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Wright State Expert on Violence Prevention in Children Says Parents Should Look for Danger Signs

DAYTON, Ohio, Feb. 16 [AScribe Newswire] – Temper tantrums, violence toward animals and being bullied are among the warning signs parents should look for to prevent violent behavior by their children, according to Betty Yung, Ph.D., a psychology faculty member at Wright State University and pioneer in youth violence prevention education.

She said parents can be the most valuable prevention tool to help children learn to deal with emotions without using violence and suggested several things parents can do. They include looking for the following warning signs of potential violence:

- Frequent and prolonged temper tantrums in toddlers or preschoolers, coupled with an inability to be calmed by parents or caregivers.
- Frequent physical fighting with other school children.
- Violence toward animals.
- Frequent victimization by bullies.
- Making friends with other children known to be aggressive.

Yung, an associate professor at the Wright State School of Professional Psychology [SOPP], helped develop the Positive Adolescent Choices Training [PACT] model in 1989, when there were almost no other children's violence prevention programs in the country. It has since been expanded to 25 states as a way to help youngsters develop pro-social and anger management skills as alternatives to fighting. She also directs the Center for Child and Adolescent Violence Prevention at SOPP.

In addition to the warning signs of violence, she said parents should be conscious of themselves as a model. "Show children appropriate behavior by the way you act, and treat them and others with respect," she said. "When you discuss problems with your children, you are modeling ways to solve problems with calm words."

Yung, a member of the National Task Force on Emergency Responses to School Violence, said if there is violence in the home, parents should seek help to stop it. "Witnessing domestic violence and/or being abused are the strongest predictors that children will become either a

victim or a perpetrator of violence in their future relationships,” she emphasized. She said the Dayton community has trained counselors to help at the domestic violence hotline at 937-222-7233.

Yung said parents who store guns in the home should make sure they are kept in a secure and safe place. She also said it is important to get children involved in positive, constructive activities. “Children who have strong bonds to institutions such as schools and church are less likely to engage in the risky behavior that often places them in violent situations.”

Yung has been interested in violence prevention since the 1960s, when, as a probation officer, she observed a murder case involving an innocent teen who was killed while trying to defuse a violent incident. “Sitting in that courtroom was very traumatic for me. My reaction was to do whatever could be done to prevent violence. Unlike other social problems, you can’t go in afterwards and fix it. Life can’t be restored, criminal charges can’t be revoked and the grief of parents who have lost a loved one can’t be erased.”

Yung was able to develop a mentoring program for delinquent children while working in county government juvenile services in Kentucky. She later moved to Dayton and, with Rodney Hammond, Ph.D., then an SOPP professor and now director of the violence prevention division of the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, developed PACT.

Although youth violence has often been in the headlines recently in the Miami Valley, Yung said national statistics report a decline in recent years. However, a disturbing statistic shows violence among kids now has a far greater potential to become deadly. “More children are arming themselves with weapons,” she said, “and even more disturbing is that more than half say they could easily get a gun if they wanted to.”

She said, in conclusion, that more children need to develop the skills to avoid turning conflicts and arguments into physical fights.

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