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Are Schools Safer After Columbine?

Thursday, April 15, 2004

National Crime Prevention Council

5th Anniversary Reminds America about School Violence

April 20th marks the fifth year anniversary of the tragic shootings at Columbine High School, but are America's schools safer? While the incident put a spotlight on school safety and security, real change will only come about when school administrators, principals, teachers, parents and students come together and work towards solutions.

NCPC reminds parents that there are things they can do to help prevent violence in their community. Here are some helpful tips:

- If you choose to keep firearms at home, ensure that they are securely locked, that ammunition is locked and stored separately, and that children know weapons are never to be touched without your express permission and supervision.
- Take an active role in your children's schools. Talk regularly with teachers and staff.
- Volunteer in the classroom or library, or in after-school activities. Work with parent teacher-student organizations.
- Act as role models. Settle your own conflicts peaceably and manage anger without violence.
- Listen to and talk with your children regularly. Find out what they're thinking on all kinds of topics. Create an opportunity for two-way conversation, which may mean forgoing judgements or pronouncements. This kind of communication should be a daily habit, not a reaction to crisis.
- Set clear limits on behaviors in advance. Discuss punishments and rewards in advance, too. Disciplining with framework and consistency helps teach self-discipline, a skill your children can use for the rest of their lives.
- Communicate clearly on the violence issue. Explain that you don't accept and won't tolerate violent behavior. Discuss what violence is and is not. Answer questions thoughtfully. Listen to children's ideas and concerns. They may bring up small problems that can easily be solved now, problems that could become worse if allowed to fester.
- Help your children learn how to examine and find solutions to problems. Kids who know how to approach a problem and resolve it effectively are less likely to be angry,

frustrated, or violent. Take advantage of “teachable moments” to help your child understand and apply these and other skills.

■ Discourage name-calling and teasing. These behaviors often escalate into fistfights (or worse). Whether the teaser is violent or not, the victim may see violence as the only way to stop it.

■ Insist on knowing your children’s friends, whereabouts, and activities. It’s your right.
■ Make your home an inviting and pleasant place for your children and their friends; it’s easier to know what they’re up to when they’re around. Know how to spot signs of troubling behavior in kids—yours and others.

■ Work with other parents to develop standards for school related events, acceptable out-of-school activities and places, and required adult supervision. Support each other in enforcing these standards.

■ Make it clear that you support school policies and rules that help create and sustain a safe place for all students to learn. If your child feels a rule is wrong, discuss his or her reasons and what rule might work better.

■ Join up with other parents, through school and neighborhood associations, religious organizations, civic groups, and youth activity groups. Talk with each other about violence problems, concerns about youth in the community, sources of help to strengthen and sharpen parenting skills, and similar issues.

■ www.ncpc.org