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Stopping School Violence



- 1** Parents
- 2** Students
- 3** Teachers
- 4** Law Enforcement
- 5** Principals
- 6** The Rest of Us



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he mix has become appallingly predictable: volcanic anger, no skills to vent the anger or ease the pain, no trusted adult to turn to, and accessibility of firearms. Result: dead and wounded students, faculty, and staff at schools in all parts of our nation. We can all help prevent these tragedies in three ways: violence prevention (not reaction) programs in every community; young people taught by all of us how to manage anger and handle conflicts peaceably; and guns kept out of the hands of unsupervised kids and treated as hazardous consumer products.

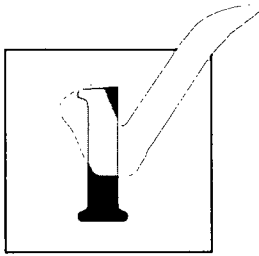
But the relatively small number of school-site homicides is only the tip of an iceberg that could cost our children their futures and our communities their civic health. Violence in our schools—whether it involves threats, fist fights, knives, or firearms—is unwarranted and intolerable. Children deserve a safe setting to learn in. Teachers and staff deserve a safe place to work in. Communities deserve safe schools that educate kids and help keep neighborhoods safer.

For some schools, violence may be a minor issue; for others, it may be a daily presence. Though the most extreme forms of violence are rare, the threat of all kinds of violence can keep students away from school, prevent them from going to after-school events, and leave them in fear every day.

To make our schools safer, everyone can and must pitch in—teachers, parents, students, policy makers, law enforcement officers, business managers, faith leaders, civic leaders, youth workers, and other concerned community residents. Each of us can do something to help solve the problem. And it’s a problem we all must solve.

What can you do to stop school violence? Here are six starter lists of ideas. Some require only individual action; some require concerted effort. Some address immediate issues like kids bringing weapons to school; others address the problems that cause violence. Consider these lists a launching pad. There’s lots more that can be done. We’ve listed resources that can provide even more ideas and help in carrying them out.

On your own, with a group, with your child, with a classroom full of children—whatever you do, there’s something here you can do. Anything you do will help.



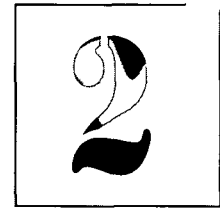
Parents

Can:

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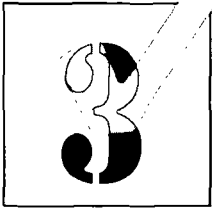
- 1** Recognize that keeping firearms in your home may put you at legal risk as well as exposing you and your family to physical risk. In many states, parents can be held liable for their children's actions, including inappropriate use of firearms. If you do choose to keep firearms at home, ensure that they are securely locked, that ammunition is locked and stored separately, and that children know weapons are never to be touched without your express permission and supervision.
- 2** Take an active role in your children's schools. Talk regularly with teachers and staff. Volunteer in the classroom or library, or in after-school activities. Work with parent-teacher-student organizations.
- 3** Act as role models. Settle your own conflicts peaceably and manage anger without violence.
- 4** Listen to and talk with your children regularly. Find out what they're thinking on all kinds of topics. Create an opportunity for two-way conversation, which may mean forgoing judgments or pronouncements. This kind of communication should be a daily habit, not a reaction to crisis.
- 5** Set clear limits on behaviors in advance. Discuss punishments and rewards in advance, too. Disciplining with framework and consistency helps teach self-discipline, a skill your children can use for the rest of their lives.
- 6** Communicate clearly on the violence issue. Explain that you don't accept and won't tolerate violent behavior. Discuss what violence is and is not. Answer questions thoughtfully. Listen to children's ideas and concerns. They may bring up small problems that can easily be solved now, problems that could become worse if allowed to fester.
- 7** Help your children learn how to examine and find solutions to problems. Kids who know how to approach a problem and resolve it effectively are less likely to be angry, frustrated, or violent. Take advantage of "teachable moments" to help your child understand and apply these and other skills.
- 8** Discourage name-calling and teasing. These behaviors often escalate into fist fights (or worse). Whether the teaser is violent or not, the victim may see violence as the only way to stop it.
- 9** Insist on knowing your children's friends, whereabouts, and activities. It's your right. Make your home an inviting and pleasant place for your children and their friends; it's easier to know what they're up to when they're around. Know how to spot signs of troubling behavior in kids—yours and others (see page viii).
- 10** Work with other parents to develop standards for school-related events, acceptable out-of-school activities and places, and required adult supervision. Support each other in enforcing these standards.
- 11** Make it clear that you support school policies and rules that help create and sustain a safe place for all students to learn. If your child feels a rule is wrong, discuss his or her reasons and what rule might work better.
- 12** Join up with other parents, through school and neighborhood associations, religious organizations, civic groups, and youth activity groups. Talk with each other about violence problems, concerns about youth in the community, sources of help to strengthen and sharpen parenting skills, and similar issues.

- 1 Refuse to bring a weapon to school, refuse to carry a weapon for another, and refuse to keep silent about those who carry weapons.
- 2 Report any crime immediately to school authorities or police.
- 3 Report suspicious or worrisome behavior or talk by other students to a teacher or counselor at your school. You may save someone's life.
- 4 Learn how to manage your own anger effectively. Find out ways to settle arguments by talking it out, working it out, or walking away rather than fighting.
- 5 Help others settle disputes peaceably. Start or join a peer mediation program, in which trained students help classmates find ways to settle arguments without fists or weapons.
- 6 Set up a teen court, in which youths serve as judge, prosecutor, jury, and defense counsel. Courts can hear cases, make findings, and impose sentences, or they may establish sentences in cases where teens plead guilty. Teens feel more involved and respected in this process than in an adult-run juvenile justice system.
- 7 Become a peer counselor, working with classmates who need support and help with problems.
- 8 Mentor a younger student. As a role model and friend, you can make it easier for a younger person to adjust to school and ask for help.
- 9 Start a school crime watch. Consider including a student patrol that helps keep an eye on corridors, parking lots, and groups, and a way for students to report concerns anonymously.
- 10 Ask each student activity or club to adopt an anti-violence theme. The newspaper could run how-to stories on violence prevention; the art club could illustrate costs of violence. Career clubs could investigate how violence affects their occupational goals. Sports teams could address ways to reduce violence that's not part of the game plan.
- 11 Welcome new students and help them feel at home in your school. Introduce them to other students. Get to know at least one student unfamiliar to you each week.
- 12 Start (or sign up for) a "peace pledge" campaign, in which students promise to settle disagreements without violence, to reject weapons, and to work toward a safe campus for all. Try for 100% participation.



Starter List

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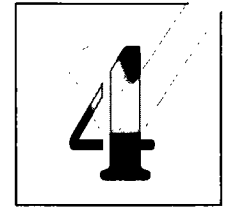
Checklist

Checklist

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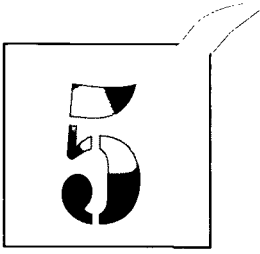
- 1** Report to the principal as quickly as possible any threats, signs of or discussions of weapons, signs of gang activity, or other conditions that might invite or encourage violence.
- 2** With help from students, set norms for behavior in your classroom. Refuse to permit violence. Ask students to help set penalties and enforce the rules.
- 3** Regularly invite parents to talk with you about their children's progress and any concerns they have. Send home notes celebrating children's achievements.
- 4** Learn how to recognize the warning signs that a child might be headed for violence and know how to tap school resources to get appropriate help (see page viii).
- 5** Encourage and sponsor student-led anti-violence activities and programs ranging from peer education to teen courts to mediation to mentoring to training.
- 6** Offer to serve on a team or committee to develop and implement a Safe School Plan, including how teachers should respond in emergencies.
- 7** Firmly and consistently but fairly enforce school policies that seek to reduce the risk of violence. Take responsibility for areas outside as well as inside your classroom.
- 8** Insist that students not resort to name-calling or teasing. Encourage them to demonstrate the respect they expect. Involve them in developing standards of acceptable behavior.
- 9** Teach with enthusiasm. Students engaged in work that is challenging, informative, and rewarding are less likely to get into trouble.
- 10** Learn and teach conflict resolution and anger management skills. Help your students practice applying them in everyday life. Discuss them in the context of what you teach.
- 11** Incorporate discussions on violence and its prevention into the subject matter you teach whenever possible.
- 12** Encourage students to report crimes or activities that make them suspicious.

- 1 Get to know students in non-confrontational settings. Help them see you as a mentor, peace keeper, and problem solver, not just as an enforcer.
- 2 Develop a formal memorandum of understanding with the school about handling complaints, criminal events, and other calls for service. Volunteer to serve on the school's Safe School planning team.
- 3 Offer to train teachers, staff, and students in personal safety. Work with students to help present these trainings.
- 4 Help students learn about the costs of violence to their community—financial, social, and physical. Link them with others in the community who are affected by violence to help them understand its lasting impacts.
- 5 Provide accurate information about your state's juvenile and criminal justice systems and what happens to youth who are arrested because they've been involved in violence. Explain the kinds of help available to young people who are in distress or who are victims of crime
- 6 If you are qualified in crime prevention through environmental design, offer to help school staff perform a security survey of the school building, identifying lighting needs, requirements for locks and other security devices, areas where physical changes to the building could increase safety, and needs for pruning or other landscaping changes. Share training opportunities through your department with school security personnel.
- 7 Work to include school administrators, staff, and students in existing prevention action against gangs, weapons, and other threats.
- 8 Consider starting a school resource officer program, in which a law enforcement officer is assigned to a school to work with the students, provide expertise to teachers on subjects in which they are qualified, help address school problems that can lead to violence, provide personal safety training for students, and the like.
- 9 Work with school attendance officers to identify truants and return them to school or to an alternate facility.
- 10 Develop links with parents through parent-teacher associations and other groups; educate them on violence prevention strategies and help them understand the importance of their support.
- 11 Work with community groups to put positive after-school activities in place throughout the community and for all ages.
- 12 Together with principals and parents, start safe corridor programs and block parent programs to make the trip to and from school less worrisome for students. Help with efforts to identify and eliminate neighborhood trouble spots; using community policing and problem-solving principles.



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Be proactive

Share ideas

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- 1** Establish “zero tolerance” policies for weapons and violence. Spell out penalties in advance. Adopt the motto “If it’s illegal outside school, it’s illegal inside.” Educate students, parents, and staff on policies and penalties. Include a way for students to report crime-related information that does not expose them to retaliation.
- 2** Establish a faculty-student-staff committee to develop a Safe School Plan. Invite law enforcement officers to be part of your team. Policies and procedures for both day-to-day operations and crisis handling should cover such subjects as identifying who belongs in the building, avoiding accidents and incidents in corridors and on school grounds, reporting weapons or concerns about them, working in partnership with police; following up to ensure that troubled students get help.
- 3** Work with juvenile justice authorities and law enforcement officers on how violence, threats, potentially violent situations, and other crimes will be handled. Meet regularly to review problems and concerns. Develop a memorandum of understanding with law enforcement on access to the school building, reporting of crimes, arrests, and other key issues.
- 4** Offer training in anger management, stress relief, mediation, and related violence prevention skills to staff and teachers. Help them identify ways to pass these skills along to students. Make sure students are getting training.
- 5** Involve every group within the school community—faculty, professional staff, custodial staff, students, and others—in setting up solutions to violence. Keep lines of communication open to all kinds of student groups and cliques.
- 6** Develop ways to make it easier for parents to be involved in the lives of their students. Provide lists of volunteer opportunities; ask parents to organize phone trees; hold events on weekends as well as week nights. Offer child care for younger children.
- 7** Work with community groups and law enforcement to create safe corridors for travel to and from school; even older students will stay home rather than face a bully or some other threat of violence. Help with efforts to identify and eliminate neighborhood trouble spots.
- 8** Reward good behavior. Acknowledging students who do the right thing, whether it’s settling an argument without violence or helping another student or apologizing for bumping into someone helps raise the tone for the whole school.
- 9** Insist that your faculty and staff treat each other and students the way they want to be treated—with respect, courtesy, and thoughtfulness. Be the chief role model.
- 10** Develop and sustain a network with health care, mental health, counseling, and social work resources in your community. Make sure that teachers, counselors, coaches, and other adults in the school know how to connect a needy student with available resources.
- 11** Ensure that students learn violence prevention techniques throughout their school experience. Don’t make it a one-time thing. Infuse the training into an array of subjects. Draw from established, tested curricula whenever possible.
- 12** Consider establishing such policies as mandatory storage of outerwear in lockers (to reduce chances of weapons concealment), mesh or clear backpacks and duffle bags (to increase visibility of contraband); and limited entry access to the building (to reduce inappropriate visitors).

1 Adopt a school. Help students, faculty, and staff to promote a sense of community in the school and with the larger community through involvement in a wide range of programs and activities.

2 Help to strengthen links between school services and the network of community services that can help students and families facing problems.

3 Join with school and law enforcement in creating and sustaining safe corridors for students traveling to and from school. Help with efforts to identify and eliminate neighborhood trouble spots.

4 Help students through such opportunities as job skills development, entrepreneurship opportunities, and internships.

5 Encourage employees to work with students in skills training, youth group leadership, mentoring, coaching, and similar one-to-one and small group activities. Make your facilities available for these activities when possible.

6 Provide anger management, stress relief, and conflict resolution training for your employees. They can help build an anti-violence climate at home, at school, and in the community. You might gain a more productive working environment, too!

7 Speak up in support of funding and effective implementation of programs and other resources that help schools develop an effective set of violence prevention strategies.

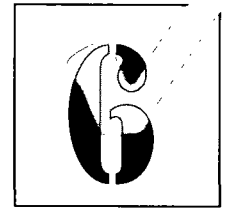
8 Offer your professional skills in educating students on costs and effects of violence in the community (including their school). Public health personnel, trauma specialists, defense and prosecuting attorneys, and judges are among those with important messages to deliver.

9 Help employees who are parents to meet with teachers by providing flexible hours or time off; encourage employee involvement in sponsoring or coaching students in school and after-school activities.

10 Develop an anti-violence competition, including speech, dance, painting, drawing, singing, instrumental music, acting, play-writing, and other creative arts. Get youth to help suggest prizes. Make it a community celebration.

11 Report crimes or suspicious activities to police immediately. Encourage employees and families to do the same.

12 Establish business policies that explicitly reject violent behavior by employees or others on the premises.



The Rest of ...
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Watch for Signs



Know signs
that kids are
troubled and
know how to
get them help.

- lack of interest in school
- absence of age-appropriate anger control skills
- seeing self as always the victim
- persistent disregard for or refusal to follow rules
- cruelty to pets or other animals
- artwork or writing that is bleak or violent or that depicts isolation or anger
- talking constantly about weapons or violence
- obsessions with things like violent games and TV shows
- depression or mood swings
- bringing a weapon (any weapon) to school
- history of bullying
- misplaced or unwarranted jealousy
- involvement with or interest in gangs
- self-isolation from family and friends
- talking about bringing weapons to school

The more of these signs you see, the greater the chance that the child needs help. If it's your child and he or she won't discuss these signs with you, see if a relative, a teacher, a counselor, a religious leader, a coach, or another adult can break the ice.

Get help right away. Talk with a counselor, mental health clinic, family doctor, a psychologist, religious leader, the school's dean of students, or the office of student assistance. The faster you find help, the more likely the problem can be resolved.

Not your child? Recognizing these signs in any child should set off alarm bells for any community member. If you know a child well enough to notice these changes, constructively express concern to the parent(s), who may already be taking action and would welcome your support. If parents appear disinterested, speak to the child's teacher or counselor.

RESOURCES

This is a brief list of just a few of the many groups and agencies that can help you stop school violence. Many of their websites link to those of other groups. Many of their publications provide even more referrals.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America
230 North 13th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107
215-567-7000
215-567-0394 (fax)
Website: bbbsa.org

Boys & Girls Clubs of America
1230 West Peachtree Street, NW
Atlanta, GA 30309
404-815-5700
404-815-5789 (fax)
Website: bgca.org

Bureau of Justice Assistance Clearinghouse
PO Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849-6000
800-688-4252
Website: ncjrs.org
Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence

Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado
Campus Box 442, Building #10
Boulder, CO 80309-0442
303-492-8465
303-443-3297 (fax)
Website: colorado.edu/CSPV

Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse
National Library of Education
U.S. Department of Education
600 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202-0498
800-LET ERIC
Website: aspensys.com/eric

Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse
PO Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849-6000
800-638-8736
Website: ncjrs.org

National Association of Police Athletic Leagues
618 North US Highway 1, Suite 201
North Palm Beach, FL 33408
561-844-1823
561-863-6120 (fax)

National Center for Conflict Resolution Education
Illinois Institute for Dispute Resolution
110 West Main Street
Urbana, IL 61801
217-384-4118
217-384-8280 (fax)

National Clearinghouse on Alcohol and Drug Information
PO Box 2345
Rockville, MD 20852
301-468-2600
Website: health.org

National Crime Prevention Council
1700 K Street, NW, Second Floor
Washington, DC 20006-3817
202-466-6272
202-296-1356 (fax)
Website: ncpc.org

National Injury Control and Prevention Center
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road, NE
Atlanta, GA 30333
404-693-3311
404-639-1623 (fax)
Website: cdc.gov/ncic/

National Institute for Dispute Resolution
1726 M Street, NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 10036
202-466-4764
202-466-4769 (fax)
Website: nidr.org

National PTA
330 North Wabash Avenue, Suite 2100
Chicago, IL 60611
312-670-6782
Website: pta.org

National School Safety Center
4165 Thousand Oaks Boulevard, Suite 290
Westlake Village, CA 91362
805-373-9977
805-373-9277 (fax)
Website: nsscl.org

National Youth Gang Information Center
Institute for Intergovernmental Research
PO Box 12729
Tallahassee, FL 32317
850-385-0600
850-386-5356 (fax)
Website: intranet.iir.com/nygc/

Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
U.S. Department of Education
Portals Building, 600 Independence Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20202-6123
202-260-3954
202-260-7767 (fax)
Website: ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS

Street Law, Inc.
918 16th Street, NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20006-2902
202-293-0088
202-293-0089 (fax)
Website: streetlaw.org

Teens, Crime, and the Community
c/o NCPC, 1700 K Street, NW, Second Floor
Washington, DC 20006-3817
202-466-6272, x152 or 161
202-296-1356 (fax)
Website: nationalccc.org

Youth Crime Watch of America
9300 South Dadeland Boulevard, Suite 100
Miami, FL 33156
305-670-2409
305-670-3805 (fax)
Website: ycwa.org

Youthinfo (website on adolescence-related issues)
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Website: <http://youth.os.dhhs.gov/>

Readings

This list highlights just a few of the more recent documents that offer ideas about programs and strategies that can help reduce or prevent violence in schools, as well as information on the problem. They in turn offer referrals to still more sources of information and ideas. Many of the organizations listed above will send free catalogs listing all their publications.

Arnette, June and Marjorie C. Walsleben. *Combating Fear and Restoring Safety in Schools*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. April 1998. (NCJ 167888).

Drug Strategies, Inc. *Safe Schools, Safe Students: A Guide to Violence Prevention Strategies*. Washington, DC: Drug Strategies, Inc. 1998.

Heavside, Sheila, Cassandra Rowand, Catrina Williams, and Elizabeth Farris. *Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools: 1996-1997*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. March 1998. (NCES 98-030).

Kenney, Dennis J. and T. Steuart Watson. *Crime in the Schools: Reducing Fear and Disorder with Student Problem Solving*. Washington, DC: Police Executive Research Forum. 1998.

Lockwood, Daniel. *Violence Among Middle School and High School Students: Analysis and Implications for Prevention*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. 1997. (NCJ 166363)

U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice. *Creating Safe and Drug-Free Schools: An Action Guide*. Washington, DC. 1996. Electronically available through <http://www.ed.gov> or <http://www.ncjrs.org/ojjhome.htm>, or by calling 800-624-0100.

Zimmer, Judy, Terrence W. Modglin, and Jean F. O'Neil. *Teens, Crime, and the Community: Education and Action for Safer Schools and Communities, Third Edition*. Cincinnati, OH: West Educational Publishing (a Thomson International company). 1998.