



Parents Matter: A Descriptive Study of Parental Discussions With Teens About Violence Prevention and Related Topics

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

Past research shows that youth violence prevention programming can be enhanced by involving parents and other adults. Parent-child conversations can have protective effects for youth; by having discussions with their children about violence prevention, parents can model and promote healthy attitudes and behaviours. The current study examined the extent to which parents engage in conversations with their children about violence prevention and other related topics. The study also examined factors that might predict confidence in discussing such topics, as well as the methods in which parents might be interested in accessing more information about these topics.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

The researchers surveyed 142 parents of middle or high school-aged children in the United States. Participants answered questions about their frequency in discussing various topics with their children, including sexual harassment, bullying, dating violence, and healthy relationships. They also answered questions about their confidence in discussing such topics, and their interest in learning more about preventing violence.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- Parents reported more frequently engaging in conversations with their children about less sensitive prevention-related topics (e.g., healthy relationships, bullying, and managing stress) compared to more sensitive prevention-related topics (e.g., sexual harassment, sexual assault, and dating violence).
- Parents with more confidence discussing prevention-related topics were more likely to engage in such conversations with their children.
- The majority of parents reported being interested in learning more information about preventing violence, and identified websites and workshops as methods they would be most likely to access.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

Parents reported speaking with their children about less sensitive prevention topics (e.g., healthy relationships, dealing with stress) more often than more sensitive topics (e.g., sexual harassment, dating violence). Bullying appeared to be a less sensitive topic compared to sexual harassment, sexual assault, and dating violence. Most parents reported feeling confident speaking with their children about these topics, and parents who were more confident did so more frequently. The majority of parents reported they were somewhat or very interested in learning more about adults' role in preventing violence. Parents identified how likely they were to use different ways of accessing such information; the two most popular responses were "a website I can visit on my own" and an "in-person workshop".

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

This research highlights the importance of building parents' confidence in having discussions with their children about more sensitive topics, such as sexual harassment and dating violence. The authors suggest that prevention programs can build parents' confidence by sharing information on what they can say to their children, and providing opportunities to practice and receive feedback. In addition, communities may have different preferences for how they want to access such information; practitioners could survey their local community to determine preferred methods. Finally, the study also suggests that information needs to be culturally tailored to different communities, who may have different parenting practices, values and historical factors to consider.

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