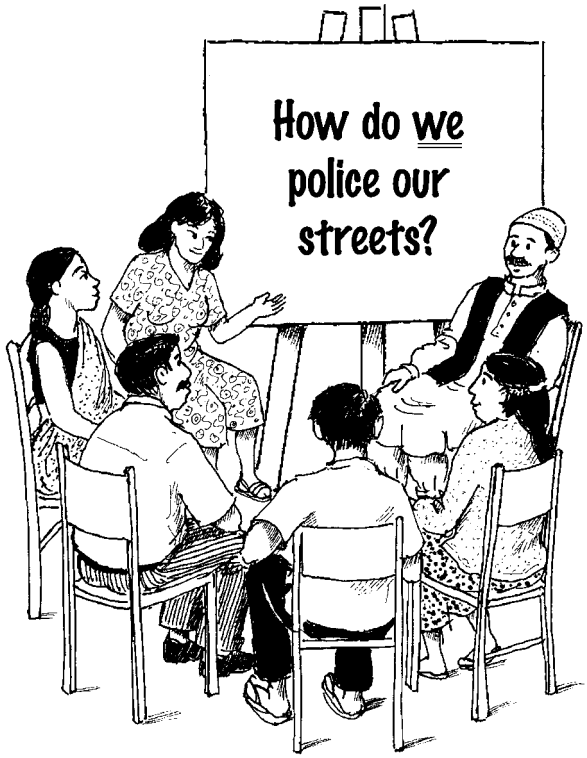
5 Violence and anger

Promoting community mental health often includes dealing with violence, both violence happening now and historical violence. Whether experienced directly or indirectly, individually or as a community, violence not only causes physical harm but can cause fear, anxiety, and trauma as well as affect the social and political conditions that influence health, including housing, education, and work. This has led many community groups to make violence prevention and undoing the effects of violence central to their organizing for social change.

Anger is a strong emotion we all have. Anger can be triggered by violence or lead to violence. Anger can also be a response to social injustice and lead to social change. When anger is not channeled into an effective response, it can be expressed in ways that harm ourselves and other people. Learning how to pay attention to and transform anger (see page 85) can help all of us, especially children, to develop ways to understand, talk about, and respond to strong feelings without becoming violent. That ability is a central part of mental health and well-being, both for individuals and for communities.



This chapter describes strategies developed by groups to deal with and respond to different kinds of violence and important examples of community efforts to address violence prevention.

Gun violence

The number of people who die in the US from gun violence is shocking. Guns are now the leading cause of death for people under 19 years old in the US. Countries with fewer guns and with rules that make guns harder to get suffer far less gun violence.

While the need for mental health support for everyone affected by gun violence keeps increasing, health workers and community organizers also focus on prevention—advocating to limit access to guns and to watch for and help people who might use a gun to harm themselves or others. Sometimes community healing processes—bringing people together around grief, rage, and frustration—are combined with prevention efforts.

Taking back the streets from gun violence

There are more guns in the United States than cell phones! Our communities are flooded with cheap guns when they need to be flooded with quality jobs, services, and education.

In recent decades, several US cities have developed programs to identify, support, and provide alternatives for people drawn into violent crime and gun violence. In Oakland, California, upset by an alarming increase in gun murders, crime, and too many funerals, a group of ministers and community leaders formed *Faith in Action East Bay* to stop the violence.

Over a 10-year period, they put a 3-part Ceasefire Initiative into action:

- **A Ceasefire march every Friday night,** gathering at a different place of worship and then walking through a neighborhood experiencing violence to signal their concern to residents and show them they are not alone.
- **"Call-ins,"** meetings with ministers, community leaders, social service providers, police, and the people who are causing the violence in the neighborhood. Because they live there, the community leaders (called "violence interrupters") know who is causing the violence and "call them in" to a meeting to discuss what is needed—jobs, housing, drug treatment, counseling, or something else—to make it stop.
- **Follow-up** to make sure that people can and do take advantage of the services and opportunities offered. If they instead continue causing violence in the community, the police follow up with legal enforcement.

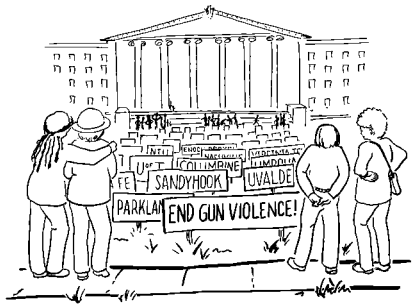
Faith In Action's leadership and role in the Ceasefire Initiative helped cut the East Oakland crime and murder rates in half until COVID stopped everything. Faith in Action East Bay has now restarted, confident in their efforts to reduce violence and promote uplift in their community.

Mass shootings

Although the number of people killed in mass shootings is only a tiny percentage of all deaths by gun violence in the US, their impact is enormous. A mass shooting is an attack on an entire community. When it targets a community of color, as they frequently do, it is a reminder of the racist violence that Native American, Black, Latinx, Asian, and other communities have endured for generations. It recalls past acts that were rarely acknowledged and almost never resulted in accountability or justice.

Following any type of gun violence, counseling for trauma (see page 34) is essential for survivors and the families of those murdered, as is organizing events that allow the broader community to grieve together. Ongoing programs and activities designed to strengthen and connect people within the community are a necessary and effective way to help repair and reset community mental health.

Temporary or permanent monuments and other public art honor the people lost to violence. These also provide a place to grieve and to renew community efforts to stop the loss of more lives.



Feed people, not violence

In May 2022, a white supremacist shot and killed 10 people at the Tops Market grocery store in a Black neighborhood in Buffalo, New York. In the aftermath of the mass shooting, residents pointed to how lack of investment in the Black community resulted in Tops being the only supermarket in the neighborhood. This structural violence (see page 79) helped sow the seeds for the mass shooting as the gunman chose the location precisely because it was the only supermarket in a Black neighborhood. Relatives and community members have taken many paths to honor those killed, specifically calling out the inequality and harm to the community caused by racism.

Community members have channeled their pain into activism by working to establish quality, affordable grocery stores to challenge "food apartheid" in Buffalo. Others give testimony in Congress, support efforts to limit gun access, and educate to highlight rather than erase African American history. People have also filed a lawsuit against the social media companies that fuel hate crimes and the online purchase of weapons.

Gender-based violence

Violence or threatening violence against someone because of their gender is called gender-based violence. Women and girls especially face a staggering amount of violence in the US and elsewhere. Violence is often used to enforce society's gender inequalities and rigid ideas about masculinity and femininity. This includes violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity—toward people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, nonbinary, or gender-fluid. Forced marriage, human trafficking, and cases of missing and murdered women of color that go uninvestigated are other examples. Gender-based violence can be physical, social, emotional, or economic. No matter the form, it is deeply harmful to mental health.

Most of us have either experienced or know someone who has experienced gender-based violence. Being aware of this reality and the different forms it takes is part of being prepared to deal with it. For example, a person being hurt by a partner might tell you directly or you might actually see physical marks. Or you might notice signs of fear or that something seems wrong. When a woman says she can't attend evening meetings, is it because her partner controls what she does? Or maybe it is unsafe for her to walk at night? Talking with her may reveal what is going on and what might be done about it: have another group member accompany her to and from meetings; connect her to domestic violence services and a place where she will be safe (both she and her partner will need help); or plan a neighborhood-based violence intervention such as a Take Back The Night march, where large numbers of people noisily walk the streets together to show how everyone should feel safe.

Sexual violence

Forced sex or any sex that is not wanted or agreed to is rape. Sexual violence also includes unwanted sexual touching, sexual harassment, and stalking. Sexual violence may come from strangers, but most often it is from someone a person knows: a family member, romantic partner, date, classmate, neighbor, or friend. Knowing and having trusted the person who assaulted you can make sexual violence even more difficult to talk about and recover from.

Many college students have never discussed sexual violence or do not know what to do if they witness or experience it. Non-profit It's On Us is building a student-led movement against sexual assault through chapters that carry out awareness and prevention trainings for peer-education. They provide students, especially young men, with tools to address the cultural norms at the root of sexual harm and instead foster a culture of violence prevention.

Support for sexual violence survivors

A person who has been raped or sexually assaulted needs first aid for any physical injuries. They may need medicine to prevent pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections. Most hospital emergency rooms have staff trained to support sexual violence victims and can document the injuries. This record will be necessary if the case is reported to the police, even if that decision is not made until much later.

The person needs emotional first aid at the same time. You can help them connect with organizations that provide counseling, find other survivors to talk with, and anything else they need.

Supporting survivors' healing process

The *Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN)* is the nation's largest anti-sexual-violence organization. RAINN created the National Sexual Assault Hotline (1-800-656-HOPE) in partnership with more than 1,000 local sexual assault service providers across the US and runs programs to prevent sexual violence, help survivors, and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice. Hotline staff recommend using specific phrases when talking to survivors.

"I believe you. It took a lot of courage to tell me about this." It can be very difficult for survivors to share their story. They may feel ashamed or worry they won't be believed. Leave "why" questions for later—your priority is to offer support. Do not assume that calmness means the event did not occur or harm them—everyone responds to trauma differently.

Knowing what to say when someone tells you about a sexual assault is not easy. Be as supportive and non-judgmental as you can. Support may mean helping them reach a hotline, get medical attention, or report the crime. To start, listen and let them know you care.

"It's not your fault. You didn't do anything to deserve this." Survivors may blame themselves, especially if they know the perpetrator. Remind them, more than once, that they are not to blame.

"You are not alone. I care about you and am here to help." Let the survivor know you are there for them and willing to listen. Make sure they know there are other survivors and counselors who can help them heal.

"I'm sorry this happened, it should not have happened to you." Acknowledge the experience has affected their life and the healing process will take time.

Intimate partner violence

The domestic violence prevention movement has raised awareness that violence takes many forms. In addition to hitting and other physical violence, advocates and activists also focus attention on harms from actions taken to intimidate and control others. Also, while most intimate partner violence is carried out by men harming women, abusive behavior can come from and be directed toward persons of any gender and sexuality, and happen in gay, straight, or other kinds of relationships.

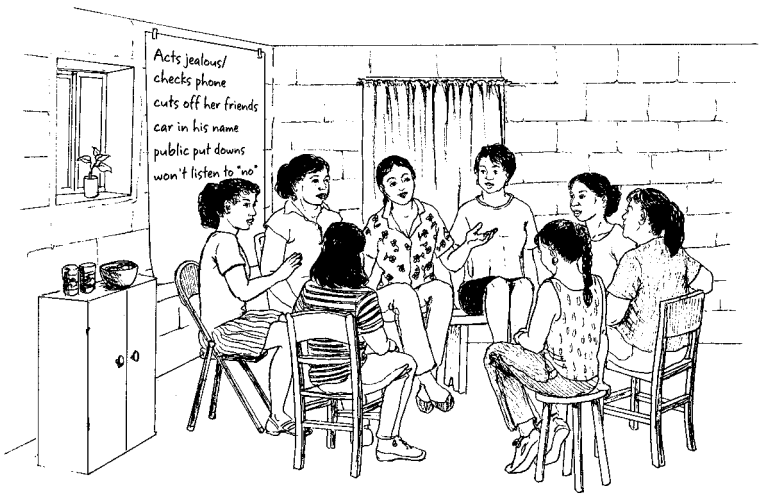
Warning signs: Abusive behaviors are violence. Control over another person can take many forms. Pay attention to signs of physical as well as emotional violence. You might notice someone mentions that their spouse doesn't like them to go out, or they worry about how their ex-partner treats their children. Other warning signs include a partner who is jealous, controls access to money and resources (like a car), pressures for sex or drug use, or threatens with words, actions, or both.

Understanding power and control

At the National Domestic Violence Hotline, we know that watching someone endure an abusive situation is difficult and it's not always clear how best to respond when you see warning signs of abuse. Your instinct may be to "save them" from the relationship, but abuse is never simple. Abuse takes many forms and there are many reasons why people stay in abusive situations. Understanding how power and control operate as a backdrop to abuse and how to shift power back to those affected by domestic violence are some of the most important ways to support survivors in your life.

ACTIVITY Look at power and control in relationships

1. At the top of a large sheet of paper or whiteboard, write: "Signs of control and abuse."
2. Ask the group to list examples of how one person can abuse or control the other person in a relationship. These could be examples that are commonly understood to be abuse, such as hitting or always yelling at them. Add other ways a person is limited by a partner such as: controlling access to money, stopping someone from getting a job, not allowing visits with family or friends, constant insults, telling the person she imagines things, or limiting access to children. You could also group examples under categories like: economic, intimidation, isolation, technology, using the children, or others.
3. Talk about how warning signs often occur before there is physical violence and that some may be daily events. Discuss how it may be harder for someone to recognize these signs compared to signs of abuse that are more commonly thought of as violence. You may also want to discuss examples that reflect how family histories or cultural traditions consider or ignore abuse in how men treat women or how parents treat children.



The Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs in Duluth, Minnesota, developed the Power and Control Wheel image used by many groups to explore these issues. An online Wheel Gallery (see page 165) links to versions in different languages and Wheels focusing on a religious or cultural identity, age group, and other specific situations.

Support for someone experiencing intimate partner violence

Be prepared to lend support by keeping a list of local hotlines, counseling programs, or shelters as well as state or national resources (like the National Domestic Violence hotline: 1-800-799-7233).

People who are experiencing or have experienced intimate partner violence need emotional and practical support.

Emotional support, as they process complex feelings and decide next steps, can include:

- acknowledging their situation is difficult and they are brave to take control of it.
- not judging their decisions, including if they leave and then return to an abusive partner.
- helping them create a safety plan.
- offering to go with them for moral support when they visit a service provider or legal setting.

Practical support, especially if the person depends financially on an abusive partner or otherwise lacks resources, can include:

- suggesting where they can get help with housing, food, health care, and other needs.
- advising where they can learn about their legal rights and get legal aid.
- storing copies of their important documents or a backpack with items they'll need in case of an emergency.
- encouraging them to talk to hotlines, people, or programs that can provide guidance.
- helping them document specific instances of violence, threats, or harassment by writing down what happened and when. Also help them take pictures of injuries and screenshot text messages.
- not posting information on social media that could be used to identify them or where they spend time.
- notifying (with their permission) specific neighbors or co-workers about the situation and what to do (and what not to do) if the abuser appears at their home or work.

Help for the person causing abuse

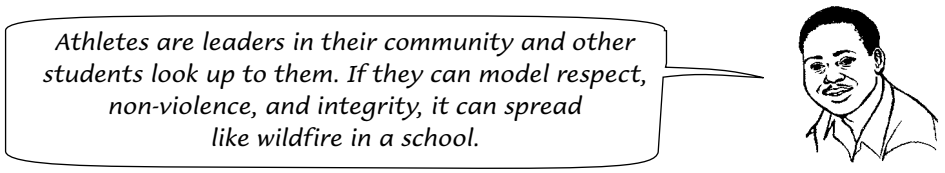
In some cases, abusers may not appear to others as a threat, especially if they seem likeable or calm. The abuser may be good at presenting their violence as justified ("I was provoked") or apologizing and promising it won't happen again. People who abuse their partners usually need help to stop. Become familiar with local resources that help abusers to change. If it is safe, you can express concern and point out the harmful consequences of their abuse. Point out what is at stake based on what is important to them: they could be arrested, destroy their relationship, harm their children who witness violence, lose access to their children, incur legal or other expenses, or ruin their reputation. Assure them that with the right help and long-term support, a person who abuses can change.

Create accountability for those who hurt others. *Emerge Counseling and Education to Stop Domestic Violence* in Massachusetts has been working with perpetrators of violence for years. Their long-term, profound approach goes beyond anger management to help perpetrators address the root causes of abuse. Their Intimate Partner Abuse Education Programs center on how the person who commits abuse is entirely responsible for their abusive behavior and ways they can become accountable for their actions. They work directly with victim advocacy programs.

Healthy relationships help prevent violence

Most young people learn about sex and relationships from a mix of family and friends, school, music and movies, pornography, and social media. Modeling healthy relationships and opening discussions about communication in relationships, consent around sexual activity, and handling feelings are important ways to prevent sexual and intimate partner violence.

Healthy relationships and becoming an adult. *Coaching Boys Into Men* (CBIM) is a violence prevention program that uses the attraction of sports and the relationships between coaches and young male athletes to teach healthy relationship skills, especially that violence is not the same as strength. The program offers a set of activities built around brief weekly team discussions led by the coach. A single coach can do the program with a single sports team, or entire schools or school districts can get involved in promoting the development of a common language and understanding among young people. Discussion topics include identifying insulting language, disrespectful behavior (in person and online), consent with romantic partners, and talking through how the aggression promoted in sports should not carry over into relationships. In 2022, the program broadened its focus on young people's mental health needs.



The CBIM program has changed group culture to where young men now call out the offensive behavior of others, even when adults are not present. The CBIM curriculum is free online and is used across the US and, increasingly, in other countries.

Violence in families

Violence in the home can harm children in many ways. In addition to serious harm if they experience physical, sexual, or other forms of violence directly, children are harmed by watching one adult hurt another. Children cannot stop violence from happening, but they may wrongly blame themselves for being the cause of it. Violence between family members can leave a child feeling scared, confused, sad, anxious, or angry. These feelings can make focusing on school or getting along with others more difficult. Sometimes children respond to violence by acting out; other times, they become very quiet and withdrawn.

Experiencing or witnessing violence as a child can lead to adults imitating the situation they grew up with. This can create a cycle of violence that repeats generation to generation. Witnessing violence within the family may make a child believe that violence is a normal way to solve problems or show anger, and that even loved ones cannot be trusted.

Ending the cycle of violence by how we raise children

Children need to feel safe and loved. It is challenging to create a strong, loving family, especially for parents who were raised in an unstable or violent home or community (see "Structural violence," page 79). Encouraging open and honest conversations within the family can help everyone understand each other's feelings and concerns. Suggestions to help parents and caregivers end the cycle of violence and create a healthy environment at home include:

Be a positive role model by using respectful ways of communicating. Children learn by watching the adults around them. Show them how to handle problems and disagreements peacefully. When you're upset, slow down. Then use words to explain how you feel rather than yelling. This helps children learn to solve their own problems in a peaceful way.

Acknowledge your feelings. Use yourself as an example to show your child that it's OK to feel emotions, even when it may not be OK to act on them. Teach them simple ways to manage feelings, like finger-holding (see page 21) or focusing on breathing (see pages 31 and 140), and talk about different words to describe emotions, such as frustrated, left out, and worried (see page 85).

With an upset or angry child, first acknowledge their feelings. If they speak harshly to a sibling, say: "I see you're unhappy and I'm sorry about that, but you know you can't speak to your brother like that." Remind your child that you understand how they're feeling to help soften the blow of any consequences or discipline.

Be fair about discipline. Clearly explain household rules, and what is expected of everyone and them in particular. If a child doesn't follow the rules, use "consequences" that are not overly severe and are related to the behavior, for example, taking away screen time if they misuse devices. That way the child will understand why their behavior is being corrected.

Recognize and praise good behavior. Parents and caregivers tend to focus on and criticize a child for what is not going well. Instead, regularly offer words of encouragement, small rewards, and special activities to provide positive feedback so children feel good about themselves and their relationships in the family and community.

Hope and healing from histories of trauma

Share family stories and cultural traditions to help teach children how to respect themselves and others. Southcentral Foundation is an Alaska Native-owned, non-profit health care organization. Their *Family Wellness Warriors Nu'iju Program* supports healing in communities whose cultures have been severely disrupted, as is true for many Alaska Native communities. One strategy is maintaining traditional practices through sharing stories on the radio and in person. This draws on community strengths to encourage storytelling as a way of teaching children, reminding adults: "Your resilience and your stories model how our words, our actions, our strengths have great impact on our little ones."

I remember learning how to cut fish at the edge of the river as a child. I watched my aunties as they made their perfect and beautiful cuts on their fish and they helped me learn how to hold the traditional knife. Once I was old enough, I then tried to cut fish on my own. Though my cuts weren't perfect, and the knife frequently tore a hole through the skin of the fish, I remember the loving praise coming from my aunties: "You cut fish so good," "You are a fast learner." Hearing the gentle and loving words coming from my aunties inspired me and made me want to keep learning. Watching them and hearing their praise, I did learn, and today cutting fish is one of my favorite activities.

There are many ways to break the cycle of violence passed between generations. Some examples include Emerge Counseling and Education to Stop Domestic Violence (see page 75), the Milpa Collective (page 81), and the Occupational Mentor Certification Program (page 83). These programs are so effective because they respond to the particular histories and needs of their communities.

Structural violence: Violence built in to our social systems

When physical harm, threats, and unfair limits on your choices or possibilities come from not a person but an economy, social system, or government, you are experiencing structural violence. The term structural violence describes how systems of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia keep people down and affect each person's ability to enjoy life and have equal access to opportunity. By working to undo structural violence, we can prevent an enormous amount of lost potential, harm, injury, illness, and death.

Structural violence plays out in society in interrelated and complex ways. As an example: We know that air pollution can cause asthma. Mapping where asthma occurs shows that it is highest in low-income neighborhoods, often where a majority of residents are people of color. That is where traffic, oil refineries, and other industries pollute the most. The schools get fewer resources, leading to a less adequate education for those children and, ultimately, lower-paying jobs. Racism and lower incomes often prevent people from moving into neighborhoods with cleaner air or better schools, and because banks historically denied loans to area residents (a practice called "redlining"), it is difficult to improve the houses and businesses in the neighborhood. This is the multi-faceted way structural violence works.

Structural violence can deprive whole classes of people of human rights: as immigrants fleeing violence who are denied asylum; Black men stopped by police who are humiliated, imprisoned, or killed because of racism; and all those denied health care or jobs because of their gender.

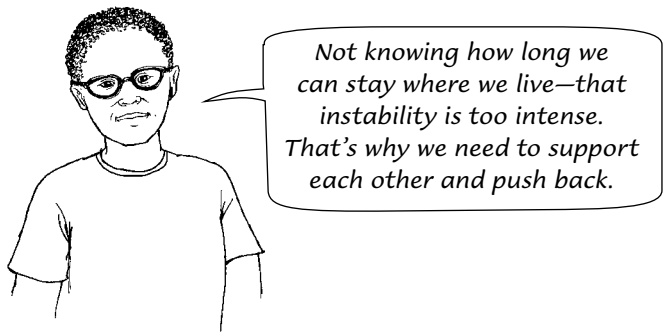
These examples have obvious mental health effects, but all structural violence harms mental health. Besides being impossible to escape, structural violence can feel both invisible and invincible because we are taught "it is just the way things are." Community projects that expose and combat these built-in sources of violence can be empowering, healing, and transformative.

Structural violence can lead to immediate tragedy, for instance, when a police officer shoots someone because of their race. The discrimination which is a feature of structural violence causes obvious harms and limits opportunities. One long-term effect of structural violence is stress that never lets up (see page 19). Persistent stress can build up and create mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety, and physical health conditions such as high blood pressure, digestive problems, insomnia, and others.

Medical research indicates that the effects of the stress caused by structural violence can pass between generations as physical and mental health vulnerabilities passed on to one's children.

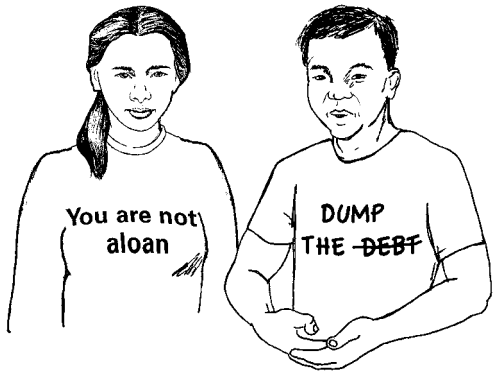
Different strategies can help a person deal with the effects of structural violence. Counseling, other person-to-person support, and a variety of cultural practices can support health and well-being (see pages 22 to 24), but at the root of the problem are the harmful structures themselves, which can be changed only through social organizing.

Youth speaking out against lack of housing. Young adults at risk of losing their place to live or already living on the streets are victims of the structural violence of poverty and inadequate safety nets. A Richmond, California, organization, *Tiny Village Spirit*, works to empower unhoused youth and create housing. The young people receive stipends while participating in the organization's leadership structure. They develop skills and gain experience by speaking at city council and other meetings, by doing media outreach and interviews, by writing letters to the editor, op-eds, and social media postings, and by organizing and leading events. Youth set and meet personal as well as vocational goals, and focus on developing their life purpose and long-term goals. They move from being victims to becoming active proponents of why and how to transform harmful social structures.



Creating the conditions so kids grow up healthy and successful. The *MILPA Collective* is based in an agricultural region of California where many residents have Mexican as well as Indigenous roots. MILPA offers rites of passage programs and monthly discussion circles for youth, ages 13 to 25. Where children grow up interacting with gangs, violence, and incarcerated community members, the program provides a positive collective vision of the future, bringing young people together to focus on building self-confidence, resilience, and leadership while drawing on Indigenous and other culturally relevant living and healing practices.

Stop debt from crushing people. The *Debt Collective* is a membership organization set up to be a union of debtors. They run campaigns to cancel debt (student, medical, bail, and others) owed to government and private companies. They also help individuals and groups to dispute and get out of debt. They envision a world where no one is forced into debt to survive.



Restorative justice to repair harm

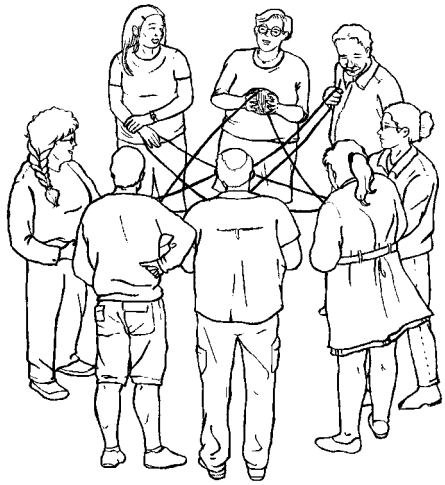
Restorative Justice is a different way of looking at wrongdoing, crime, and punishment. Instead of declaring a person guilty and punishing them, the point is to look at the harms done to an individual or to a community and ask how those harms can be repaired. This can be done in schools, community settings, court systems, prisons, and elsewhere. While perhaps not appropriate in all cases, every situation addressed through a holistic approach, with mediated solutions that help both the person who caused harm as well as the victim, can help break the vicious cycle of violence in ways that simply focusing on punishment cannot.

Restorative Justice Partnership in Yolo County, California, has what it calls its "secret sauce" that creates connections through open and honest dialogue among offenders, community participants, and victims who choose to participate. To be eligible, the accused person must agree to take responsibility for their conduct. The accused person gives an account of the events that led up to the crime, allowing them to share the story from their perspective and provide context. Panelists then ask questions to understand the circumstances around the crime and work with the person to identify the harms that they, the community, and the victim or victims experienced as a result of the crime. At the end, all decide together the steps that are necessary to make things as right as possible, and to discuss how to avoid repeating the behavior in the future.

ACTIVITY **Yarn ball web of relationships**

The *Yolo County Restorative Justice Partnership* uses this training activity with volunteers to demonstrate and get people talking about how violence harms community connectedness.

Everyone stands in a large circle and tosses a ball of multicolored yarn to one another. Each person catching the yarn ball says a few words about how they identify as a community member. Then, holding the string in one hand, they throw the yarn ball to a person across from them who does the same.



Once everyone has shared, held onto the string, and tossed it to someone else, a spider web of yarn results. (Toss the yarn ball to everyone twice if the group is small.) The web represents the connections among community members.

Then the facilitator cuts the yarn in one or two places to represent how crime breaks relationships between community members, weakening the entire web—the community as a whole. Tying 2 broken strands back together reverses the damage. By focusing on repairing the harms caused by violence and crime, restorative justice aims to strengthen the community at large.

Violence harms everyone it touches

People who are or have been victims of violence need support. So do people who have been violent toward others. Often, someone using violence has suffered violence and trauma themselves. Their experience may have shown them that violence works to control others or is a way to gain power in their life. Efforts toward restorative justice help people on all sides of a violent episode address their needs and strengthen the community. Though many places do not have restorative justice structures in place yet, you can learn from the experiences of existing programs and adapt their approaches to your context.

Understanding that those causing harm and violence may also have been victims, and that traditional forms of punishment don't tend to lower levels of violence, can open the door to approaches that interrupt the cycle of violence. Helpful approaches to situations where violence has occurred include:

Be self-aware and reserve judgment. Ideas about how to behave and the meaning of speech and actions vary from culture to culture, family to family, and person to person. What one person sees as angry or threatening may not match your experience. Open, respectful, non-judgmental questions can help uncover when differing cultural understandings are making a situation worse.

Be compassionate and aware. You may know or hear about a community member who has been violent with others or whose edgy, angry, or irritable behavior makes you worry they might become violent. Many of us are understandably uncomfortable interacting with potentially violent people, but it is important not to isolate them or leave them alone with their angry, irritable feelings. If you can involve them in community or other constructive activities where they can talk about their feelings and anger, and feel connected and understood, this will decrease the likelihood of violence. On the other hand, feeling judged, shunned, and distrusted can make violence more likely.

De-escalating situations that threaten to become violent is often a hard-won skill, developed through experience. By practicing to maintain a calm, confident, and sympathetic presence through your choice of words, tone of voice, and body language, you can learn to diffuse difficult situations. For ideas about how to prepare yourself and how to act in the moment, see page 62. Always remember to prioritize your own safety along with the safety of others.

Prison-based counselor training—offenders become mentors

Peer support among those who are or have been incarcerated is a good example of the unique advantage of talking to someone who "gets it" as compared to counselors who haven't lived a situation directly. Understanding the deep connections between addiction, trauma, violence, and incarceration led *Options Recovery Services* to develop California's first in-custody counselor training program. The Occupational Mentor Certification Program (OMCP) trains incarcerated people to understand the health aspects of addiction and work as alcohol and drug counselors. The extensive training requires participants to confront, tell the truth about, and deeply engage with their own struggles with addiction, past trauma, the violence they experienced, and the violence they inflicted on others. Upon graduating from OMCP, the Mentors work as group facilitators and provide guidance and support to other incarcerated people. Piloted in 2006, the program now runs trainings in 7 California prisons and OMCP counselors work in every prison in the state.

With their work experience and Alcohol and Drug Counselor certification, OMCP graduates often find employment with substance abuse and violence prevention programs when they are released from prison, applying their skills to carry on this work in the community.

Anger

Usually anger is hard *not* to notice. Anger's immediate physical effects can include changes in breathing, heart rate, and temperature. Like other stresses (see pages 19 to 20), constantly feeling anger can harm long-term physical and mental health. Too often, anger is expressed through violent behaviors, harming ourselves and others.

Anger can also provide positive motivation on a personal level, for example, to get out of a bad relationship or to find a better job. On a community level, anger can lead people to organize against gender discrimination or to improve their schools. Racism, exploitation, ecological collapse, political corruption, denial of health care—unfortunately, there is no lack of serious social problems to make us angry.

Having good mental health doesn't mean a person doesn't feel or express anger. It means they can understand what causes that anger and how to transform and channel that angry energy into effective action. We learn how to do that—successfully or less successfully—from our experience growing up in a family, attending school, and living in our communities and society at large. As adults, we often have to "unlearn" many of the habits we developed as children to deal with anger and try to replace them with more effective, less harmful ones.

All cultures have various ways of expressing and acting upon emotions, including anger. Anger may be acceptable in some situations or when coming from people in certain family or community positions. In other situations, or from other people, getting mad may be totally unacceptable. But acceptable or not, anger is distinct from violence. While anger communicates feelings, violence is an attempt to cause emotional or physical harm.

The anger we feel inside, as well as anger and violence used on us, especially as children, can create mental health problems. It is important to develop the mental health skills that allow us to process our anger. It is just as important to change the social conditions that turn anger into violence in our communities.

Learning to recognize feelings and manage anger

Learning how to understand and process strong feelings as they appear is a valuable mental health skill for everyone. If children can begin to develop these emotional skills before they develop habits of violent response to strong feelings, it will help them, their families, future partners, and communities throughout their lives.

When children and young teens feel anger, they often lack the words to express what is going on inside them. It is difficult to identify where anger comes from and how to prevent it from taking over. Children (and most adults!) struggle to express strong feelings in ways that won't make them feel worse, harm others, or create new problems. Sometimes, when words don't work very well to express our emotions, art-based or physical activities can help us process them.

The activities below were designed for older children. Change them as needed to use with adults or younger children or to meet the needs of your group. Combine more than one activity to link awareness of emotions with exploring what works well to feel better or calmer when emotions become hard to deal with.

ACTIVITY Working with emotions

Find new words

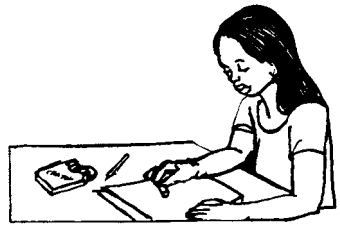
Build a list of words that help talk about strong feelings. The words can be those that kids already know, can come from book or movie characters, can pair with emojis, or can be part of vocabulary homework or spelling games. Include words like: disappointment, frustration, ignored, unheard, sad, embarrassed, ashamed, scared, worried, guilty, overwhelmed, hurt, furious, and others.

Make an "inside/outside" drawing

Ask everyone to draw a box with space around it or a person's head with space to write inside and around it. Label the top of the paper: "what you see." Inside the box, write: "the real me" or "what's really happening." The area outside is for writing words or drawing scenes that show anger: yelling, swearing, throwing things, hitting, insulting, crying, etc. Inside, write or draw feelings (see "Find new words" above). Use color markers to pair ideas, for example, if "scared" is the inside feeling behind the word "yelling," use the same color for both, or connect them with a line. Discuss how feeling hungry or tired can cause certain ways of acting, and add these words inside the box. Each person can explain what they thought while writing and drawing, and what they wish others knew or should do when "what you see" doesn't show "what's really happening" inside.

ACTIVITY Working with emotions *(continued)*

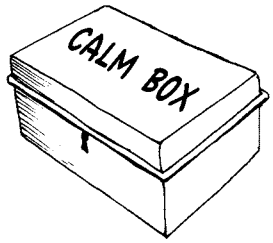
Make a collage highlighting hopes and dreams



Using magazines, newspapers, or printouts of online images, create a collage to show what you are looking forward to in your life, want to do within 3 years, or things you are grateful for. Collage-making is fun and focuses on positive goals. The collage can be taped to the wall to remind you of good feelings and possibilities when you are feeling down or worried.

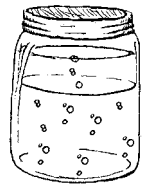
Reminder cards or poster with ways to feel better

Experiment with different ways to feel more calm or comforted when distressed. Try squeeze balls, pressing your fingers together, pressing hands on the knees, doodling, deep breathing, or other techniques. Practice several of these as a group and then have each person draw pictures on cards of the techniques they like best. The cards can be kept at a desk, by the bed, or pasted onto a poster as a reminder of what to do when difficult feelings arise.



Shake it up and calm it down

This activity makes a glitter, sand, or "snow" globe you can shake and watch settle. Making and using it helps you focus on how feelings get stirred up and then calm down, useful for both children and adults to remember. Have everyone talk about what stirs up and calms down their emotions as you make the globes.



Fill a small glass jar or clear plastic bottle part-way with water and a few drops of food coloring—choose a color you find calming. Add a little sand or glitter and small objects like shells or beads. For it to work well, add 2 drops of glycerin per 1 cup of water, leaving a little room at the top. If you don't have glycerin, use 2 teaspoons of vegetable oil or baby oil. Adding oil makes the glitter fall slower. Glue the lid onto the jar. Shake it up and watch the contents settle.