

12 ACTIONS PARENTS CAN TAKE TO HELP PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE

"Somebody's got to do something! Then I realize I was somebody." (Attributed to Lilly Tomlin).

1. Communicate fully with your children, knowing their friends and whereabouts; refuse to tolerate name-calling or bullying; manage your own violence; involve yourself in your neighborhood and schools.
2. If you own a gun, make sure it's separated from its ammunition, and locked up. This action protects your children, and prevents theft. If your gun is stolen and used in a crime, you could be held liable.
3. Know something about the homes where your kids play and spend overnights. Questions about smoking and seat-belt use have become natural parts of parental conversations: the same must happen with guns. You have every right to ask whether the home your child occasionally visits has guns and whether they are safely stored. The question can be asked without being intrusive: "My child loves playing with Maria. I know we're both worried about safety. If you have a gun in the house, is it safely locked away where the kids can't get at it?"
4. Is the route your child takes to school safe? If not, organize other parents to help serve as crossing guards. Some cities have launched "Bike Trains," parentally-guided groups of kids on bikes going to school as a large group. If parents are too busy working, enlist the faith community or retirees to help.
5. Know your teen children's friends.
6. Be aware of worrisome changes in your child's behavior: a change in friends or clothes, anger, fascination with weapons. If you're worried do not hesitate to seek advice from a school counselor or gang/violence prevention expert, even inviting them to your home to help you assess your situation.
7. Call your child's school to see whether they have an active anti-violence, anti-bullying curriculum.
8. Check with your child's school to assess whether they offer sufficient mental health services.
9. Do you feel you're alone in all of this? If so, add a gun violence prevention dimension to your local group – PTA, neighborhood watch, block club or parents' group.
10. Keep your kids in school at all costs. Truancy and chronic absenteeism put your child at extreme risk. Absence from school usually winds up as trouble on the streets.
11. Find out who's selling guns in your community. See if they have the requisite permits. This also applies to gun shows.
12. High rates of gun violence, including suicides, are linked to weak state regulations. Find out how your state representative votes on such issues as assault weapons, multi-magazine clips and background checks. Remember, your state legislators work for you!