discuss something more serious.

- Think about when are most likely to be in the right frame of mind to talk
If they are not a morning person, do it later when they are more receptive



- Consider chatting while doing something else – formal one to one sit downs can be off putting

Conversation

- *Try open-ended questions.* Avoid yes or no questions e.g. - “How was your day?” is asking for a response of “ok”. Instead, try something like, “Tell me about your day.”
- *Don't try to force them to talk to you.* That will only result in them becoming more closed off.
- *Put yourself in their shoes.* Really try to think out how you would feel if you were in their shoes going through what they are dealing with *today*. Remember, we didn't have technology or social media to deal with. It is *their* world today.
- *Don't try to fix things.* Don't go straight to problem solving allow time to hear them out. Don't offer advice until it's asked for. Avoid lectures, preaching and judgement at all costs.
- *Listen more than you speak.* They need to feel heard. Would you enjoy sharing your thoughts and the person kept interrupting you.
- *One Parent at a Time.* What parents see as working together as a family, teens can see as ganging up. be sure both parents are in agreement ahead of time - but only one parent involved with the actual talk.
- *Continue Conversations in the Future.* All conversations can remain ongoing. Some subjects might need to be broken up into sections over time. Sending a positive text that keeps the conversation open can be valuable. “It meant a lot that you shared about _____ with me. I'm here whenever you want to talk.”

What if they don't want to talk or shut off?

- Let it go for now but let them know you are there for them to talk to whenever they want. Open conversation may come about slowly over time.
- Try again in a day or two. Try a different time of day or different room, do an activity together. Use your own best judgement and find a time and place that are private and safe for you both.
- Try something like "Hey, remember that other time I spoke to you about [person's] behaviour? You didn't want to talk, but I wanted to check if you've felt like talking since then?"
- Always, let them know that you are always there to talk to, now or in the future.