



Peacekeeping



The Art of Reducing Violence & Scattering Kindness

Leading the industrialized world in homicides, rapes and assaults, the United States is one of the most violent nations on earth. Bombings, fear, suicides, grief. Gunfire that kills the equivalent of a classroom of children every few days.

Of course, our children are no strangers to violence. The average child witnesses 8,000 murders and 100,000 acts of violence on TV before reaching the seventh grade. By adulthood most of us are so accustomed to this brutality that we grow numb to its terribly painful, widespread and long-lasting consequences.

For many home is more of a battlefield than a haven. This year alone about three million children will experience or witness parental abuse—ranging from hitting, punching, or slapping to attacks with deadly weapons. Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to American women between ages 15 and 44.

Enough grim statistics. You get the picture. The level of actual and portrayed physical violence is alarmingly high. Yet the problem goes much deeper.

EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL VIOLENCE

Though not accompanied by gunshots and physical injury, emotional and mental abuse are by far the most widespread forms of violence. Like a largely invisible war, every day meanness, harsh words, and damaging thoughts wound thousands upon thousands. As sure as any bullet, emotional and mental abuse can shatter self-esteem, tear into the heart of close relationships, and kill untold opportunities. Whether it's the direct hit of a belittling remark or a constant barrage of resentment-filled thoughts, the cost to society is beyond estimation.

The tide of violence must be turned back. We each have a role to play. It can be done!

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Today's violence is so overwhelming that many of us feel powerless in responding, thinking there is little if anything we can do to substantially counter the epidemic.

But you and I *can* make a difference. We can become more peaceful within ourselves, we can learn more skillful ways of handling conflict, and we can do a better job of instructing our children and others in the ways of peace and love. Joined together, our power is enormous.

*Disturbing the peace is a crime.
When you rant and rave and stomp
and fret over life's petty grievances,
arrest yourself!*

Carol Ann Morrow

IT STARTS WITHIN

The violence we see in society is a reflection of collective negativity in the hearts and minds of individuals. This is where so much of the problem starts, and it is here, within ourselves, where we can make the most potent changes.

Most of us don't like to think about this. It's much easier to do nothing or blame forces and people outside ourselves. Of course, making our voices heard, holding perpetrators of violence accountable, and working for positive change are important. However, ***our greatest point of power is within our own hearts and souls.*** It

is here that we can truly control what happens, and it is from a platform of personal peace that we are most effective in promoting nonviolence.

KEEP A POSITIVE PERSPECTIVE

We must courageously face violence and act to make our world safer, knowing that we have the individual and collective power to succeed. Yet we also need to focus on the larger picture—on everything that is going right in today's world, the many examples of selfless giving, our enormous creativity and compassion, and the endless blessings that surround us. Life is far less bleak than the newspaper headlines and evening news would lead us to believe.

We need to reclaim our power and enthusiasm, and open our hearts and eyes to all that is beautiful and filled with potential. Then the challenge of living and teaching nonviolence becomes manageable.

SOUL-SEARCHING

To grow in our peacemaking skills requires serious soul-searching. To assist in this process, slowly and thoughtfully reflect on the following questions:

Are you calm and peaceful on the inside? Is this peaceful vitality reflected in your day-to-day behavior—in what you think, feel, say and do? Have you developed healthy ways of honoring and resolving feelings of anger and frustration?

Can you accept and learn from people who think and live differently than you? Can you readily forgive yourself and others and make fresh starts? Do you have the courage to listen to your heart, and say and do what you think is important, even if it's unpopular or demands that you take a leap of faith? Do you realize that peacemaking starts with the feelings in your heart and the thoughts in your mind?

Perhaps a specific, positive change comes to mind—something you want to start doing today.

SMALL CHOICES, LARGE PAYOFFS

Becoming a peacemaker is a journey—a journey that takes time, discipline and skill. The more you learn about and practice peacemaking, the more you will grow in peace, power and love. Never confuse being peaceful with being weak. It takes tremendous courage and self-discipline, for example, to respond calmly when a family member or coworker is trying to get your goat.

Do not underestimate the small decisions you make each day. Within the choices you make lies an awe-

some power. For example, if you want to lash out in anger and instead you choose to take a deep breath and respond in a calm yet assertive manner, you strengthen your own peace and act as a positive role model. In addition, by refusing to send out unnecessary negative energy, you reduce the collective negativity in which violence thrives. There's no question about it: Your small positive choices *do* make a difference.

Peace begins with each of us.

We cannot give peace to others and to the world until we experience it within ourselves. We cannot truly experience that inner peace until we have healed our unfinished business of the past and let go of our grievances, ultimately through forgiveness. Our inner peace is one of the biggest gifts we can give to another and the to the world.

Gerald Jampolsky & Diane Cirincione

To be violent or peaceful, to be weak or strong, to be controlled by fear or to be an instrument of love—these are your choices, choices that you make many, many times each day. The youngsters and adults in your life are watching and learning. They feel your choices, they sense your courage, they reflect your degree of inner peace.

MAKE INNER PEACE A PRIORITY

Peace is the ability to accept with composure whatever challenges come our way. True peace is not dependent on outward circumstances, the behavior of others, or the absence of illness. Peace means letting go of the past (acceptance), living in the present (flowing), and looking forward to tomorrow (faith). It is a state of soothing but vibrant tranquility. Inner peace carries with it a quiet feeling of power and energy. It bears no kin to passivity or laziness.

Make the practice of peace a priority. Examine what helps you feel peaceful. Maybe it's playing with the twin kittens, walking in the park, singing songs, listening to music, praying, reading, or gazing at the stars. Whatever seems to work, build those experiences into your daily life.

Sometimes a lack of peace is an inner call for forgiveness, a change in lifestyle, or the healing of a

relationship. If this is the case you'll know it, as long as you respectfully listen to the signals of your body, mind and spirit. Tune into your thoughts, feelings and messages from your body. Is there something in particular you feel prompted to say or do?



When you are peaceful, you can more easily attune to your intuition—that inner sense of what is best to do, your inner guidance, or the “still small voice within.” Make friends with your intuition. Listen. Trust. It will comfort, guide and inspire you in the smallest details of your life and in your most sweeping decisions.

Inner peace is the ideal springboard for all activities. Whether you are dealing with a conflict, engaged in athletic competition, playing with children, giving a speech, or listening to a friend, feeling calm inside will enable you to act with greater skill and enjoyment. Out of inner peace springs patience, strength, sensitivity, and creativity.

LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD

You have power; let it out! Help quell the widespread violence that hurts us all. Stand up, speak out. Send an editorial to your local newspaper, write a complimentary letter to the producer of an excellent movie, call your congressional representative. Become an advocate for public policies that protect and nurture. In your family, in your local community, and in your state and nation, act to ensure that every child has a right to a safe, loving upbringing in a non-violent and kind society.

TIPS FOR TEACHING PEACEMAKING TO OUR CHILDREN

The African proverb says it well: “It takes a village to raise a child.” As parents, grandparents, relatives and adult friends, we each have opportunities to influence the children in our lives. A few suggestions:

■ **Encourage gentleness.** Speak to young children with kindness and gentleness. In time their behavior will reflect your gentle strength. Instead of saying, “Don’t touch,” say “Use soft hands.” Children also

learn gentleness from books about kind, caring people who solve problems without aggression.

■ **Teach inner peace.** Help children tune into their inner peace—perhaps early on Saturday morning when the birds are singing, or while softly petting the new puppy, or as you enjoy a quiet walk along the creek. Talk about how that inner peace can grow and stay with us all the time, how it helps us bravely face our fears, how it allows us to more easily share love and happiness.

■ **Refuse to tolerate abusive behavior.** When conflict between children escalates into meanness, name calling or hitting, gently put your foot down. Model calmness and explain that hurting one another is not allowed. “We don’t hit, and we don’t say mean things. We use words to talk about our feelings and solve problems.”

International war is the sum total of millions of individual wars, raging in the minds of the people, between what is selfish and what is selfless. To the extent that you and I develop selflessness in our own hearts, to that extent we contribute to peace in our family, community, country, and world.

Eknath Easwaran

■ **Monitor the amount and quality of television.**

Both for yourself and children, restrict the amount of TV and say no to programs that are violent or otherwise insensitive. Plan alternatives to TV: Play a game, take a walk, bake a cake, reminisce, fly a kite, visit a neighbor, plant some flowers, laugh, read, write, enjoy quiet time. Also, do your best to stay away from videos, movies and music that promote unwholesome negativity and aggression.

■ **Assist youngsters in finding their own solutions.** Create an atmosphere in which children can settle their own disputes in a peaceable manner. Help them feel safe and respected, and in an age-appropriate way, let them know that you have faith in their abilities. As necessary, guide children in finding peaceful solutions, but let them take as much initiative as possible.

■ **Use unavoidable violence and conflict as teaching opportunities.** When children in your life hear about a murder, or see an act of physical or verbal abuse, talk

to them about the violence. Discuss the pain it causes, choices people make, and ways violence can be prevented. By your words and by your example, teach children to be peacemakers.

■ **Establish peacemaking rules.** If you are a parent, set up two or three family guidelines for preventing and managing conflict. Use rules that make sense to you; keep them short and simple. Talk and live these guidelines until they become second nature to all family members. What do you think of these three rules?

We are kind to each other.

We listen to feelings.

We solve problems calmly.

SCATTERING KINDNESS

One of the best ways to counter violence and become a force for peace is by regularly performing small acts of loving kindness. Always remember: Every act of kindness is a mighty force. From-the-heart kindness is not a way of drawing unnecessary attention to oneself. The goal is simply to brighten another's day.

Think about it: If each day you go out of your way to spread a few extra gestures of kindness, you'll quietly inspire others to do the same. In a couple of months, you alone will be directly responsible for thousands! of unexpected acts of kindness.

Brainstorm ways you can spread an extra measure of kindness in your home, school, workplace or community. Some idea-starters:

- ◆ Take your favorite little person to a petting zoo.
- ◆ Write a brief "I appreciate you" note to a friend or relative you haven't seen for awhile.
- ◆ Leave that choice parking place for someone else.
- ◆ Give away some extra smiles, sincere compliments, or hugs.
- ◆ Anonymously send money to an acquaintance who needs it.
- ◆ Prepare an unexpected dinner for your spouse.
- ◆ Pray for or send positive thoughts to someone in your day who seems burdened.
- ◆ Plan one-on-one fun time with your children.
- ◆ Invite family members along to pick a huge box of fresh strawberries. Then go door-to-door sharing the juicy red delights with neighbors.

Go out of your way to be thoughtful. Scatter kindness all over the place! Who knows? Your small acts of

goodwill might help start a massive outbreak of kindness that could spread worldwide.

*Kind words are jewels that live in the heart
and soul and remain as blessed memories
years after they have been spoken.*

Marvea Johnson

SIGNS OF INNER PEACE

If you notice any of the following indicators taking place in your life, congratulations! You are well along in your journey as a peacemaker. You can also use these characteristics of peace as goals that you can work toward and expect to experience. Some signs of increased inner peace:

- ♥ Less apt to feel hurried or pressured.
- ♥ Decreased involvement in conflict.
- ♥ Absence of the need to control; a willingness to let things happen naturally.
- ♥ Less prone to worry.
- ♥ Fewer fears; more security and inner strength.
- ♥ Decreased interest in judging others.
- ♥ Accepting and loving people as they are.
- ♥ Willingness to forgive and let go of old hurts and resentments.
- ♥ Increased sense of trust and faith.
- ♥ Living openly, honestly and authentically, with nothing to hide.
- ♥ Living in the here and now, fully attentive to the present moment.
- ♥ More focus on giving and receiving love.
- ♥ Playfulness, vitality, spontaneity, humor.
- ♥ Feelings of oneness with people and nature.
- ♥ Episodes of peace and joy bubbling up from within.



Prepared by **Sam Quick**, Human Development & Family Relations Specialist and **Kim Townley**, Associate Professor. (1996) A **Leader's Manual** accompanies this publication. *Educational programs of the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service serve all people regardless of race, color, age, sex, religion, disability, or national origin.*