



Shaking Hands with a Clenched Fist

FINDINGS ON FIGHTING AND WEAPONS USE

From the March 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey
Arlington, Virginia

The choices that young people make today have a big impact on their health and well-being, now and in the future.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) asks young people about those behaviors and habits with the strongest links to their health.

This brochure looks at data on fighting and weapons use from Arlington's March 2007 survey of middle and high school students.

WHY WORRY?

While conflicts will always be part of life, aggression and violence don't have to be. However, teenagers often lack the skills they need to resolve conflicts in a peaceful way. The result is an "epidemic" of violence among our youth.

We worry about violence and aggressive behavior for obvious reasons – we don't want children in our community to suffer the physical and emotional harm that comes from fighting. Add in a weapon and the risks only increase – the Centers for Disease Control finds that fights involving weapons are a major cause of serious injuries and death among teenagers. And teenagers who get into fights also tend to take other risks – by using drugs, binge drinking, and having unprotected sex.

WHO IS FIGHTING?

Overall, 28 percent of youth who participated in the 2007 survey report getting into a physical fight at least once in the previous year. Among high school students, 24 percent were in a fight; 12 percent were in a fight at school and 5 percent report being. These rates are similar to rates for high school youth nationwide.

When parents demean and strike each other or their children, when children are encouraged to be bullies or fight back on the playground, and when they have easy access to real or toy guns and other weapons, violence is being taught.

Source: American Psychological Association

HOW WE DID THE SURVEY

These findings are based on a survey of about 2500 students enrolled in grades six, eight, ten and twelve in Arlington's public secondary schools. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Parents had an opportunity to opt out their child. Less than two percent did. Eighty-six percent of students in the classes chosen for the survey filled out a questionnaire. Most of those who did not were absent from school.

WEAPON USE

About 15 percent of young people reported carrying a weapon in the past 30 days. Among high school youth, 17 percent carried a weapon, 10 percent took a weapon to school and 6 percent reported carrying a gun.

You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist.
-Indira Gandhi,
Source: *Christian Science Monitor*

WHO'S AT RISK?

Boys are generally two to three times more likely to report these risk behaviors than girls. In particular, 38 percent of boys but only 17 percent of girls report getting into a fight in the previous year. This finding is consistent with data from another survey (the Assets Survey) that show that boys are far *less* likely to have peaceful conflict resolution skills than girls.

Fighting peaks in middle school. The percent of youth who report fighting increases from 30 percent of 6th grade students to 34 percent of eight grade students then falls to 20 percent of 12th grade students. However, weapon carrying seems to peak in high school.

CHANGES SINCE 2004

Since 2004, when the YRBS was last administered in Arlington, there have been few changes in the percent of youth carrying weapons. However, fewer youth report fighting.

SOME OF THE VICTIMS

Violence among young people should not be dismissed as “the boys being the boys.” Six to nine percent of high school youth in Arlington report being threatened or injured at school (7%); missing school due to safety concerns (6%), being physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend (9%) or being forced into sexual intercourse (9%). These experiences can traumatize young people, leaving them vulnerable to other risk behaviors and problems for many years.

ESPECIALLY FOR PARENTS

You can do many things to help your child avoid being the victim or the perpetrator of violence:

1. Learn about and model ways to resolve conflicts peacefully. While conflicts are inevitable and can even be healthy, aggression and violence are not.
2. Don't use hitting, spanking or slapping as discipline. These “techniques” don't help a child learn self-control and, instead, teach that violence is acceptable.
3. Keep your child away from violent movies and television. The research is now clear – seeing violent images makes kids more aggressive.
4. Help your child or teen learn the skills they need for peaceful conflict resolution – assertiveness, problem solving, impulse control, anger management and communication.
5. Know the signs of a violent relationships and how to help a teen who might be in one. Know your child's friends and make sure they are all engaged in positive, supervised activities.

RAISING RESILIENT TEENS

Some teens stay away from violent behavior even when raised in violent circumstances. What helps these kids beat the odds? The answers give important clues to all parents on how to raise resilient youth:

- ✓ Positive role models and supportive relationships with teachers and friends
- ✓ Strong social skills and good peer relationships
- ✓ A sense of hope for the future, self-esteem, and a sense of having control over what happens
- ✓ An ability to “escape” into hobbies, work, or other activities

*Source: American Psychological Association
(www.apa.org)*

TO LEARN MORE

To find out more protecting youth from violent behaviors, check out these sites:

Is Youth Violence Just Another Fact of Life? (American Psychological Association) at www.apa.org/ppo/issues/pbviolence.html

Teen Dating Violence (Centers for Disease Control) at www.safeyouth.org/scripts/topics/dateviolence.asp

Managing Anger: Their and Yours in Helping Your Children Navigate the Teenage Years (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) at <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/SVP-0013/default.asp>

What You Need to Know About Youth Violence Prevention (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) at <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/SVP-0054/parents.asp>

For questions about the survey, contact Amy Graham, Data Coordinator, at (703) 228-1668 or agraha@arlingtonva.us.

Partnership for Children, Youth, and Families
3033 Wilson Blvd., Suite 600A
Arlington, VA 22201
Phone (703) 228-1667
www.arlingtonpartnershipforyouth.org