

HOW CAN I...

Help my child with difficult experiences such as witnessing or being exposed to community violence?

Advice for Parents and Caregivers

Build a Strong Support System

- **Community as Family:** Surround your child with positive people who care. Get involved in community events, join after-school programs, or create a neighborhood watch with trusted neighbors. Having a strong “village” makes everyone feel safer and supported.
- **Always There:** Show your child they’re not alone. Make time for regular talks, listen to their worries, and be a safe space for them to express their feelings. Remember, sometimes just being there and offering support can make the biggest difference.
- **Seek Support:** If you need help, don’t hesitate to reach out. Talk to your family, friends, or community members. There are people who care and want to help.

Empower Your Child

- **Believe in Them:** Send the message loud and clear: “You are strong, capable, and you can overcome anything.” This boosts their confidence and helps them navigate challenges.
- **Set Clear Expectations:** Establish rules and boundaries, but remember, it’s not just about “don’ts.” Teach them responsible choices, good communication skills, and how to handle difficult situations.
- **Check In Often:** Even when things seem fine, stay connected. Talk about their day, ask how they’re feeling, and let them know you’re always there to listen.



Scan to watch our
video on this topic.

Open Communication is Key

- **Talk About Violence:** Don’t shy away from the tough stuff. Help your child understand and talk about what happened, why it’s wrong, and how to stay safe. Let them know it’s okay to feel scared or angry, and that it’s important to talk about their emotions.
- **Listen Without Judgment:** Be their sounding board. Let them express themselves freely without fear of criticism or blame. This builds trust and encourages open communication.
- **Working Together:** Work together to brainstorm ways to stay safe in your community. Let your child be part of the solution, encouraging a sense of control and resilience.

7 Tips for Helping Kids Cope with Community Violence

1. **Talk about it.** Children will be much better equipped to process community violence if they have a trusted adult to help. Talk about what happened and take their lead; they may not be ready to share their feelings right away, so give them time and space if they need it. By initiating the conversation, you are showing them that they can come to you with questions or concerns.
2. **Provide multiple outlets for expression.** If your child wants to share their feelings verbally, then listen and validate. Some kids may need other forms of expression such as drawing, writing, playing, or listening to music.
3. **Emphasize their safety.** Reassure your child that they are safe and that you and other adults will do all you can to protect them.
4. **Go over safety measures.** Make or review safety plans for different situations, especially if your child is feeling nervous about their own well-being. Designate adults they trust who they can go to if they are feeling unsafe or if something scary happens.
5. **Monitor the media.** While you don't want to hide what has happened, it's a good idea to be mindful of where kids can see and hear the news — especially young kids. They can become confused or anxious from images and reports on TV or social media.
6. **Stick with routines.** Though things may feel far from normal, kids will likely find a lot of comfort in predictable routines. Continue regular activities if it is safe to do so and maintain your usual meal and bedtime rhythms.
7. **Know when to seek outside help.** If your child is showing signs that they are not coping well, then it is worth consulting a mental health professional. Behaviors to look for include persistent changes in mood, behavior, or eating and sleeping habits. Healing takes time.

To learn more, check out these helpful resources:

[Talking to Children About Violence: Tips for Families and Educators](#)

National Association of School Psychologists

[Multilingual Trauma Resources](#)

The Child Mind Institute

[Family Resources to Address Violence](#)

Sesame Workshop

The Child Mind Institute is dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families struggling with mental health and learning disorders by giving them the help they need to thrive. We've become the leading independent nonprofit in children's mental health by providing gold-standard care, delivering educational resources to millions of families each year, training educators in underserved communities, and developing tomorrow's breakthrough treatments.