

Non-violent Resistance (NVR)

**Guidelines for parents of children
or adolescents with violent
or destructive behaviours**



**An eye for an eye will make
the whole world blind**

March 2007

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Introduction

Non-violent resistance (NVR) addresses violent, destructive and harmful behaviours in children and adolescents. The methods and ideas of non-violent direct action and resistance from Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks are used in community and family settings to help parents and carers with their parenting. NVR can help parents and carers overcome their sense of helplessness. It can help develop a support network that will stop violent and destructive behaviours both in and out of the home. It can improve relationships between family members and the outside world.

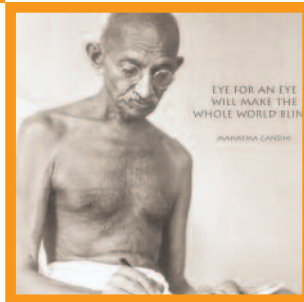
Key concepts of non-violent resistance in parenting:

- de-escalating conflicts
- increasing parental presence
- taking a firm stand against any acts of violence done by yourself and your child or adolescent
- announcing this commitment to your child or adolescent
- arranging sit-ins
- breaking the cycle of shame and silence
- recruiting and utilising supporters
- creating reconciliation gestures that are not linked to the young person's behaviour but increase positive interactions between parents and young people.

These ideas and suggestions are guidelines and will be explained in more detail in the individual chapters. You can use them in any order that suits you. The chapters are meant to help you use this approach in your own family. You may want to pick and choose what fits for you and your child or adolescent. You do not have to use all of the chapters for this approach to be successful. Any aspect of it will help you parent more effectively.



Martin Luther King



Mahatma Gandhi



Rosa Parks

Is your house like this?



What is happening?

- Who is in control?
- Where might it lead?
- How much more can you take?
- Have you had enough?
- Is it difficult to remember how much you love your child?
- Does it feel like you are losing your child?
- Are you afraid that someone might get hurt?
- Are you prepared to try something different to change things?

What is really going on?

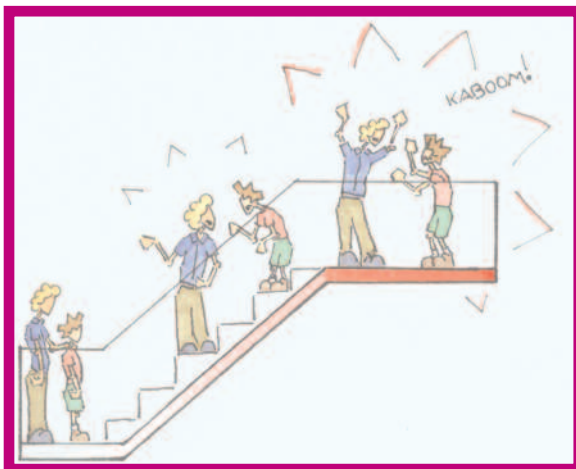
Things get out of hand because the arguments go up and up just like an escalator. Sometimes this ends in violence.

You are doing your best but you might be making things worse without realising it. How you respond to your child has a direct effect on what happens.

The two main ways in which things escalate between parents and children are described on the next page.

Joint escalation

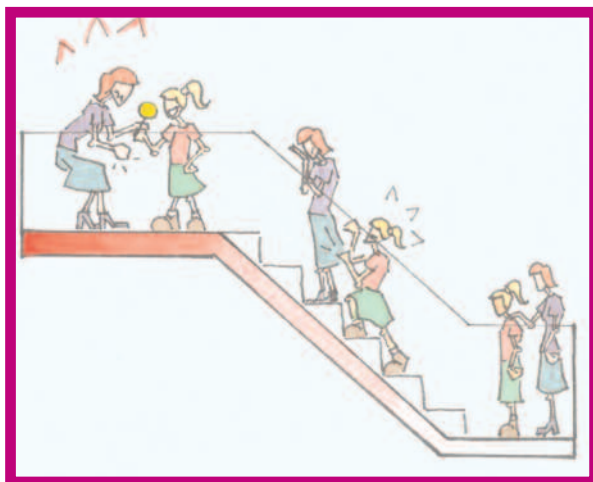
Your child raises their voice, you raise your voice, you raise your voice, your child shouts, you shout, your child shouts louder, you shout louder. The argument can end in violence on both sides.



Pattern 1

Giving-in escalation

Your child shouts and demands, after a while you give in and let your child have their way. Your child learns that they get their own way if they make enough fuss and will repeat this pattern as often as they can.



Pattern 2

When there are two parents one may use the first pattern (joint escalation) while the other uses the second pattern (giving in escalation). This makes the situation even worse because it is confusing for the young person.

Non-violent resistance offers you a completely different pattern which aims to help you to stop the child's or young person's destructive behaviour and prevent escalation and violence. Experience and research show that it is very effective.

The main principles of NVR are:

- 1.** Taking a firm stand against violence, risk-taking and anti-social behaviours.
- 2.** Holding back from physical or verbal violence.
- 3.** Increasing your positive presence in your child's life.



“I am no longer prepared to continue with this situation and will do all in my power to change it - except by attacking you physically or verbally!”

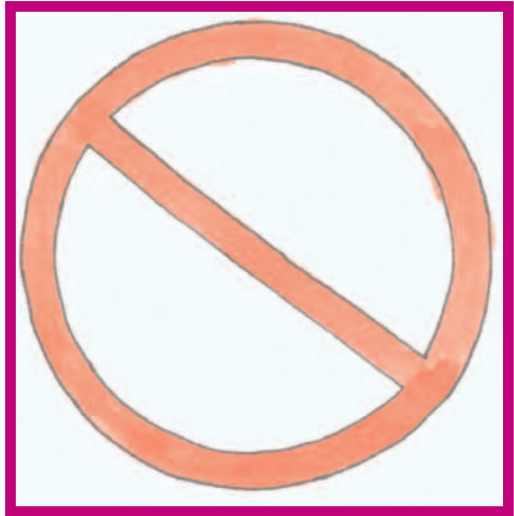
What you should do

- stay calm
- stop and think
- remain positive
- give yourself time to plan your response
- be non-judgmental
- tell your child that you are doing this because you love them
- be gentle and firm
- persist
- resist violence
- believe that things can get better.

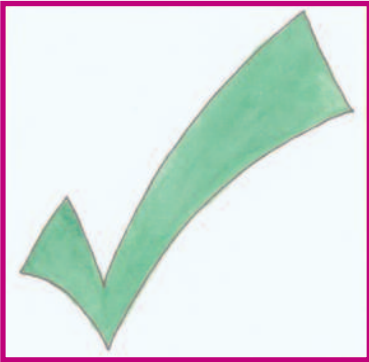


What you should not do

- react
- talk too much
- argue
- lecture
- threaten
- raise your voice
- use sarcasm
- blame
- say hurtful things
- use aggressive body language.



You may like to write down your own DOs and DON'Ts here:





Working together and parental presence



What is parental presence?

When children are growing up, their parents tell them what is right and what is wrong and how they should behave. In time children learn what their parents would think even when they are not around. This helps children know how to behave when their parents are not there. NVR calls this 'parental presence' because the parent is present in the child's mind.

When a child or young person has got out of control then you may have lost 'parental presence' in your own house. This means that your influence in the house is no longer strong enough to help your children know how to behave.

When parental presence is lost, children and young people lose their sense of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. They no longer have you in their mind as a 'presence' in their lives. This can be scary for them although they will not show it.

Growing up involves challenging and questioning your parents' ideas and beliefs. This is a normal part of development. It is easier for the young person to do this when they have a strong sense of their parents' beliefs and values. There will be other presences in your child's life that may become more important. For example friends, other young people or new experiences. This is why parental presence is so important.



How can you get parental presence back?

If there are two of you then it is really important that you work together. Seeing you divided is confusing for your child and they will not know what you expect from them.

If you cannot work together then you are not yet ready to change things in your home.

If you are a single parent then you may need to get yourself some supporters because it might be more difficult to do this alone. Look at chapter four on *'supporters'*.



Remember:

- You do not have to win
- You are not trying to make your child someone they are not
- You love your child so you have to resist their behaviour
- You are not going to lecture or punish them
- You will never respond with violence.

Re-establishing your parental presence means reminding your child that you love them and will be there for them no matter what, however you **will** resist their unacceptable behaviour. You love them so you have no choice.

An important part of parental presence is rebuilding your relationship. Look at chapter eight on '*Rebuilding the relationship*' further on in this booklet.

“I am not alone in this”

Finding and using supporters



The Non-Violent Resistance Programme encourages parents to share their experiences, concerns and fears as well as their hopes with other people and to invite others to help and support them.

Breaking the silence about what goes on in the home and asking for support is no sign of weakness!

Using support does not mean handing over the responsibility for children to other people. It may help parents to feel less isolated and lonely. Asking for support is a crucial step in starting on the path of regaining positive relationships and becoming an effective parent again.

Common obstacles:

- **The wish not to burden others with problems that are not theirs**

Usually other people like to be helpful and may even feel honoured to be asked.

- **The fear of being judged**

Often other people have similar secrets themselves and are glad that they can share them with others as well.

- **The shame of being bad parents**

People may be impressed with how parents have managed to cope by themselves for such a long time without help.

- **The fear of rejection**

Supporters will usually let parents know how and in what way they can contribute, even if they can only offer moral support.

- **The fear of damaging the existing relationship with the supporter**

Often the relationship with the supporter becomes even closer and turns into mutual support and lasting friendship.

- **Parents may feel that they do not know anyone who could help**

In this case therapists can help parents to identify potential supporters in the parents' wider networks. Therapists are supporters as well!

- **The fear that the child or young person will react with more anger, disappointment, hurt or contempt**

This reaction is to be expected and predicted. Parents and their supporters are encouraged to repeat to the young person that they have asked for help because they care for them and want them to stop the violent behaviour.

- **The feeling of being disloyal to the child or young person**

Calling others in for help and support means that parents will become more effective and secure. They demonstrate their moral obligation to protect themselves and their children from the damaging effect of violence on their family life.

Role of supporters

Examples of the kind of things supporters may do:

- visit the child or adolescent or contact them by phone, text, email or letter
- mediate between the young person and their parents
- protect brothers or sisters of the young person
- visit the family when things get out of hand
- monitor the young person's whereabouts
- witness what goes on in the home
- support the parents in their determination to stop the violence, develop self-control and become less reactive
- do something active and positive with the young person, their brothers and sisters or the parents
- listen to the parents' stories.

Supporters can be witnesses, mediators or protectors!

Parents decide:

How?

Who?

What?

When?

On the following pages is a letter that therapists might send to supporters to explain how they might help parents.

This is the type of letter that your therapist would send with your agreement to your supporters.



Dear supporter

We are glad that you have agreed to support the effort to improve the quality of life of the _____ family. Your presence can be most helpful in reducing tension and preventing things getting out of hand. We hope that the following information will help you to understand our approach and will give you a few ideas about how to help the parents.

Goals of support:

Parenting an aggressive or out-of-control child or young person is hard. It drains parents mentally and physically leaving them tired and weak. A good support system helps parents cope and stay strong. Parents often worry what other people will think. They believe that asking for support means that they have failed as parents. Other fears include the belief that no one will want to help them or that exposing the child or young person's behaviour will label the child or young person as bad. Your reaction as a supporter is crucial in decreasing these fears enabling the parents to feel comfortable with your help.

The roles of supporters:

Being a supporter does not have to be time consuming. Every person can contribute as much time and energy as they want to give. There are different ways to support parents: you can support them emotionally or practically, you can mediate between the parents and the child, or you can support the young person. Here are some suggestions that other people have found helpful:

- You can contact the child or young person and let them know that their parents requested your help. Tell them that you know about their extreme behaviours and that you find them unacceptable. In addition, it is helpful if you can tell the child or young person that you care for them, but that you will do everything possible in order to stop their violent or destructive acts.
- If you are close to the child or young person you can ask to meet them. If they agree you can try to become a mediator between them and their parents. With your mediation the child or young person might feel less isolated.
- In the case of violence towards brothers and sisters you can contact them and offer your protection.
- You can visit the family when things are getting out of hand. There is a good chance that your presence will decrease tension and prevent violence.
- You can help parents to monitor their child's whereabouts.
- You can also involve yourself in the child's or young person's life when things are going well.

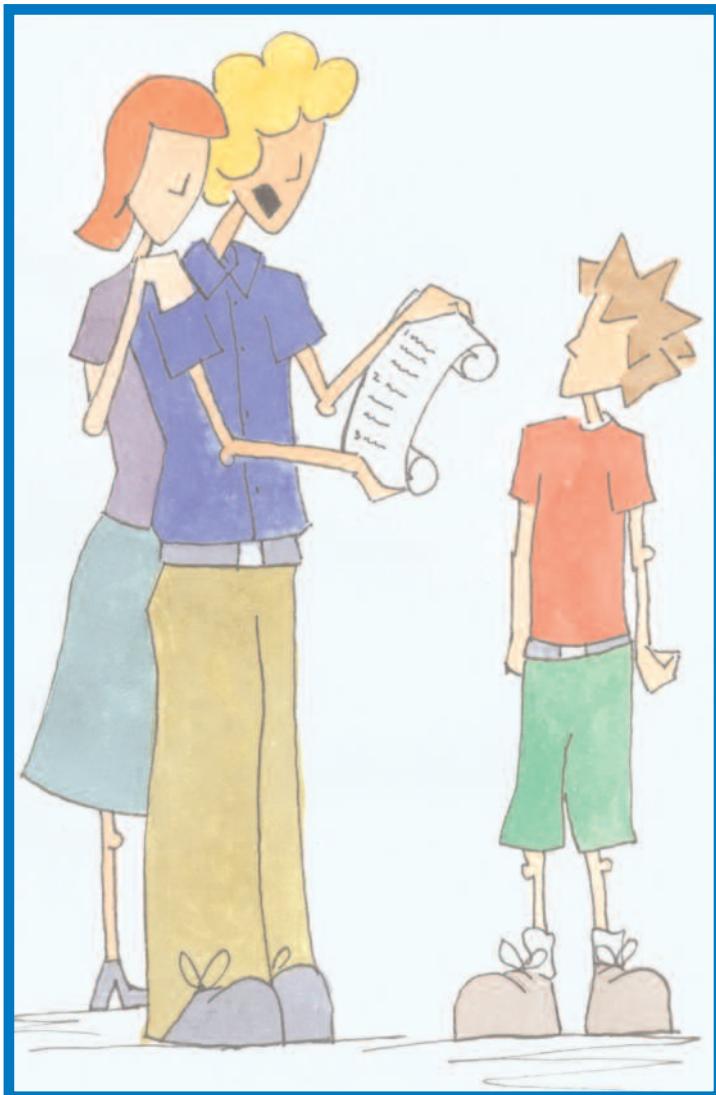
The supporter's meeting:

If needed, we might organise a meeting with supporters. This meeting includes the parents, the parents' supporters and the therapists. The goal of this meeting is for everyone to develop ways of helping parents to stop violence and improve family life. Your participation and support will be welcomed.

Sincerely

The therapist's name _____

The announcement



NVR marks a new stage of being open and clear with your child. You begin by telling your child about the stand you are going to take and your commitment to resist their behaviour.

1 Deciding which behaviour to focus on

It is important to decide where to begin. Parents often find that part of the difficulty is that they do not agree on what to take a stand about or how to do this. Preparing to make the announcement helps clarify goals and brings parents together.

Q There are so many things we need to change, where do we start?

A For this to work you need to concentrate on only one or two.

Begin by writing every behaviour that you want to change on a separate piece of paper. Now you are going to work out which are the most important.

Use the idea of baskets to help you work out what is most important.

Prioritising



This is the largest basket. Put all the things that you are going to **ignore** in here. Most of your pieces of paper should be in this basket.



This is the middle sized basket. Put the things in here that you are prepared to be flexible about or **negotiate** over.



This is the smallest basket. Put in here things that you will no longer tolerate. This should be no more than **one or two** things.

2 Writing the announcement

Take the one or two behaviours from the smallest basket. These are the ones you are going to include in the announcement.

The content will:

- be short
- not include punishments for breaking the rules
- be a statement about what you are going to do, not what you expect your child to do
- not be threatening.

Suggested outline

Violence has made life unbearable for us. We cannot and do not want to live like this any longer. We will do all we can to change the situation. We will not attack you physically or verbally. We will always be here for you.

We will no longer remain alone with the problem but will ask our friends and family for help and support. We will not hide what is going on.

We promise to resist the following behaviour:

1.
2.

We are not trying to put you down or get control over you. We are doing this because we love you and want to do our best for you as your parents/carer.

- choose a quiet time
- speak in a clear, calm and non-threatening way
- if there are two of you and one of you is the 'softer' parent, let that person make the announcement
- read the announcement
- ask someone else to be there as a witness if you think your child might react with violence
- if communication has completely broken down between you and your child ask someone else to be there to read the announcement
- give your child a copy of the announcement.

Children may react by:

- tearing up the paper
- screaming
- shouting
- crying.

Stay **calm** and stay **silent**.

You may like to write down ideas for your announcement here:

Baskets



This is the largest basket. Put all the things that you are going to **ignore** in here. Most of your pieces of paper should be in this basket.



This is the middle sized basket. Put the things in here that you are prepared to be flexible about or **negotiate** over.



This is the smallest basket. Put in here things that you will no longer tolerate. This should be no more than **one or two** things.

The sit-in



The sit-in allows you to show parental presence without escalating or losing control. The purpose of the sit-in is to address a violent incident and to let your child know that you will not put up with their behaviour any more.

Steps:

1. Enter your child's room when your child is in there (a few hours or the following day after the incident you want to address).
2. Shut the door after you.
3. Sit down somewhere that makes it difficult for your child to leave the room.
4. Tell your child "We are/I am not prepared to put up with this behaviour anymore (describe the unacceptable behaviour). We are here to find a way to solve the problem. We will sit and wait until you suggest a solution."
5. Remain quiet and wait for suggestions.
6. Consider all suggestions offered in an encouraging way.
7. Ask questions if your child has any good suggestions, then leave the room saying you will give the suggestion a chance.
8. Remain sitting quietly if your child answers with accusations ("it is my brother's fault!"), demands ("if you buy me a TV I will stop!") or threats ("I will run away!"). DO NOT be drawn into argument. You can say "this is not a solution."
9. Stay in the room for one hour (less if your child is young or if there is a specific problem like a learning difficulty which would make it too long) even if a suggestion is not made, then leave saying "we still have not found a solution."

Do:

- wait patiently and quietly
- plan ahead and be prepared to sit in the room for one hour
- be specific about what you want (eg “We are not going to put up with you hitting your brother any longer”)
- have backup (one or two friends or relatives in the house but not in the room) if you anticipate your child may respond violently, and tell the child (eg “We thought you might be violent so we invited X to see this”)
- ask the witnesses to enter the room if the child behaves violently – this is likely to stop the violence
- return to normal routine once the sit-in is over and do not mention the sit-in or desired change
- stop the sit-in if your child continues to be violent and you cannot protect yourself
- you can repeat the sit-in on another day if you have had to stop it.



Don't:

- behave aggressively
- blame
- lecture
- threaten
- raise your voice
- argue or fight
- plead or bargain
- question your child's suggestion suspiciously
- threaten to return to sit-in if the suggestion doesn't work.



Frequently asked questions

What if your child...

Tries to drive you out by screaming? Stay silent.

Starts crying? Stay silent and seated where you are. Do not hug or comfort your child.

Tries to drive you out with violence? Protect yourself without hitting back - invite the third person into the room. If no third person is present and you cannot protect yourself, stop the sit-in and come back to it when you are better prepared with support.

Tries to bargain with you? Say you cannot accept the suggestion but do not give a reason for this, then stay silent again.

Ignores you? Your child may ignore you by putting music, TV, or a computer game on. Turn the equipment off at once. If your child puts it back on do not turn it back off (as this would lead to escalation). Wait in the room until the hour is up.

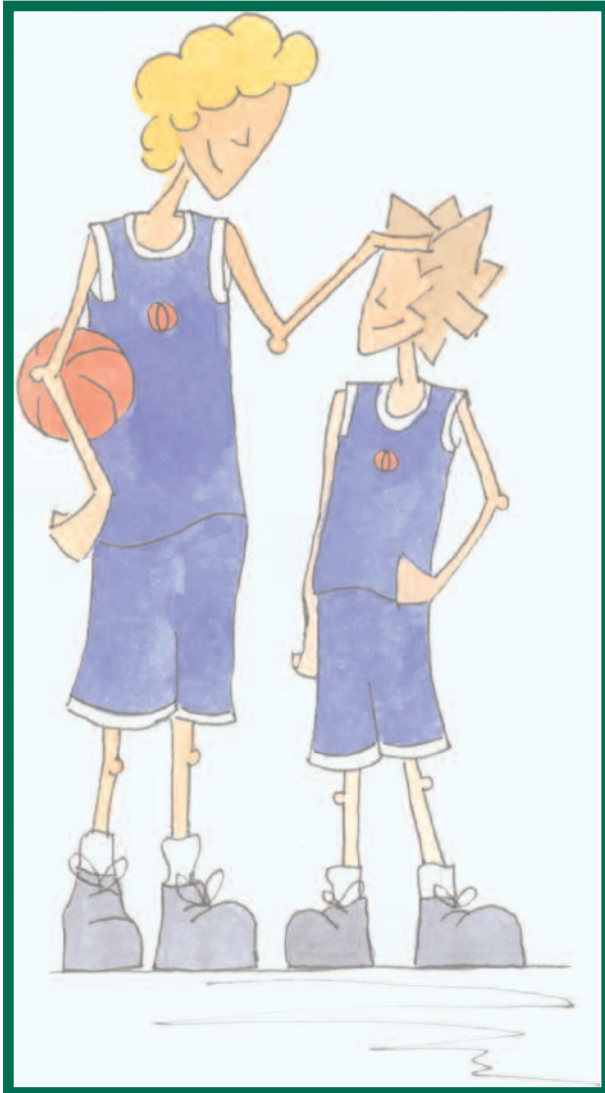
Screams to get other people's attention? Warn whoever (eg neighbours) might hear the screaming and tell them what might happen.

Remember:

- The goal of the sit-in is not to win but to show parental presence.
- You being there is more important than your child's suggestion.
- If your child behaves badly in the sit-in it does not mean the sit-in was not successful.
- Having to repeat the sit-in does not mean you are not making progress.



Rebuilding the relationship



Rebuilding the relationship

When things have been difficult for a long time it becomes hard to show your child how much you love them. Parents often feel that if they do anything nice for their child this is rewarding bad behaviour and will make things worse. When they do buy their child something after some improvement in behaviour then the child sometimes seems to behave even more badly in response.

As a result it becomes hard to rebuild the relationship because it seems to consist of nothing but telling off, groundings and arguments. How are you ever going to change things if your child never behaves well enough to be rewarded? Parents end up feeling that they really do not like their child anymore and they never get the opportunity to do anything nice for their child.

The way forward is to separate the child's behaviour from the reward. Therefore 'reward' is not the best word to describe what you are trying to do; 'reconciliation gesture' is a better description. Reconciliation means making peace when you have been at war.

What is a reconciliation gesture?

A reconciliation gesture is something small that you do to show you love your child and want to rebuild the relationship.

It is making or getting some small treat you know your child likes (like a trifle or some favourite dish). You might want to tell your child that you have made something you know they like and you have left it in the fridge or the cupboard for them.

You might fix something that belongs to your child, which they have broken.

Do not be upset if they do not accept your gestures at the beginning, just repeat the procedure.

Remember:

These gestures are separate from any behaviour; they are not a reward. You are making the gestures because you love your child and you want to rebuild the relationship. You will make these gestures no matter how your child behaves.

The gesture must be small and should be inexpensive. It does not matter if your child seems not to respond or rejects your gesture.

You may like to write down ideas about what makes your child happy:

Helping brothers and sisters tell their story



Telling other people what the violence has been like is very important and makes children stronger. It can be helpful to write experiences down or record them in some way.

Brothers and sisters have the right to speak out about violence and to expect their parents to support them and listen to what they have to say. Speaking up and saying what is happening is the right thing to do: it is not 'grassing' or being sneaky.

The child who is acting violently needs to hear how they are affecting their brothers and sisters. Parents should not take sides if the child says that it is not true. Parents need to increase their level of supervision and be more prepared to prevent violence against their children.

We recommend sharing all violent incidents with at least one witness outside the family as soon as possible. Ask this witness to tell the hurt brother or sister and the young person who has acted violently, that they know about the latest incident and that they will support the parents to stop future violence.



The witness also assures the hurt child that they are no longer alone and that the witness will try to protect them (for example staying with them, frequent phone contacts, asking how their day has been, increased presence in the household and writing down every new incident).

Parents need to be prepared for the possibility that the young person who acts violently may step up their abusive behaviours or run away when the cover of secrecy is broken.

When parents witness any violent incident between their children they should immediately separate them and then write down the details of the new violent incident. They should make a list of names, including the young person's friends, their parents and other people who are important to the young person. Parents should then tell their son or daughter that this report will be sent to everyone on the list when any acts of violence happen again. They should avoid any discussion about this because it is not about right or wrong but about stopping violence.

However, even in cases of violence against their other children, parents should continue to make reconciliation gestures in order to show their child that they do not reject them and still care deeply.

Steps for parents and supporters

1. Interview the brother or sister that was hurt and write down the violent incident in detail. We have provided an example of how you can do this at the end of this chapter.
2. Give the brother or sister phone numbers of supporters and helpers and make sure that they hide them well.
3. Increase parental presence and check regularly/daily whether new incidents have occurred.
4. Show the incident report and list of names to the young person who has been violent.
5. Send copies of the report to supporters and witnesses on the list and ask them to get in touch with the young person who has been violent. This is to let the young person know that they do not accept the violence but will continue to offer support as much as possible.
6. Supporters get in touch with the violent young person to let them know that they have received the report and are prepared to help but do not accept violence.



7. Supporters get in touch with the other children who were hurt and reassure them of their support.
8. Parents make reconciliation gestures on the same day as the violent incident to reassure their child that they still love them.
9. The list of incidents gets updated and new names of supporters and witnesses (including the young person's friends and their parents) are added to the list.
10. As a final resort, the completed journal of incidents can be taken to the police if the violence does not stop.

List the names of supporters who get copies of this journal.

Name

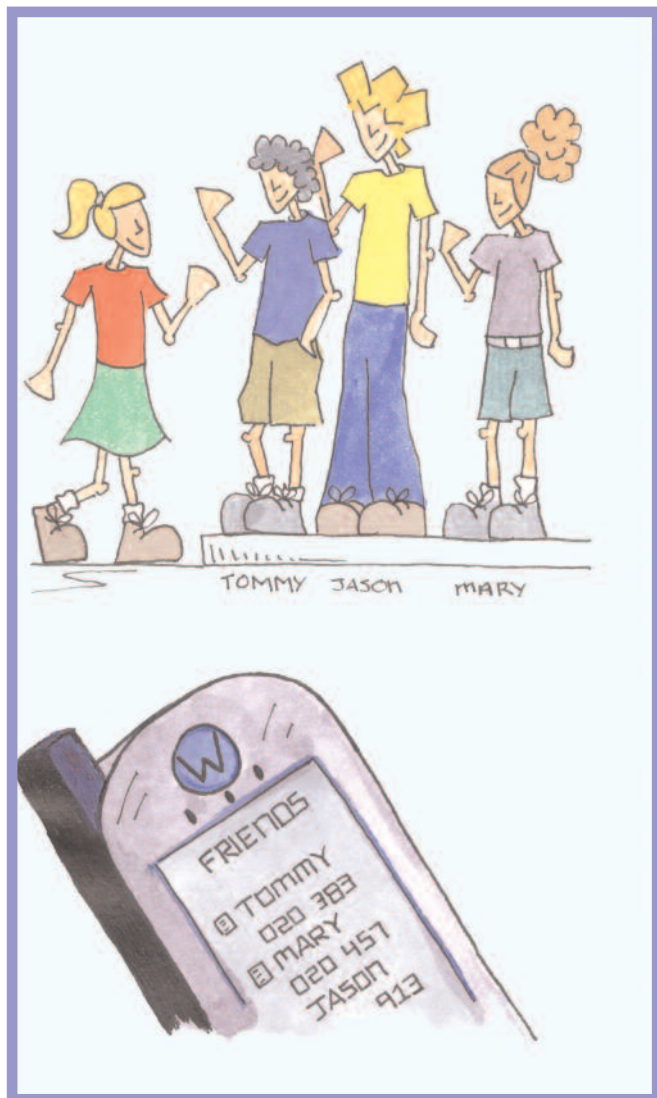
Address

Phone number

Date	Time	Location	Who was present?	Outcome

Date	Time	Location	Who was present?	Outcome

Parental presence outside the home



Being in your child's life a lot may limit their privacy. However it is important to reduce anti-social and risky behaviours where these have become dangerous.

Sometimes it is not always possible to be present in your child's life as much as you might want to be.

Reasons for this could be:

- single-parent household
- parents working long hours
- parents with physical or mental illness
- lack of social support
- secrecy - isolates the parents and blocks potential help
- one parent who has little contact or influence
- long term conflict between parents
- parents that prefer not to get involved
- parents who give in because they feel guilt, pity or anxiety.

Parental presence can be increased by:

- Trying to re-establish contact when your child avoids parental supervision or runs away.
- Making your child feel that you know exactly where they spend their time and you are present even when you are physically distant.
- Acting in a way that gives the message "I am here! I am your parent and will remain your parent! I am not giving in to you or giving up on you!"
- Not reacting to your child's attempt to break off contact with escalation (eg locking the door or not talking to the child).

- Standing strong with your decision to resist all provocations and trying as much as you can to maintain contact and supervision.
- Repeating to yourselves “We will not be provoked and will not give in!”

What to do if your child:

1. Runs away from home: this will usually be to a friend or relative, or a group of other young people.

On arrival ring the bell and say (in a respectful way) that you have come to take your child home. Say that you have no intention of punishing your child but that you want them to come with you. If the child does not come to the door say that you will wait for them (you can ask the friend or parent’s permission to wait inside). If you are not invited to come in ring the bell again every ten minutes and ask the child to come home with you. Stay calm.

2. Does not come home at night when supposed to or disappears for long periods during the day: these tend to happen routinely. Children feel these disappearances are their ‘basic right’, reinforced by their parents’ inability to prevent them.

On arrival approach the child and say you want them to come home with you and that they will not be punished. If the child runs away do not run after them. Instead take the opportunity to make contact with their friends. Ask for their names and telephone numbers (say only for urgent situations) and explain why you are concerned about your child. If the friends say you should not worry you may answer “I know my child well and I know they do not have much self-control. Maybe you have more self-control than they do.” Some of these friends may play an important role as mediators.

3. Keeps bad company: unsupervised time spent in such company can put your child at risk of using drugs, dropping out of school or getting into trouble with the police.

When your child runs away and joins a group of young people who are getting into trouble, be prepared to track your child for a long time. It might be worthwhile taking a friend or relative for support and to reduce the risk of escalation. The third party may also be able to mediate: your child may accept a proposal coming from them better than one coming from you.

Remember:

- Ask your child to come home with you and state that you will not punish them.
- Avoid arguments. If possible, stay silent for as long as you remain with your child at the place they have run away to.
- Avoid any act that could lead to escalation (eg taking your child by force and putting them in the car).
- Follow your child for as long as possible.
- The idea of following your child is not to return the child home but to show your love and stand by your decision to supervise your child.

What parents and carers say about NVR

Our thanks to the Thanet Multi Agency Services (TMS) team who have provided the following quotes from their successful work with families and foster families in East Kent using NVR.

Catherine, an experienced foster carer came to TMS



regarding an adolescent, autistic girl in her long term placement who displayed violent and controlling behaviour towards all members of the household.

“Being persistent gains respect. I have learned to stay calm. NVR has been successful in keeping her in the placement. She would say she feels safer with the boundaries.”

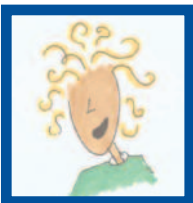
Sharon, has had a 12 year old boy in placement for five years.

They came to TMS with concerns around his aggression to his sibling, damage to the home, verbal aggression towards the carer. He was trying to divide and rule everyone around him, including professionals, putting his placement in danger of breaking down.



“His behaviour is not a secret anymore. Having the support of other agencies saying the same thing relieved the pressure. NVR is a relaxing way of working; it is a planned way of working.”

Patricia, who has a physical disability is the mother of a 10 year old girl who refused to be in school without her mother present in the classroom. The girl controlled her mother’s life totally, including the use of physical violence.



“I am enjoying the freedom, and enjoying life more.”

Anne, is the mother of a 15 year old son who was putting himself at risk with drugs and alcohol. This had led to involvement with the police. His behaviour at school was unacceptable and the risk of exclusion was imminent. Within the home he was violent and aggressive towards his mother and sibling.



“I have been keeping reconciliation gestures to little things that he enjoys and remembers. We have learned a different way of life, life is now pleasant. I do not respond to his control. I walk away. He is happier and enjoying life.”



Other parents have said



“It was great to have really practical advice. I needed someone to tell me what to do.”

“It is just common sense but having it written down was really useful.”

“Things are so much better, we can go out together and have fun.”

Your views

In order to ensure that we respond to the needs of families, we want to know what you think about our booklet and whether you found it helpful. We may write to you to ask for your views.

Looking after your own...



Spiritual beliefs

Sense of purpose
Connecting with your beliefs about the world, love, the meaning of life, what being a parent means to you.

Relationships

Good communication
Compassion/listening
Solving problems and conflicts
Talking and sharing with partners, friends and relatives
Intimacy
Being involved in clubs, religious groups, education, volunteer work and employment.

Mental health

Accepting personal responsibility
Self respect, feeling of belonging
Taking care of your own emotional/psychological and safety needs
Respect for others
Humour and laughter
Creativity
Positive self-reminders like:
"I am a good parent"
"I won't give up on my child"
"Things will get better."

Physical health

Relaxation/meditation
Exercise, walks
Sleeping well, singing, dancing
Enjoying nice meals.



**You may want to write down ideas
about how you can look after yourself.**

This booklet has been written by Liz Day, Elisabeth Heismann and Miriam Spyrou from Bexley and Greenwich Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

CAMHS provides an assessment and treatment service for children and young people from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds where there are concerns about their behaviour or emotional well-being.

We would like to acknowledge and thank Haim Omer, Uri Weinblatt and Peter Jakob whose work on non-violent resistance inspired us to write this booklet.



Peter Jakob, Elisabeth Heismann,
Haim Omer, Liz Day
and Miriam Spyrou

A more in-depth description of NVR is available in *Non-violent Resistance* by Haim Omer published by Cambridge University Press in 2004.

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