

TALKING TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

A TOOLKIT FOR PARENTS



Developing Healthy Relationships: The Importance of You!

Educating children is one of the greatest joys and responsibilities a parent can have. An important goal of teaching children is empowering them to be independent thinkers and helping them to develop the foundational skills that will enable them to help themselves achieve their goals as adults.

Parents and caregivers play a critical role in providing a good example and teaching young people the importance of respectful, honest, and positive relationships: how to make responsible decisions regarding relationships, how to resolve conflicts, establishing good boundaries, and maintaining a sense of self in their relationships.



Talking to a child or teen about relationships can be awkward and have moments of uncomfortableness for both the child and parent. However, these conversations are vital to providing necessary information and guidance to your child. Talking about healthy versus unhealthy behaviors can be incorporated into your everyday life; utilizing TV shows, media, conversations, and other teachable moments can help start conversations. Hopefully this toolkit will provide you tools and useful information you can use to start these conversations at every age of your child's development.



Did you know?



3 out of 4 parents say they have had a conversation with their teen about dating.
However, **3 out of 4 of sons and 2 out of 3 daughters** say they have not had a conversation with their parents about dating abuse.

Liz Claiborne Inc. study on teen dating abuse conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited, February 2005)



0-5 years old

At this age your child develops the ability to communicate and understand the world in various ways such as through play and story-telling. They talk about experiences in respect to themselves and things that are important to them; understanding the feelings of others is just beginning. At this point it is helpful for the child to learn about their emotions and to allow them to have choice in how they interact with other people like their family, friends, teachers and strangers.

Help children learn about emotions by teaching them words for their feelings, acknowledging their fears, and helping them to find helpful ways to express their feelings. During the toddler stages create opportunities for your children to play with other kids their age. Explain reasons for rules and certain behaviors. Set clear limits and boundaries for them. Be careful not to label a child as being good or bad -- but instead let them know that their behavior is good or bad.

Helpful Videos to Watch with Your Child

These YouTube videos can help you start conversations with your child:

- Inside Out: Guessing the feelings
- Sesame Street: Common and Colbie Caillat - "Belly Breathe" with Elmo
- Consent for Kids (talks about bodily autonomy)



Helpful Books to Read with Your Child

Here are some helpful books to start conversations with your child:

- "I can share" by Karen Katz
- "Are you my mother" by P.D. Eastman & Carlos Rivera
- "Guess how much I love you" by Sam McBratney



Here are some free resources in your area that can provide care and support:

- First 5 California: <https://www.first5kids.org/>
- Early Learning Services: <https://www.sccoe.org/depts/students/early-learning-services/Pages/default.aspx>
- Early Start: <https://www.dds.ca.gov/services/early-start/>

The ABCS for Online Safety 0-11



Social Media & Digital Protection

There is no getting around the influence of social media on children and the constant connection to screens/apps. It is important to talk to your child about ways they can stay safe online. Here are some tips that can help:



APPS & Age: Make sure apps and games are age appropriate. Take your child seriously if they report feeling uncomfortable with an online interaction. Watch for signs of your child being targeted like spending long hours online (especially at night), child hiding online activities, phone calls or contacts you don't know, or gifts you didn't buy.



Boundaries: Discuss rules in your home for what is ok and not ok when online searching, activities, apps, and games.

- Never reveal personal information like address, phone number, etc
- Tell a trusted adult if someone makes you feel scared or sad.
- Share your password with your parents. But, never share your password with strangers or someone online.
- Never agree to meet someone from online in person.
- Keep technology usage in common areas so you can monitor what your child is using.



Create Time Together: Get involved and know what activities, apps, and games your child is playing and using when online.

- Spend time online together by playing the games they like or watching them play.
- Have them show you what they like to do online and what videos they like to watch.



Safety: There are several online tools that let you control your children's access to adult sites or content. You can even limit the amount of time your children can be online each day. Search "parent controls" on the app or system you are trying to setup for step by step guides. You can also download parental control apps that control multiple systems and platforms. Make sure social media accounts are set to private.

The Timeline of Conversations



6-8 years old

During the earlier school age years children are developing their own place in the world but still rely heavily on the relationships of family for their main source of information and support. They also begin to be more aware and modest of their developing bodies as they begin to observe others around them. It is important to continue to help them understand boundaries while allowing open and non-judgmental (age appropriate) conversation around their bodies and boundaries.

Many of us were taught to hug and kiss family members when we see them at parties and social gatherings. If we did not want to, we may have been told we have to or we could get in trouble. This could teach children that saying "no" to an adult is not a choice and if you don't do what an adult asks then there could be negative consequences. Giving children choice and allowing them to say "no" when it comes to their body can help strengthen their voice and give them bodily autonomy. You can also talk to your children about their rights to stay safe, strong, and free: safe from harm by others, strong in their mind and body, and having free choice over their actions.

Helpful Videos to Watch with Your Child

These YouTube videos can help you start conversations with your child:

- Consent for Kids (talks about bodily autonomy)
- Know Your Emotions



Helpful Books to Read with Your Child

Here are some helpful books to start conversations with your children:

- "My Body! What I Say Goes!" by Jayneen Sanders
- "Rainbow Fish" by Marcus Pfister
- "I like myself" by Karen Beaumont



Here are some free resources in your area that can provide care and support:

- Prevention & Early Intervention services. Contact your child's school, call Behavioral Health Services at 800-704-0800, or connect to your insurance provider
- YMCA's Project Cornerstone's Developmental Assets <https://www.ymcasv.org/ymca-project-cornerstone/developmental-assets>

Activities to Do with Your Child

Asserting Yourself:

Knowing how to assert yourself in an uncomfortable situation can be very empowering. Exercising boundaries and speaking up about what makes you uncomfortable is the first step.



HERE IS HOW TO DO IT:

When you _____
It makes me feel _____
If you do not _____
I will _____

HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW TO DO IT:

When you look at me that way
It makes me feel really uncomfortable
If you do not stop
I will tell the teacher

Help your child identify safe people in their life using a personal resource map:

School Staff:

☐ _____
☐ _____
☐ _____

Community Agencies:

☐ _____
☐ _____
☐ _____

Family:

☐ _____
☐ _____
☐ _____

Friends:

☐ _____
☐ _____
☐ _____


The Timeline of Conversations



9-11 years old

During these ages a child is able to see things through the perspective of others and begins to experience peer pressure. They also start to rely on their peers as a source of information and examples of relationships. As the child starts their journey into independence, parents are still a major area of support and reason. It is important to maintain healthy communication around consent and body changes.

Discuss as a family on how to safely intervene in situations where they may see something unhealthy happening like bullying. Define the meaning of a bystander: someone or a group of people watching as an individual is harassed or bullied; and an upstander: a person who stands up for his or her beliefs, does what they think is right (even if they are alone), who sees wrong and acts, who takes a stand against an act of injustice or intolerance. Ask if they think they would consider themselves a bystander or upstander? Talk with your child about their choice and ask questions. Talk with them about the 4Ds of Being an Upstander (see the next page).

Helpful Videos to Watch with Your Child

These YouTube videos can help you start conversations with your child:

- Be an Upstander - Prevent Bullying: A NED Short
- Why Do We Lose Control of Our Emotions?



Helpful Books to Read with Your Child

Here are some helpful books to start conversations with your children:

- "Speak Up and Get Along!: Learn the Mighty Might, Thought Chop, and More Tools to Make Friends, Stop Teasing, and Feel Good About Yourself" by Scott Cooper
- "Being Me: A Kid's Guide to Boosting Confidence" by Wendy Moss

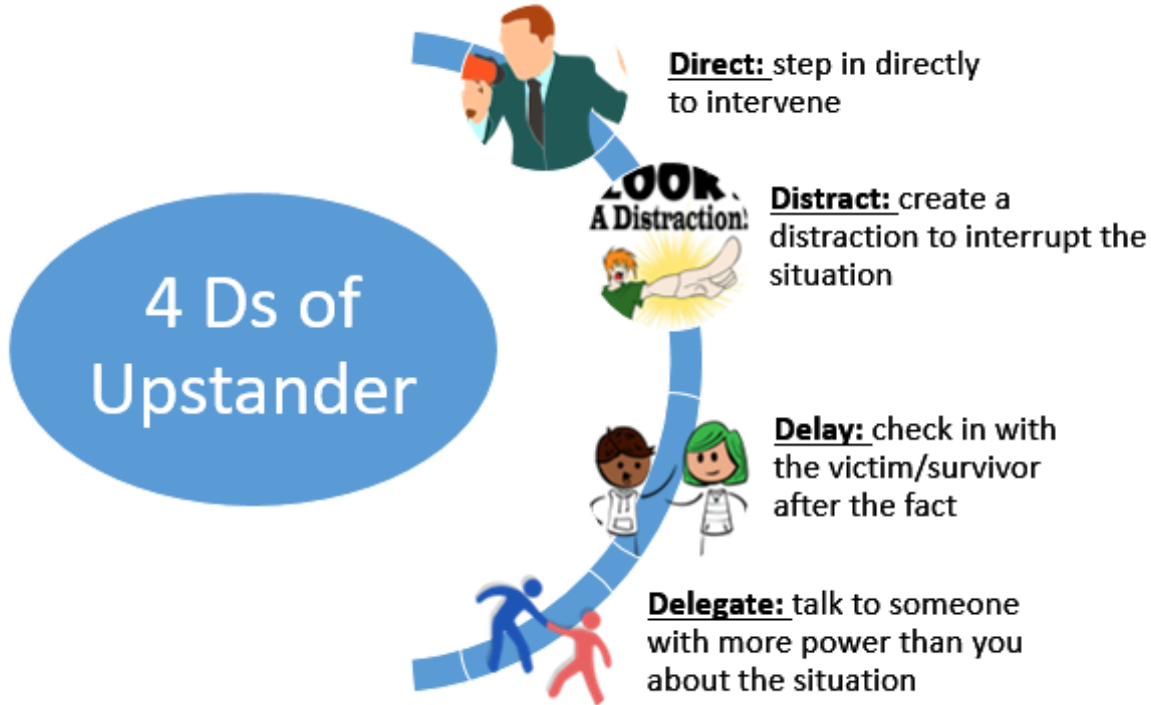


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Activities to Do with Your Child

Talk about the 4D's of being an Upstander



Boundaries & My Bill of Rights

Personal boundaries help define your expectations about how you want to be treated by others. Communicating personal boundaries includes telling others your expectations and expressing when your boundaries have been crossed. Talk with your kids about ways they can identify what their boundaries are.

HERE IS HOW TO DO IT:

- I have a right to _____
- I have a right to _____
- I have a right to _____
- I have a right to _____

HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW TO DO IT:

- I have the right to be treated with respect.
- I have a right to express my feelings.
- I have a right to feel good about myself.
- I have a right to say "no" and not feel guilty about it.



The Timeline of Conversations



12-14 years old

At this point children develop their own views and opinions that can differ from and even challenge that of their parents. Their main source of information is their peers and their need for privacy increases substantially. It is important to allow them the ability to develop and discuss their own views, opinions even if they do not agree with their parents.

Understand the pressure your teen maybe facing. There are a lot of pressures that begin during middle school such as substance use, sex or sexual acts, relationships, gangs, and bullying. Create spaces for your child to share the pressures they are facing. Guidance from parents is still needed. Open, non-judgmental avenues for communication allow the child a safe place to go when they need support. Be careful not to label a child as being good or bad -- but instead let them know that their behavior is good or bad. Make sure you are having equitable conversations about healthy and unhealthy relationships. Many times we have conversations with our daughters about being safe and not making risky decisions; but we forget to have conversations with our sons about their choices, staying safe, and what healthy is.

Helpful Videos to Watch with Your Child

These YouTube videos can help you start conversations with your child:

- The Break In - Girlfriend's Story - That's Not Cool
- Pressure Pic Problem - Boyfriend's Story - That's Not Cool
- Tea is Consent (clean version)



Helpful Tips to Incorporate into your Family

- Develop a game night where all phones, TVs, and electronics are turned off and the family just connects and plays with each other.

Here are some free resources in your area that can provide care and support:

- Behavioral Health or School Linked Services: Contact your child's school, call Behavioral Health Services at 800-704-0800, or connect to your insurance provider
- LGBTQ Youth Space <https://youthspace.org/>
- 24 hour Mobile Crisis Services through Uplift 408-379-9085 .



The ABCS for Online Safety 12-17



Social Media & Digital Protection

There is no getting around the influence of social media on children and the constant connection to screens/apps. It is important to talk to your child about ways they can stay safe online. Here are some tips that can help:

A

Active: Stay active in your child's social media and online activities. Ask them to add you as a friend on their social media pages such as Instagram, SnapChat, and more. Teens love teaching so ask them to show you how to use the filters, or how they create videos, or what they choose to post or not. Ask them to show you their friends or people they follow online. Make sure when you are asking you are coming from a place of exploration not as a demand.

B

Boundaries: Discuss rules in your home for what is ok and not ok when online searching, activities, apps, and games:

- Never reveal personal information like address, phone number, etc.
- Share your password with your parents. But, never share your password with strangers or someone online.
- Never agree to meet someone from online in person.
- Don't say anything online that you wouldn't say in person.
- Create a curfew and time limit for phone and/or games.

C

Cyberbullying and digital disrespect (spreading negative or embarrassing information about someone behind their back) can have serious consequences. Talk about ways to combat it. Can they think of a time they were cyberbullied or disrespected by someone online? How did those behaviors make you feel? What could they do about it if it happens? Have they cyberbullied someone? How do they think that person felt?

S

Safety is important. Talk to your child about ways they can protect themselves. Keep their personal passwords and information private. Teach them to trust their gut! If you feel threatened or harassed by someone say something- let people know their behavior is not ok. Be an Upstander for others as well. Know where their boundaries are. Block those you don't know or don't want to associate with you.

Activities to Do with Your Teen

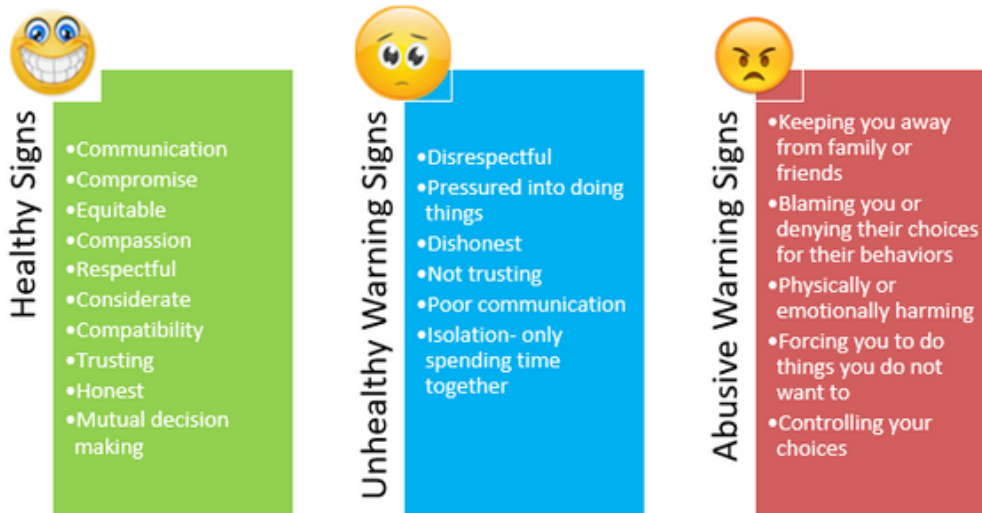
Having a Dialogue on Healthy Relationships:

Though your child may not be in a "dating relationship" yet they are starting to build strong relationships and exploring "dating" with their peers. This is a good time to talk to them about relationships in their lives and what is healthy or unhealthy.

Ways to start the conversation:

- Why do you like your friend?
- What makes you stay friends with them?
- Do you feel like you have a right to voice your disagreement with your friends? How do you do this? Or how can you do this?
- Has a friend ever made you feel as though you couldn't do anything right? How did that make you feel? What did you do about it?
- Ask them to think about a friend they realize was not good for them:
 - Why do you think you stayed friends with them?
 - Why do you think your friend treated you this way?
 - If you had a friend who was in the same position as you, what advice would you give them?
- Do you think you would recognize if a relationship wasn't good for you? How?

Talk with them about what healthy and unhealthy look like:



Here are some online resources that can provide more support:

- Community Solutions: <https://www.communitysolutions.org/survivors-of-violence/>
- <https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/>
- <https://www.loveisrespect.org/>

Activities to Do with Your Teen

Having a Dialogue on Healthy Sexuality

Many times talking about sex is a taboo with our friends and family. It is often awkward and uncomfortable which make conversations about sex feel shameful. Not talking about what healthy sexuality looks like can create barriers to understanding what is ok and not ok; and make it harder for someone to come forward if someone has harmed them. It is important to not only to talk about the physical aspects of sex and bodies, but to discuss consent and boundaries.

Ways to start the conversation:

- What are some examples of someone saying or doing something that crosses your personal boundaries?
- What can you say or do to communicate your personal boundaries?
- Do you know the difference between flirting and harassment?
- When does playing or teasing become too much and is no longer fun?
- Are there certain things that someone may ask of you that you don't want to do?
- Have you ever been asked or made to do something you didn't want to do or that made you uncomfortable?



It is important to understand that sometimes our actions and conversations can lead to others around us feeling harassed. Some of examples of this can include: dirty jokes, talking about someone else in sexual way, sharing inappropriate pictures of someone without their consent, whistling or saying “hey baby” to others as they walk by. Pressuring men to “score,” assuming that men don’t get raped or that only “weak” men get raped, or teaching women to avoid getting raped instead of teaching men not to rape.

These sorts of conversations have impacted our society with negative and harmful consequences by impacting social policy, reducing accountability, and leading to higher levels of sexual assault and domestic violence. Changing these conversations by confronting these harmful social norms can help prevent sexual abuse and sexual harassment. Talk to your child about the true impact words can have on someone and our society. Talk with them about different scenarios and define what is a not big deal, what is against your expectations as a family, what is against the school rules, and what is against the law.

The Timeline of Conversations



15-17 years old

Youth in this age group continue to develop independent of their parents and tend to spend more time with their friends than their family. They are much more capable of understanding others' points of view and are able to see more of the complexities of life and relationships. Interest in dating and sexuality increases substantially and thus the need for open and healthy communication with peers, parents, and other sources of support is very important.

Understand your teen's development and how it affects your relationship. Adolescence is all about experimentation. From mood swings to risk taking, "normal teenage behavior" can appear to be anything-but-normal, however, new research reveals that brain development during these formative years plays a significant role in shaping your teen's personality and actions. Knowing what's normal is key so you can better understand and guide your teen.

Helpful Videos to Watch with Your Child

These YouTube videos can help you start conversations with your child:

- Tea is Consent (clean version)
- Text Monster - Boyfriend's Story - That's Not Cool
- Teen stress from a teen perspective | Michaela Horn | TEDxNaperville



Helpful Tips to Incorporate into your Family

- Make time or a "date" for each child individually for you to connect with them about their lives and show them how special they are. It can be as simple as taking your child to the store with you. For teens long drives or walks can be very successful.

Here are some resources in your area that can provide care and support:

- Behavioral Health or School Linked Services: Contact your child's school, call Behavioral Health Services at 800-704-0800, or connect to your insurance provider
- LGBTQ Youth Space <https://youthspace.org/>
- 24 hour Mobile Crisis Services through Uplift 408-379-9085

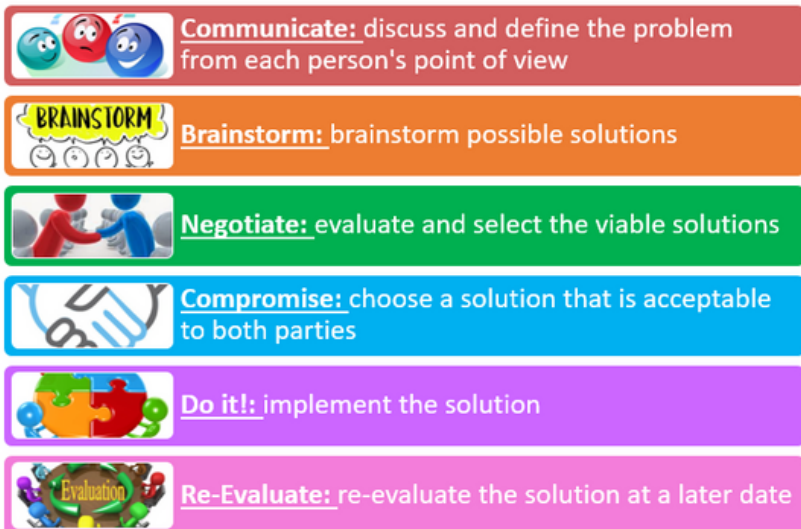
Activities to Do with Your Teen

Having a Dialogue on Healthy Relationships:

All relationships are unique. Encourage emotional awareness – the ability to recognize moment to moment emotional feelings and to express all feelings (good and bad) appropriately. Some parents/caregivers are struggling with their own histories of violence, including ongoing abusive relationships. This can impact a parent's willingness and ability to connect to their child to discuss healthy and unhealthy relationships. However, the importance of open, forthright communication about relationships may be even more important in these family situations. In a healthy relationship there should be respect, safety, support, individuality, fairness and equality, acceptance, honesty, trust, communication and fun.

Questions to Discuss:

- What do you expect from someone you would go out with?
- What have you learned about relationships from the relationships you see around you? (like parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, TV, etc.)
- What do you think are qualities that are important in a relationship? What are qualities that could ruin a relationship?
- If your relationship wasn't going well, how would you end the relationship?



In all relationships there will be arguments and misunderstandings. Talk about healthy ways to resolve conflict and work through disagreements that may arise in healthy ways. Make sure both individuals use "I" statements and be willing to be wrong and/or compromise. Follow the steps to the left on ways to fight fair.

Here are some online resources that can provide more support:

- Community Solutions: <https://www.communitysolutions.org/survivors-of-violence/>
- <https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/>
- <https://www.loveisrespect.org/>

Activities to Do with Your Teen

Having a Dialogue on Healthy Sexuality:

Every parent has a right to guide their teen's decisions about healthy sexuality. This conversation can be challenging for all parents. Below are some questions you can talk about with your teen to open the dialogue while incorporating your family values and ensure your teen is informed. Talking about healthy relationships is an ongoing process rather than a single conversation. Again this conversation should happen with your child regardless of their gender or sexual orientation. It is important to note, according to the CDC, 55% of kids in the U.S. have had sex by age 18.

Questions to Discuss:

- Do you trust the person?
- Does this person make you feel safe?
- Does this person make you feel respected?
- Are they being pressured into sexual activity? Is your partner?
- Have they been honest with their partner?
- Do they know the physical risks of sexual activity (STDs, pregnancy, etc.)?
- Have they considered using birth control?
- Is this the right thing for them to do? For their partner to do?
- Do they have good communication with their partner? Will they be able to tell them if they are in pain or uncomfortable?
- Does engaging in sexual activity support their personal, moral, or religious values?
- Is this something they will regret the next day? Or will their partner?



Consent is an agreement between participants to engage in sexual activity. It needs to be freely given without threat or coercion. It should be active and not passive where partners are engaging willingly the entire time. It should be informed and specific. Partners should agree on what acts they are engaging in and how; for example we agree to use protection, we agree to kiss only. Lastly, consent is reversible: a person can change their mind at any point and that has to be respected and honored.

Final Tips to Consider

Communication with your child about relationships is an on-going process rather than a one-time conversation. Invest time to talk with your child about friends and daily events. Remember these conversations need to happen frequently and at all stages of a child's life. Ensure you are having conversations about healthy relationships with your children equitably, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

- Accentuate the positive. Talks about relationships need not focus solely on risky behavior or negative consequences, but should also address factors that promote healthy adolescent development and positive outcomes (i.e. academic success, friends, hobbies, and reminding them of how amazing they are).
- Discuss how to act as a healthy Upstander when your child observes unhealthy behaviors in their peers.
- Encourage open, honest, and thoughtful reflection about healthy relationships and unhealthy relationships. Allow your child to clarify their values and expectations for healthy relationships and allow them to debate those issues and come to their own understanding, rather than dismissing their answers as “wrong”.
- Be an effective parent through balancing firmness with sensitivity. Encourage your teen to communicate with you and be open to their feelings-don't dismiss or criticize them.
- Make the most of “teachable moments” to discuss healthy and unhealthy relationships --- using TV episodes, movies, news, community events, learning about friends' experiences, etc.
- Understand the pressure your child maybe facing. There are a lot of pressures such as substance use, sex or sexual acts, relationships, gangs, and bullying. Create spaces for your child to share the pressures they are facing.
- Take a clear stand against disrespect, abuse of power, any forms of violence, or use of abusive or inappropriate language with a firm and clear message.



Did you know?



Youth who have experienced family discord, including violence, tend to express high acceptance of violence among peers and intimate partners. A child or youth's experience with domestic violence or conflict at home, as well as, being victims of physical or sexual abuse or neglect, or parental mental illness or substance abuse can increase a youth's own risk for adolescent dating violence.

Connecting the dots: an overview of the links among multiple forms of violence, CDC 2014



The mission of Community Solutions is to create opportunities for positive change by promoting and supporting the full potential of individuals, the strengths of families, and the well-being of our community.

OUR SERVICES INCLUDE

Community Solutions provides a comprehensive spectrum of prevention, intervention, treatment, and residential services to help children, families and individuals overcome the challenges posed by: mental health, substance abuse, trauma, gang influence, sexual assault, domestic violence, and human trafficking.

- 24 Hour Hotline in South Santa Clara and San Benito Counties
- Confidential Shelter for survivors and their children
- Individual and group counseling for adults, teens, and children
- Accompaniment to law enforcement interviews, Court, and more
- Help obtaining a Restraining Order and other legal assistance
- Resources and referrals

CONNECT WITH US

- Visit our website at www.communitysolutions.org
- Call our 24 hour confidential crisis line at 1 (877) 363-7238
- On Facebook & Instagram @CommunitySolutionsSTV
- Connect with an advocate online at www.safechatsv.org
- Visit our Family Justice Center and connect with multiple partners on Wednesdays at our Morgan Hill office
- Our offices:
 - 16264 Church St. Suite 103 in Morgan Hill
 - 9015 Murray Ave Suite 100 in Gilroy
 - 341 Tres Pinos Rd Suite 202b In Hollister

VOLUNTEER WITH US

- Certified Volunteer Advocates
- Gilroy Innovators
- Hollister Innovators

Funding made possible through the County of Santa Clara Office of Gender-Based Violence Prevention