

PREVENTING ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

PRACTICAL GUIDE
FOR PARENTS

A SAFE
CHILDHOOD FREE
FROM VIOLENCE

CHILDREN ABLE
TO PROTECT
THEMSELVES

INFORMED ADULTS
TAKING ACTION

Project director

ESPACE Chaudière-Appalaches
Regroupement des organismes ESPACE du Québec (ROEQ)

Editor

France Fortin – adapted by the ROEQ Collective

Translation

Stéphanie Martin

Illustrations

Illustrations Orbie

Graphic design

Kaylynne Johnson – Web et design
Marie-Josée Beaulieu – mariejodesign

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157, rue des Chênes, bureau 218, Québec, QC G1L 1K6

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For the Independent Community Organizations ESPACE

Every action aims to offer children the chance to have a safe childhood free from violence. It is how we translate our ongoing commitment to preventing all forms of violence against children.

Preventing violence means not only giving children the tools they need to protect themselves against all forms of violence but also raising adults' awareness of what their role is in prevention and equipping them to help children.

ESPACE's principal activities are:

- ◆ an educational program for elementary schools, daycare centres, recreational or sports groups, and other children's milieus.
A one-on-one meeting is offered to the children after the workshop;
- ◆ raising awareness and supporting the general public, community organizations, associations, professionals, etc.;
- ◆ collaborating with various professionals in organizations, universities, colleges, the media, working groups, etc.;
- ◆ telephone consultations and referrals.

You can also view the activities of each ESPACE organization by visiting our website at www.espacesansviolence.org.

Introduction

As parents, you want a fair and just society and a safe environment for your children to grow up in. You want them to be happy and confident, able to face life with all the joys and challenges, love and violence that it may bring. The ESPACE organizations share these wishes with you.

Three important factors make children vulnerable to violence and make them easy prey for aggressors:

- ◆ *their **lack of information** concerning abuse and their rights;*
- ◆ *their **dependence on** adults to meet their needs and insure their protection;*
- ◆ *their **social isolation**, because children generally consider themselves playmates and not people who can help one another. It is usually through adults that they have access to the resources in their community.*

That is why ESPACE works to prevent all forms of violence against children.

Here is a simple and practical guide to counter these vulnerability factors and enable children to develop strategies that will reinforce their self-assertiveness, self-confidence, courage and the ability to help each other.

We hope that this booklet will contribute to making you and your children stronger.

Your ESPACE organization

Member of the Regroupement des organismes ESPACE du Québec



Chapter 1

Violence against children

VERBAL VIOLENCE



Children of all ages and from all walks of life can fall victim to violence.

Violence that isn't always obvious. Aggressors who aren't always what they seem.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE



PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE



Bullying originates from an imbalance of power. It includes psychological, physical or sexual violence, threats, coercion, exclusion, rejection, gossip as well as spreading of rumours or insults. These acts of violence can be perpetrated in person or online.

NEGLECTANCE



Negligence is characterized by the absence of or inadequate gestures and care necessary for a child's development.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE



Children living in a violent environment often grow up with adjustment and behaviour problems.

CHILD EXPOSED TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



CYBERVIOLENCE



Online games, cyber predators, cyberbullying and even sexting – cyberspace is both a public place and a jungle, with all its wonders and dangers!

When a person uses their authority, their power to put down, manipulate or control a child with words or actions that hurt them or make them sad, that scare or humiliate them, that person is abusing their power. They are subjecting the child to violence and bullying.

Adults and power

Our status as adults naturally gives us power over children. Using that power in a constructive way is our responsibility towards children: for example, to support them, instill values, give them affection. Power is not wrong per se, it all depends on what we do with it. Most of the time we use it correctly to guide children.

You and your child

Nobody is perfect. It is possible that your actions or words sometimes go beyond your intentions. If you realize that what you say or do is an abuse of power that repeats itself or is severe, get help.



Recognizing that we have abused our power and apologizing for our actions show children that they are important to us and that we respect them.



Power used in a constructive manner in your daily life helps your children to grow and prepares them to face diverse situations.

Trust yourself. You are equipped to help your children acquire the skills they need to deal with life's challenges.

Chapter 2

Prevention

In your daily actions, you can provide your children with most of the skills they will need to face different forms of violence they may encounter in their lives.

A good start

Doing prevention means not only talking about violence but also using discipline that educates and guides your child in order to help develop their self-confidence, autonomy, strength and self-assertion. It means creating and maintaining a strong bond with your child and encouraging relationships based on mutual respect.



Creating bonds based on love and respect promotes healthy development and helps children take their place in society.

Know that you are already helping your children each time you make them aware of their importance as a person, worthy of attention and respect. This happens each time that you...

... make them feel that you love them:

- ◆ by giving them hugs that they like and that reassure them;
- ◆ by offering a smile, a wink, a kind loving word, by blowing them a kiss;
- ◆ by spending alone time with them;
- ◆ by dedicating time to playing, reading, or drawing with them.

... talk with your child and take the time to listen:



- ◆ discussing subjects that interest them;
- ◆ letting them express their joys and sorrows, desires and frustrations, questions and fears;
- ◆ taking into account their points of view and opinions, and encouraging them to express them;
- ◆ teaching them to negotiate through discussion instead of confrontation.

... show your children that you trust them:

- ◆ by applauding their achievements and successes;
- ◆ by supporting their efforts;
- ◆ by helping them to be heard and assert themselves;
- ◆ by urging them to rely on and trust their own judgement, and act according to their intuition;
- ◆ by recognizing their ability to find their own solutions to certain conflicts.

... help your child to become responsible:

- ◆ by teaching them self-respect, as well as respect for others;
- ◆ by encouraging their self-discipline by establishing routines;
- ◆ by giving them responsibilities according to their age and abilities;
- ◆ by allowing them to make choices, to participate in family decisions;
- ◆ by helping them to accept responsibility for their decisions, choices and even mistakes.

... allow your child to discover that you are not perfect:



- ◆ by allowing them to question your behaviour or actions;
- ◆ by admitting your own mistakes;
- ◆ by apologizing when necessary.

You are probably already using many of these reinforcement techniques. They are so important for your child and are great preventive measures!

Another step

Doing prevention also means giving your child constructive and reassuring information.

Equip your child with ways to prevent all forms of violence and how to deal with them.



Why?

Because

- ◆ Children, of all ages and from all walks of life, need to know;
- ◆ it is as important to discuss prevention of violence as it is to talk about road safety or fire prevention;
- ◆ this knowledge is useful for insuring your child's healthy development.

**You may be asking yourself « Am I doing it right?
Is the message that I am trying to convey being understood? »
Leave your doubts behind, trust yourself and take action!**

When?

Choose moments when you have your child's undivided attention. Each day offers periods of time beneficial for discussions: mealtime, while driving around or taking a stroll, after an activity. Avoid starting discussions when you can't give your undivided attention.

Take advantage of everyday life situations. They can often provide great opportunities to talk about prevention. Use an incident that happened in the neighbourhood, a particular event that occurred at school or at daycare, something you or your child has read, cartoons or a television show you have seen, games or images from the internet.

Benefit from new experiences that make your child more independent, like starting daycare or school, their first bicycle ride, a new activity. These are good opportunities to learn or review prevention strategies.

What to emphasize

Explain to your children that they have the right...

- ◆ to feel safe, strong and free at all times;
- ◆ to react if anyone tries to take away these rights.

Four strategies to teach your child to deal with any situation of violence they may encounter:

Say NO!

Simply asserting oneself and demonstrating one's opposition can make the person who intended to take advantage of the child's vulnerability change their mind.





Ask friends or other children for help.

It is easier to find solutions and, if necessary, defend yourself when you are not alone.

Talk about the situation with a grown-up.

It is important that children can, if need be, confide in adults they feel comfortable with and trust, and that these adults can help them.



Use self-defence if needed.

It is usually possible to protect our rights using simple solutions, but it may sometimes be necessary to react physically. If your child feels in danger with someone they can:

◆ **Keep a safe distance or run away if necessary.**

If the person is holding them and preventing them from getting away, they can:

◆ **Say NO! LET ME GO!**

◆ **Use simple self-defence techniques** (for example: a kick in the shin, an elbow in the stomach, scratch, wiggle around a lot, etc.).

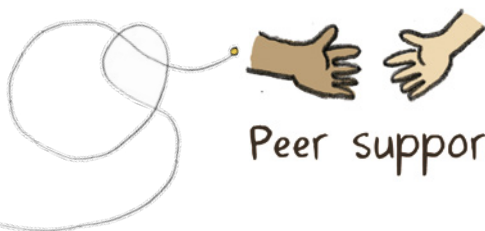
◆ **Yell** (See page 21 to learn how to do the self-defence yell and what it is for).

What subjects to discuss

- ◆ Any **questions** that may come up about **sexuality or intimate/romantic relationships**.
- ◆ The differences between **touching** that makes the child feel good and that which makes them feel uncomfortable. Tell children their bodies belong to them and nobody has the right to touch them without their consent. Teach them the proper names for different body parts.
- ◆ The dangers that are present on the **Internet**, like sharing personal information or pictures, meeting with strangers, etc.
- ◆ The notion of **blackmail** which allows a person to obtain what they want from another person either by luring them with gifts or favours, or by forcing them with threats.
- ◆ The difference between pleasant **secrets** and those that are heavy burdens, and should be revealed to a trusted adult.
- ◆ The **right to disobey and say NO**, in certain circumstances, to any person regardless of their age or authority, if the child feels threatened, in danger or uncomfortable.
- ◆ The **right to lie, to break a promise or reveal a secret** if it is necessary in order to stay safe.
- ◆ Every person's right to act when facing situations that affect them or another person.

Whatever is happening (or has happened), it is essential that your children feel that you believe them, that you trust them and love them. Let them know that the only one who is guilty is the one using violence, not the one who is a victim of that violence.

Witnesses



Peer support

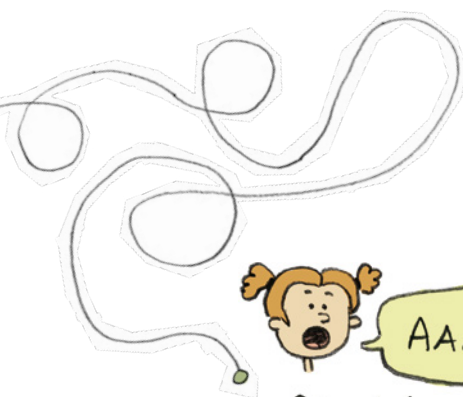
How to talk about it

- ◆ Start with short and simple explanations.
- ◆ Choose words adapted to the age and vocabulary of your child.
- ◆ Focus on the solutions rather than the dangers or fears.
- ◆ Use a book, a song, a video, etc.
- ◆ Do it in a relaxed and fun way.

Prevention through games

Games based on prevention are an excellent way to pass on information to your child. The more you play these games, the more your child becomes aware of their ability to find solutions. These activities will help them to better trust their intuition, to develop their confidence and to act to insure their own safety.

Self-defence



Special yell

The «What would you do if...» game

You can vary the scenarios and give your child the starring role with children of the same age, then with older children. You can also introduce a stranger, or an adult the child knows, like a coach or a family member.

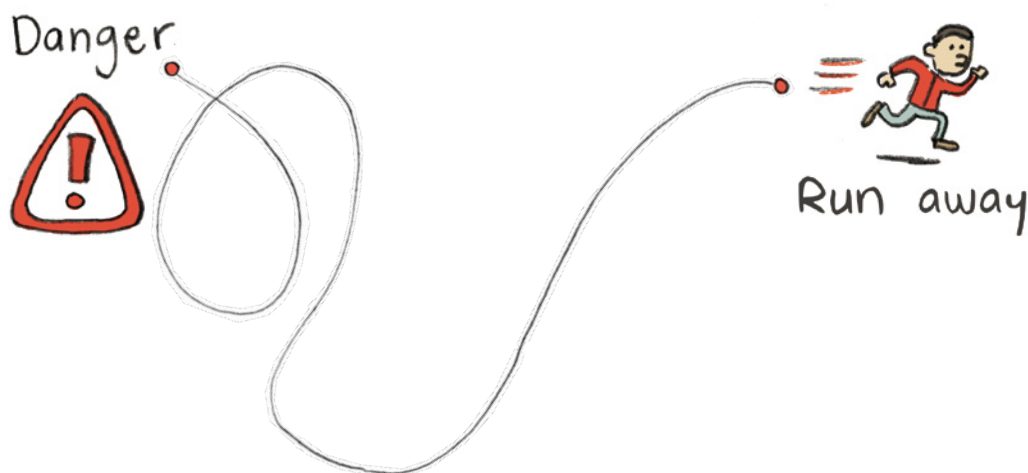
◆ The topics can include:

unexpected situations. Ex.: What would you do if you got lost in a public place? What would you do if someone who is playing with you online asked you to meet with them? What would you do if someone sent you hurtful messages online?

silly situations. Ex.: What would you do if your teacher asked you to cut up your shirt in tiny pieces in arts and crafts?

embarrassing situations. Ex.: What would you do if someone that you know and love asks you to kiss them, when you don't want to?

situations that, at first glance, seem very appealing. Ex.: What would you do if someone from your neighbourhood offered you 20\$ to help them bring their grocery bags into their kitchen?



- ◆ Daily life offers us many other topics that we can use in this game. Your child's questions can also provide ideas.
- ◆ Go from more or less difficult situations to more pleasant ones.
- ◆ The child's answer may be valid but incomplete? Congratulate your child and continue asking questions, encouraging them to push their reasoning further. If necessary, complete the information yourself.
- ◆ In short, your child must understand that it is important to:
 - ◆ **rely on their intuition;**
 - ◆ **say NO;**
 - ◆ **react physically if needed and run away;**
 - ◆ **talk about the situation with a trusted adult.**

Role-plays

How about doing some role-playing with your child? It's a fun way to practice the solutions of the «**What would you do if ...**» game.

The phone game

The child can pretend to experience different situations requiring using the phone to get help.

This game provides the tools to know:

- ◆ who to call
- ◆ where to call
- ◆ what to say



Practicing the self-defence yell

We use this yell to:

- ◆ surprise the perpetrator;
- ◆ alert the people around us;
- ◆ make ourselves feel strong and courageous.

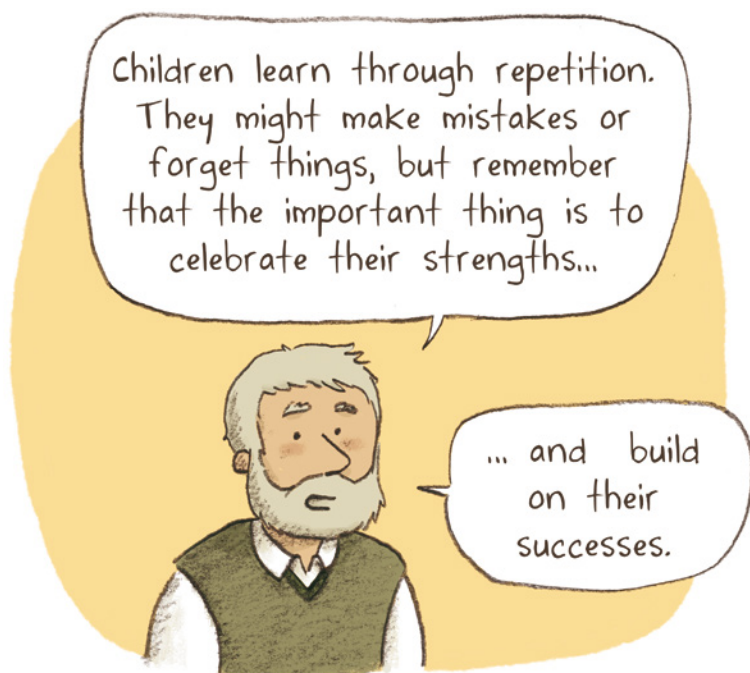


- ◆ Practicing allows the child to discover the strength of the yell. You will realize, while doing it with your child, all the power and energy it generates. With training, the self-defence yell will acquire even more strength and last longer and longer.
- ◆ Certain rules need to be observed.
 - ◆ This yell comes from the belly and not from the throat (it is a deep yell, not high-pitched).
 - ◆ Practicing must be done in a place where the yell will not be heard nor interpreted as a cry for help. Warn people that it is just an exercise.
 - ◆ Using the self-defence yell can be fun. However, remind your child that it must only be used in emergency situations.

The «Questions regarding safety» game

To answer the questions of this game, children need to think about attitudes or behaviours to insure or regain their safety. It is a good way to develop their prevention reflexes.

- ◆ Name a safety rule that we have at home? At school? For Internet use?
- ◆ Name three places **where** you feel safe indoors and outdoors?
- ◆ Who are the three people **with whom** you feel the safest?
Why?
- ◆ **When** do you feel completely safe? Tell me about three of those situations.
- ◆ Tell me **what** you can do to feel really safe.



Chapter 3

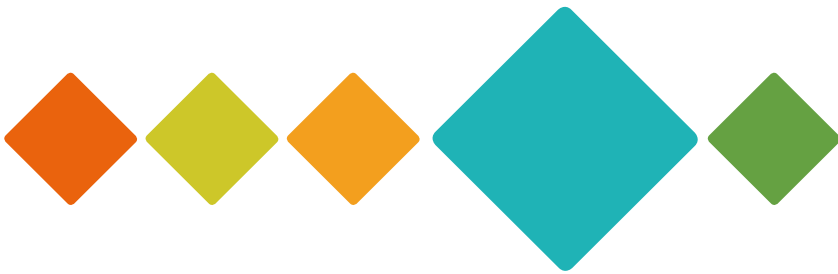
Clues to detect if your child is a victim of violence

It is certainly important to do prevention, but just as important to recognize the signs that might indicate a child is a possible victim of violence.

Bruises and injuries can be signs of physical violence. But for children who are victims of verbal, psychological or sexual violence, there are not necessarily visible traces.

What's more, children do not all react the same way to violent situations. Their reactions vary according to their age, personality, relationship with the abuser, the type of violence they've experienced and its duration and severity. Some children are able to confide in someone more easily, while others may remain silent or feel compelled to lie for various reasons such as:

- ◆ fear of not being believed;
- ◆ fear of retaliation;
- ◆ a sense of guilt;
- ◆ to protect the aggressor.



How to know

Sudden changes in your child's behavior are often a sign that something is wrong. It is your role as an adult to verify what is going on with the child and offer your help.



A couple of days ago, Valerie suddenly threw a tantrum, like she sometimes does. Her parents were not too worried about it. But now, since that day, she seems sad, she has lost her appetite and has nightmares. There is undoubtedly something wrong...

Like Valerie's parents, you intuitively sense when your child is going through a stressful situation.

Most of the time, that stress is caused by:

- ◆ a new situation like:
 - ◆ a move;
 - ◆ starting school;
 - ◆ the birth of a sister or brother.

- ◆ difficult events like:
 - ◆ exams;
 - ◆ a divorce;
 - ◆ the loss of a loved one;
 - ◆ disputes or arguments.

**It is possible that the child's stress is caused by something else:
the child might be a victim of violence.**

How to verify your suspicions

Your children may not be clearly expressing what is bothering them. But, at the same time, their behaviour is crying out: «I need help!» How can you get them to confide in you?

Take the first step by sharing your suspicions and concerns with them, remaining focused on your child's needs.



Expressing your worries and encouraging your child to talk shows that you care about their well-being and that you are available to help them resolve their problems.

It is, of course, very important to respect their pace. Despite your concerns, avoid harassing your child with numerous questions. Demonstrate openness and create a reassuring atmosphere. Your child will feel respected and will be more inclined to confide in you.

If your child does not confide in you, it might be because their problem can be resolved without your help. Respect their choice.

However, **if you feel that the situation is not resolved, share your concerns once again.**

«I understand. It's sometimes hard... But, do you think that by talking about it with someone you might find solutions more easily? Maybe you would prefer to talk about it with someone other than me...someone that you feel more comfortable with?»



If your child still does not open up and the situation worsens or becomes urgent, tell the child that you need to contact other people from your entourage that may be able to help you understand what is going on.

Ideas to help your child open up

Take advantage of everyday opportunities: a television show, a movie, a game, or an article can all be starting points to initiate a discussion about what seems to be bothering your child.

Use a real-life situation you know about, a particular event or a challenging experience that demonstrates the courage needed to speak out about a problem.

Take advantage of things you read by discussing them with your child; for younger children, made-up stories may be used portraying an animal as the hero... that encountered trouble... then talked about it with... and found solutions... and now feels much better!

When a child confides in you

When your child confides in you, some problems might seem minor. Others may appear more serious. However, for the child, no matter the problem, what they went through is important. You need to give each disclosure the necessary attention by helping your child the best way that you can.

Start by putting the child at ease

Put yourself in the position of the child who is or has been the victim of abuse or violence.

In a **quiet, discrete place**, take the time to **listen** and **believe** what they are telling you, without passing judgement. Just doing this will already make them feel better!

Try to control your reactions as much as possible

While your child is confiding in you, you may experience all sorts of emotions, like fear, sadness, anger, or outrage.

- ◆ If you can, **stay calm**.
This will help keep your child calm and help to not dramatize the situation.
- ◆ If you can't control **your emotions**,
reassure your child that what is upsetting you is what happened to them, and that you are not angry with them.

Reassure the child

What your child wants to hear is:

- ◆ «I think it's great that you are talking to me about this; it's the right thing to do and it's very brave of you.»
- ◆ «You have the right to feel safe everywhere and at all times.»
- ◆ «What is happening to you is not your fault.»
- ◆ «I love you and I will always love you.»



Simply listening to and believing a child, without passing judgement, is already a precious step for the child toward solving their problem.

You can help...

If your child has confided in you, that means that he or she trusts you. At this point you have already helped them a lot.

But imagine if, in addition to that:

- ◆ you encourage them to **express their emotions**, introducing yours, how your child will feel understood and supported! And how good this will make them feel!
- ◆ you ask them **how you can help and what are their ideas for solving the problem**, how this will give them back control of the situation, and will make them feel that their opinion is important.

It is important for a child to feel supported and encouraged. Avoid taking charge of everything and imposing your solutions. Trust the child; very often their ideas can guide you along the way.



If you are comfortable to continue

Let the child tell, in their own words, their version of the facts, from beginning to end.

- ◆ The story might be a bit unclear; the child might not be telling you everything, or may be starting with the easiest parts.
- ◆ Believe what the child is telling you without judging.
- ◆ As trust grows, you will learn more of their story.
- ◆ Respect their pace. Ask simple and open-ended questions, which means questions starting with who, what, when, where; this will help them to elaborate further.
- ◆ Don't make any promises that you cannot keep. Keep in mind that there are no magic or instant solutions.

If the problem is easy to solve

- ◆ Establish an action plan with the child (why not write it down or draw it?).
- ◆ Lend your support throughout the process.

If the problem is more complex

- ◆ Determine if the child is safe. Do you have considerable or limited time in which to act?
- ◆ If the child is in danger, explain all the steps that will follow; tell the child that it is possible that other people might need to get involved. This is a difficult time: *often the child wants the violence to stop, but doesn't want to cause trouble for the abuser or might be afraid of the consequences...*

- ◆ During this difficult time, the child will need to be surrounded by people who will provide support and comfort.



The problem-solving period will have its ups and downs. However, children will remember that someone took concrete steps to help stop the violence.

If you can no longer help

The situation might be difficult to resolve. You might not feel comfortable continuing. If so, it is important that the child know that you will not abandon him or her. Make it clear that you will **get them all the help they need, if not from you, then from someone else.**

- ◆ Ask if there are any other adults that they can confide in who can help them.
- ◆ Make sure that the child continues to work toward a solution, and offer to accompany them if that's what they want.
- ◆ Be sure **to hook the child up with the other person they chose.**



Chapter 5

Help for you and your child

Getting help from friends or family or asking for support from trusted adults or organizations that are there to help are effective measures for both children and adults.

Who can help you?

Your loved ones

Confiding in them about what is bothering you may help you:

- ◆ to better understand the situation;
- ◆ to come up with ideas, and solutions;
- ◆ get the boost you need in order to consult the resources in your community.

The child's school

Often the school can provide people that can advise you:

- ◆ the teaching staff;
- ◆ the principal;
- ◆ other professionals (psychologist, special education technician, school nurse, psychoeducator).

Community organizations and support groups

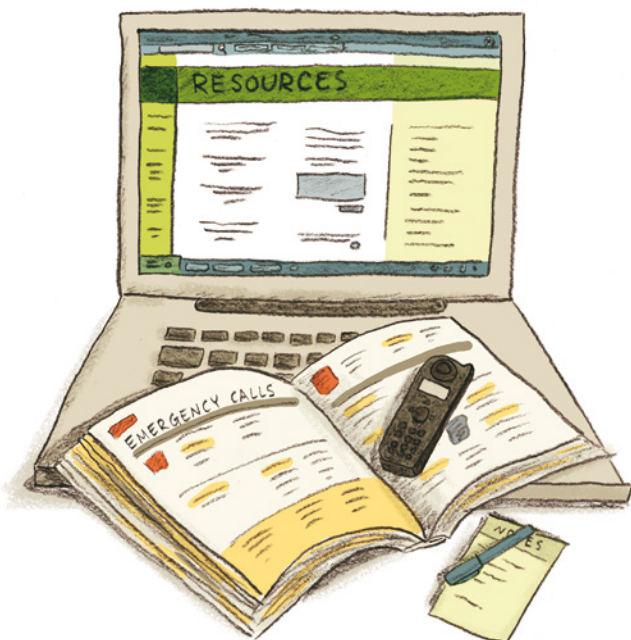
They exist in order to address various needs. How can you find them?

- ◆ Contact the ESPACE organization in your region. They can help you or refer you to other resources.

CLSC and hospitals

Find out what services are offered by your local CLSC, or about the support and services provided by the hospitals.

- ◆ You can also contact **Info-Santé or Info-Social** by dialing 811 for a free and confidential consultation 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



It is reassuring to know that there are resources available for you when you need them.

If a situation needs to be reported

Reporting to Youth Protection

- ◆ When you suspect that a child or youngster is a victim of physical or sexual violence, **you must** report the situation immediately to the Director of Youth Protection (DYP) in your region, even if you think that their parents are taking the necessary steps to put an end to the situation. It is the DYP's responsibility to evaluate if their measures are adequate.

If you have reason to believe that a child or youngster is a victim of serious neglect, abandonment, or psychological abuse (belittling, threats, emotional rejection, isolation, exploitation, exposure to domestic violence, etc.) or that they have serious behaviour problems (drug abuse, suicide attempts, running away, criminal acts, etc.), **you can** report the situation to the DYP of your region.

However, if you are a professional working with children, **you must**, in your official capacity, report to the DYP all situations stipulated in the Youth Protection Act (YPA).

- ◆ If you have concerns about a child, or doubts about whether or not to report, contact the DYP; they can answer your questions and guide you through the steps to be taken.
- ◆ When reporting, you will be asked personal information about the child, the facts that have you concerned, how often they happen, etc.
- ◆ Your name will not be released without your approval.
- ◆ The DYP must notify you if the report is not retained or if the evaluation of the situation has concluded that the child's safety and development are not compromised. If you are a professional working with children and Youth Protection takes charge of the case, the DYP must inform you.
- ◆ It can be useful to note the name of the Youth Protection worker you spoke with.

For more information, consult online

Filing a report with the DYP is already protecting a child - When and how to file a report?



Reporting requires courage! To help you, put yourself in the shoes of the child who is or has been a victim of violence.



Reporting to Police

If you want charges to be laid, you should contact your local police department. This helps protect other children. Even if you do not wish to file a complaint, it is still recommended that you contact the police; they may be looking for information for other cases.

Multisectoral Agreement

When a case is reported to Youth Protection or the Police, there is a multisectoral agreement that goes into effect. This agreement calls for collaboration between the DYP and all other relevant actors (police, judicial system, other partners like the school or daycare centre). This is the case when there is a reasonable belief that the safety or development of a child is compromised. These situations concern children who are victims of sexual or physical violence, or a lack of care that threatens their well-being.

Conclusion

We hope this booklet has given you concrete tools for discussing prevention with your children and helping them when necessary. Remember that we are here for you and your children, if you need support.

There are many simple things that you can do in order to stop violence against children. Be vigilant. Do not hesitate to tell people when they are being disrespectful towards children, and take the time to verify any actions that seem suspicious or strange to you.

Take action, because every positive act contributes to building a world where adults and children will finally feel **safe, strong and free!**



Regroupement des organismes ESPACE du Québec

The ROEQ is responsible for the implementation and development of the ESPACE program. It takes pride in the awards it has received.

- ◆ Prix des droits et libertés



- ◆ Prix de la Fondation Marie-Vincent



- ◆ Prix d'excellence Persillier Lachapelle

- ◆ Prix du meilleur jeu à impact social, festival MÉGAMIGS 2020

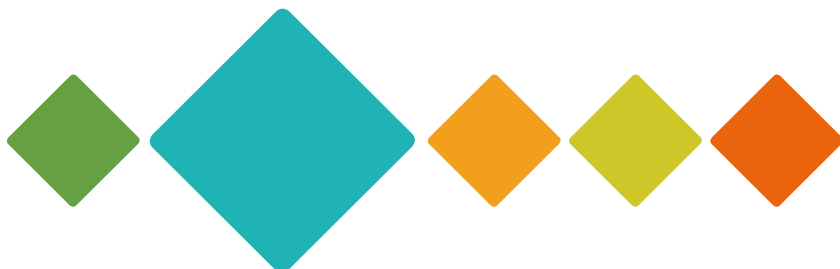


- ◆ Prix annuel Desjardins de l'éducation

- ◆ Prix Ensemble contre l'intimidation 2022 du Ministère de la famille



- ◆ Mention d'honneur aux prix excellence 2024 du Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux



How to contact your ESPACE organization

ESPACE Centre-du-Québec	819 752-9711
ESPACE Chaudière-Appalaches	418 603-8383
ESPACE Côte-Nord	418 296-2403 Toll free: 1 866 589-2405
ESPACE Gaspésie-les-Îles	418 368-2015 Toll free: 1 866 368-2015
ESPACE Mauricie	819 375-3024
ESPACE Outaouais	819 771-1546
ESPACE Région de Québec	418 649-5140
ESPACE Suroît	450 371-8096
Regroupement des organismes ESPACE du Québec	418 667-7070

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This Practical Guide for parents is a document on preventing violence against children. Simple and effective, it proposes various tools to insure that ever more children can have a safe childhood free from violence.