

VIOLENCE PREVENTION BEGINS AT HOME



A GUIDE TO HELP FAMILIES PREVENT BRAIN INJURIES IN THEIR HOMES

About the Brain Injury Association of N.Y.S.

The Brain Injury Association of New York State (BIANYS) is a statewide non-profit membership organization that advocates on behalf of individuals with brain injury and their families, and promotes prevention. Established in 1982, BIANYS provides education, advocacy, and community support services that lead to improved outcomes for children and adults with brain injuries and their families. BIANYS also offers a toll free family Help Line, chapters and support groups throughout the state, prevention programs, mentoring programs, speakers bureau, a video library and a publications library. BIANYS plays a central role in the development of public policy on the state and local level.

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We Live In A Violent Society



The United States is a violent society. Many of our movies, television shows, sports, songs, books and even computer games, present images as sexy, entertaining or exciting. Every day our newspapers present us with crimes committed by men, women and children who seek to solve their problems using violent means. Firearm violence, for example, is a uniquely American problem with a rate 90 times greater than any other similar country.¹ It is estimated that half of all American households have firearms.²

Unfortunately for many children, violence is a way of life at home as well. Shouting voices, slapping, and loud violent "entertainment" all leave the mark, deadening the growing brain to the natural heightened emotional response to such experiences and modeling a violent way to react to the world.

"Results from a prospective study of a representative sample of 309 children indicated that physical abuse is indeed a risk factor for later aggressive behavior even when the other ecological and biological factors are known.... Abused children tended to acquire deviant patterns of processing social information, and these may mediate the development of aggressive behavior."³

Equally troubling is the fact that often violence results in traumatic brain injury that may have life long impacts on the individual, his or her family and friends, and the community.

What Can We Do?

The purpose of this brochure is to provide you with a first step; to learn about the situations in which brain injuries are most likely to occur in your home. The next step is to learn what you can do. Some steps are as simple as removal of guns in your home. Other steps require behavior changes such as learning how to teach your children to express anger in a nonviolent way. We do live in a violent society and the best way to reverse this trend is to start in our homes.

What is Traumatic Brain Injury?

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is damage to the brain, caused by an external physical force, that may produce a diminished or altered state of consciousness which often results in reduced cognitive abilities or physical functioning. It can also result in the disturbance of behavioral or emotional functioning. These effects may be either temporary or permanent and may cause partial or total functional disability or psychosocial difficulties.



The results of a TBI can include problems with memory, concentration, learning, reasoning, reading and coordination. This in turn, can lead to feelings of frustration and can have a long-term negative impact on the development of one's self esteem. School failure is frequently a result of TBI. This can be followed by further violence and involvement in the criminal justice system. School failure is a two-fold problem. Students with TBI have greater educational needs that often go undetected by schools. These students may also require special resources to aid in their schooling. Often these resources are not available or are inadequate. Consequently, these students often experience school failure which can lead to other difficulties as stated above.

Young children who witness violence may display symptoms frequently associated with posttraumatic stress disorder: they can't concentrate or focus their thoughts, they have nighttime terrors or flashbacks of the violence, they find it difficult to bond to their parent, they're prone to sudden startling, are overly fearful and apprehensive, and they develop a passive and powerless attitude towards the future which leads to heightened risk-taking behaviors.⁴

In light of the life long consequences of TBI, the best cure is prevention.

Major Causes of Brain Injury Due to Violence

Firearms



Scope of the problem

- * In 1996, there were 1,118 firearm traumatic brain injury deaths in New York State.⁵
- * In 1992, firearms surpassed motor vehicles as the number one cause of brain injury fatalities in the United States.⁶
- * It is estimated that every two hours in the U. S., someone's child is killed with a loaded gun.⁷
- * Firearm violence is a uniquely American problem, with a rate 90 times greater than any other similar country.⁸
- * It is estimated that half of all American households have firearms.⁹
- * Every day, 14 American children under the age of 20 are killed and many more are wounded by guns.
- * It costs more than \$14,000 to treat each child wounded by gun fire-enough to pay for a full year at private college.¹⁰
- * Although firearms are often kept in the home for protection, they are rarely used for this purpose. In 198 cases of home invasion crimes, only three victims (1.5 percent) used a gun for self-defense.¹¹
- * The risk of suicide is five times greater if there is a gun in the home, and the risk of domestic homicide is three times greater.¹²
- * Most children kill themselves or other children unintentionally while they are playing with a gun they found in their home or in the home of a family member or friend.

* News reports state that nearly 90 percent of accidental shootings involving children are linked to easy to find, loaded handguns in the home.

* Over half of all handgun owners keep their guns loaded at least some of the time, and over half do not keep their guns locked up.¹³

What You Can Do

THE BEST PREVENTION IS TO NOT HAVE A GUN IN YOUR HOME

If you do own a gun

* Always keep your gun unloaded and locked up.¹⁴

* Lock and store bullets in a separate location.¹⁴

* Make sure children do not have access to the keys.¹⁴

* Ask police for advice on safe storage and gun locks.¹⁴

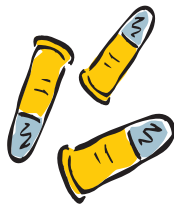
* An estimated 30 percent of all unintentional shootings could be prevented by the presence of safety features such as trigger locks and loading indicators, but American made guns are not subject to federal safety standards like other consumer products such as automobiles, aspirin bottles, and children's toys.

Even if you don't own a gun:

* Talk with your children about the risk of gun injury outside the home in places where they may visit and play.¹⁴

* Tell your children to stay clear of guns when they are in the homes of their friends.¹⁴

* Speak with the parents of your children's friends to find out if they keep a gun at home.¹⁴ If they do, urge them to empty it out and LOCK IT UP.¹⁴



Recognizing and Reducing Firearm Injuries Risks Your Family Toddlers and Young Children

* Because even the most well behaved children are curious by nature and will eagerly explore their environment, the safest thing is to not keep a gun at home.¹⁴

* Explain to your children that guns are dangerous and that children should never touch guns.¹⁴

* Tell your children that gun violence on T.V. and in the movies is not real. Explain that in real life, children are hurt and killed with guns.¹⁴

* Children learn gradually and often forget and test the rules, so periodically repeat the message to stay away from guns.¹⁴

Preteens and Teenagers

* Talk to your children about ways to solve arguments and fights without guns or violence.¹⁴

* Keep in mind that teenagers don't always follow the rules. Also remember that preteens and teens are attracted to guns and see guns as symbols of power. Since you cannot always count on teens to stay away from guns, you have to keep guns away from them.¹⁴

* Depressed preteens and teens commit suicide with guns more often than with any other method. No longer children and not yet adults, they may consider suicide if they're sad, angry, not being taken seriously, or if they feel ignored.¹⁴

* Be extremely cautious about allowing children to participate in shooting activities.¹⁴

* Remember, you are your child's role model. The best way that they can learn safety around firearms is by watching you.

Child Abuse

Scope of the Problem

- * Abuse can be both verbal and physical and both forms of abuse can cause brain injury. The impact of child abuse as a contributing factor to violent behavior cannot be overemphasized.
- * Physical abuse is the leading cause of serious brain injury among infants, often caused by shaking.
- * Approximately 64% of children under the age of one who are abused sustain a brain injury.¹⁵
- * Again and again, child abuse, physical, sexual and emotional, appears in the personal histories of people who resort to violence as adults.¹⁶
- * Among those incarcerated for violent offenses, the prevalence rates of prior sexual and physical abuse during childhood approach 100%.¹⁷
- * Verbal violence has an impact as well. Yelling, swearing and putting a child down are not forms of discipline, they are abusive behaviors that can be severely damaging to a child. If adults hit and yell when they want a child to do something, the child will only learn to hit and yell when she or he wants other people to do something.
- * When ". . . adults are overly restrictive in controlling and limiting activities, children show up with poorer problem-solving and mental organizational abilities." Excessive spanking, other harsh physical punishments, shouting, or sarcasm can also limit a child's development.¹⁸



What You Can Do

- * Anger is a normal human emotion. The ability to express anger in an appropriate fashion is one of the signs of a healthy mature adult. Adults who lose their tempers or who hit to discipline show children that anger is in control of them, not the other way around.
- * Anger management is the ability to recognize when one feels angry, and then to be able to choose an appropriate way to express that anger. Anger management is a critical skill in controlling one's behavior and therefore ending the anger/abuse cycle.

The C.A.L.M Approach

- C Cool down and count to ten: consider the cause and the consequences.
- A Accept responsibility for your actions and reactions.
- L Listen to all sides; talk it over.
- M Make up or move on to something else.¹⁹



Shaken Baby Syndrome

Scope of the Problem

* Shaken Baby Syndrome is caused by vigorous shaking of an infant or young child by the arms, legs, chest or shoulders. Forceful shaking can result in permanent brain damage leading to mental retardation, speech and learning disabilities, paralysis, seizures, blindness, hearing loss and even death.



* An estimated 50,000 cases occur each year in the United States.

* One shaken baby in four dies as a result of this abuse.

* Head trauma is the most frequent cause of permanent damage among abused infants and children. Shaking accounts for a significant number of those cases.

* The sudden shaking motion causes the baby's fragile brain to slam against the skull wall often resulting in cerebral hemorrhage, contusion and edema, bleeding within the brain or tears in brain tissue. The potential outcome is generally severe brain damage or death.²⁰

* A baby's brain, along with the blood vessels connecting the skull to the brain, are fragile and underdeveloped. Therefore, when a baby is shaken, the brain ricochets about the skull, causing the blood vessels to tear away and blood to pool inside the skull.²⁰

* Approximately 75 to 90 percent of the cases have retinal hemorrhages - a symptom almost never seen with accidental head injuries.

* Even in play, infants and small children can sustain a brain injury. Tossing a child in the air or other forms of rough play are not safe.

* Shaken baby syndrome can have disastrous consequences for the family, the child and society. If the child survives, medical bills can be enormous. The child may require lifelong medical care for brain injuries such as mental retardation or cerebral palsy. The child may even require institutionalization or other types of long term care.²¹

* The number one reason a baby is shaken is because of inconsolable crying,

What You Can Do



If you are afraid you might hurt a child, follow these three simple steps:

Stop: Put the child in a safe place and leave the room for a few minutes.

Calm Down: Call a friend or a neighbor, take ten deep breaths, then take ten more, do something for yourself, change your activity, or sit down, close your eyes, think of a pleasant place in your memory.

Try Again: Go back to the child and try again to deal with the problems at hand.²²

Spouse Abuse

Scope of the Problem

* An act of adult domestic violence occurs every 15 seconds, more frequently than any other crime in the U.S.²³ Based on this data, it is estimated that in New York State, one person is victimized by physical violence in the home every 3 minutes, 20 every hour, 480 every day and 175,200 every year.



* Battering is the major cause of injury to women, resulting in more injuries to women than auto crashes, muggings and rapes combined.²⁴

* In 1995, the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services received 87,591 police reports of family offenses (including spouse and child abuse). An adult female was the victim in 59% of these offenses.

* Three fourths of the women who are injured once, continue to experience ongoing abuse, including more severe physical assaults and injuries, with one in three reported assaults involving the use of a weapon or resulting in serious injury.

* According to the American Medical Association's Diagnostic and Treatment Guidelines on Domestic Violence (1992), battered women may account for 22% to 35% of women seeking care for any reason in emergency departments and 23% of pregnant women seeking prenatal care.

* Although clinical samples of men show a 40 - 60 percent correlation between alcohol abuse and battering, research indicated that more than half of all batterers do not abuse alcohol and that 80% of men who abuse alcohol do not engage in domestic violence.²⁵

Thirty percent of women murdered in the United States in 1992 were murdered by a husband or boyfriend (FBI, 1993). This translates into the death of four women per day at the hands of male partners.²⁶

* According to Robert E. McAfee, M.D., of the American Medical Association, "Virtually every physician in every specialty in every part of America regularly treats patients who are victims of violence. Yet too few physicians make the connection that the injuries or illnesses they are treating are a result of a nationwide epidemic as virulent, as pervasive and as destructive as the AIDS epidemic itself."

What You Can Do

One of the most difficult steps a person being battered must take is to identify oneself as a victim. Although individual experiences may differ, this checklist may help you determine if you or someone you know, is battered.

Does your partner:

- _____ constantly criticize you and your abilities as a spouse or partner, parent or employee?
- _____ behave in an over-protective manner or become extremely jealous?
- _____ threaten to hurt you, your children, pets, family members, friends, or themselves?
- _____ prevent you from seeing family or friends?
- _____ get suddenly angry or "lose his/her temper?"
- _____ destroy personal property?
- _____ deny you access to family assets such as bank accounts, credit cards, car, or control all finances and force you to account for what you spend?
- _____ use intimidation or manipulation to control you or your children?
- _____ hit, punch, slap, kick, shove or bite you?

_____ prevent you from going where you want to when you want to?

_____ force you to have sex that makes you uncomfortable?

_____ humiliate or embarrass you in front of others?

If the answer is "yes" to any of these questions, you may be a victim of domestic violence. You are not to blame and you are not alone.

A person who is being battered can find out what options and support services are available in the community by contacting the local domestic violence program or local social service agency. Services may differ from one community to another but most programs offer some form of shelter; children's services including counseling; advocacy for medical care, legal protection, housing, employment, social services; and support groups.²⁷

* For specific information on local domestic violence services, contact the New York State Adult Domestic Violence Hotline:

English 1-800-942-6906

Spanish 1-800-942-6908

Elderly Abuse

Scope of the Problem

* As the number of elderly in our population increases, problems associated with caring for the elderly are also increasing. Children of aged parents find themselves in caregiving roles that they might not be prepared to meet. In some cases this has led to abuse and neglect and is therefore another area of concern for risk of brain injury either due to unsafe conditions for the elderly or due to actual physical abuse.

* Adult children are the most frequent abusers of the elderly in domestic settings. In 1994, 35% of elderly abuse cases involved their adult children as the abusers.²⁸

* From 1986-1988, elder abuse reports increased by almost 20% nationally. Research studies indicate that only 1 in 4 elder abuse incidents are reported, suggesting that 2 million incidents of elder abuse occurred in 1988.²⁹

* New laws have recently been passed in New York State that make endangering the welfare of a vulnerable elderly person a second degree class E felony. In addition, it is a first degree, class E felony when a person who is a caregiver for a vulnerable elderly person causes physical injury to that elderly person.

What Can We Do?

* If you feel that you might need help in caring for an elderly relative or friend, contact your local department of social services located in each county and through the Human Resources Administration in New York City. They have a Protective Services for Adults (PSA) unit that provides services to adults 18 years of age or older who meet the following criteria:

- * have a reduced capacity for self-care because of physical and/or mental disabilities;
- * are being harmed or are at risk of harm by others, or as a result of their own actions or inaction; and
- * have no one else willing and able to assist.

* Even if your situation does not meet their criteria, PSA might be able to direct you to another place where you can receive help. If you are concerned about legal liability, Social Services Law 473-b provides immunity from civil liability to persons who, in good faith, refer an adult whom they believe may be endangered or in need of protective services.



Reducing Violence in Our Society Starts At Home.

* Be Head Smart!

- H Help children and yourself name your feelings.
- E Encourage discussion and cooperation to solve family disputes. Be a positive role model. Parents are a child's most influential role model. Model nonviolent ways to settle problems.
- A Avoid using alcohol and drugs to solve emotional problems.
- D Discipline without violence. Never hit or shake a child. Hitting, spanking or slapping children teaches them it is acceptable to hit others to solve problems. Nonviolent punishments include "time out" and eliminating privileges or treats for brief periods. Use a positive approach to changing behaviors by emphasizing rewards for good behaviors instead of punishment for bad behaviors.
- S Select non-violent hobbies, activities and toys.
- M Monitor the movies and television shows your child views. Restrict viewing to 1-2 hours a day. Television violence influences children to behave aggressively.
- A Applaud non-violent sports figures and other celebrities. Research has shown that violent or aggressive behavior is often learned early in life. Teach children to treat others as they would like to be treated. Respect others for their differences. Teach them that criticizing others and calling them names is hurtful and encourages violence. Emphasize the importance of settling arguments without fists and weapons. Learn peaceful ways to resolve conflicts. Be a good role model.
- R Restrict children's access to firearms.
- T Turn off the television! ³⁰

Prevention of violence must focus on the reduction of risk factors and the improvement of conditions that predispose individuals to commit violent acts. Some strategies have already been mentioned such as the C.A.L.M. anger management approach. All approaches assume the following beliefs:

- * People are responsible for their behaviors towards others.
- *"Know Your Boiling Point" - the first step to controlling violent behavior is to recognize what makes you angry.
- *People who can recognize when they have choices about how to behave are less likely to feel "trapped" into violence as a solution.



For more information, you can contact:

Brain Injury Association of New York State

10 Colvin Avenue
Albany, New York 12206-1242
(518) 459-7911 or 1-800-228-8201 • Fax: (518) 482-5285
Web site: www.bianys.org • E-mail: info@bianys.org

Violence and Brain Injury Institute

105 North Alfred Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
(703) 236-6000 • Web site: www.biausa.org

Center to Prevent Handgun Violence

1225 Eye Street, N.W., Suite 1100
Washington, D.C. 20005

To receive free information on how you and your family can work to prevent violence in your community, call:

The Crime Prevention Coalition
1 800 WE-PREVENT

* If you or your teenager is troubled or having personal problems, you can call the Boys Town National Hotline:
1 800 448-3000.

National Injury and Violence Prevention Resource Center/ NCEMCH

2000 15th Street North, Suite 701
Arlington, VA 22201-2617
(703) 524-7802 • Fax: (703) 524-9335
Internet: csncentr@medlib.georgetown.edu

Adolescent Violence Prevention Resource Center

Educational Development Center
55 Chapel Street
Newton, MA 02158-1060
(617) 969-7100 • Fax: (617) 244-3436

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