

Safe Schools Against Violence in Education

(S.A.V.E. Workshop Booklet)



This two-hour workshop fulfills the New York State Education Department mandate for school violence prevention for students applying for teacher certification, effective February 2, 2001.

SUNY
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Setting the Stage for Safer Schools

A Two-Hour Violence Prevention Training
for Persons Seeking Certification in New York State

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Acknowledgments

In October 1999, Governor George E. Pataki released the report of the Task Force on School Violence (Lt. Governor Mary O. Donohue, Chair) entitled "Safer Schools for the 21st Century: A Common Sense Approach to Keep New York's Students and Schools Safe." This report led to the enactment of new legislation in New York State called SAVE, Safe Schools Against Violence in Education.

Within SAVE is a requirement that persons seeking educational certification participate in a two-hour violence prevention training.

The New York State Center for School Safety supports the development and dissemination of training to assist schools in preventing violence. This course represents one of those trainings.

On behalf of the center, we would like to thank the following members of "the team": Joakim Lartey for piloting this material with Coordinated Health staff across New York State, and the regional coordinators for taking this material as it was being developed and agreeing to be pioneers in its delivery. A special thank you to Constance Milland for contributing the section on national perspectives on violence. Thanks to Elizabeth Mastro for additional review and Lorraine Welch, who took our words and made them legible.



Introduction



Introduction

This training is designed to respond to the requirement for a two-hour certification course to be conducted for teachers, teaching assistants, pupil personnel service professionals, and administrators in New York State as part of the Safe School Against Violence in Education Act (SAVE).

The following items must be included in the two-hour course:

- ✓ statutes, regulations, and policies relating to a safe, non-violent school climate
- ✓ effective classroom management techniques and other academic supports that promote a non-violent school climate and enhance learning
- ✓ integration of social and problem-solving skill development for students within the regular curriculum
- ✓ intervention techniques designed to address a school violence situation
- ✓ study of the warning signs within a developmental and social context that relate to violence and other troubling behaviors in children
- ✓ how to participate in an effective school/community referral process for students exhibiting violent behavior

This manual addresses the following issues:

- ✓ Setting the Stage for Safer Schools: An introduction to violence and its impact in schools (national perspectives).
- ✓ The New York State Picture: Safe Schools Against Violence in Education—An overview of the SAVE legislation and its impact on New York State schools.
- ✓ Prevention in K–12 Schools:
 - systems change
 - risk and protective factors framework
 - strategies for prevention in the classroom
 - educational strategies—what the research indicates
- ✓ Understanding the Individual: Identifying early warning signs of potentially violent behavior, understanding the referral process, and learning how to assist troubled students.



Setting the Stage for Safer Schools

OBJECTIVES

After this learning experience, participants will be able to:

1. characterize the nature and scope of issues related to violence
2. explain the need to address issues related to violence in the schools

CONTENT

The pictures of two teenagers brandishing automatic weapons while in ferocious pursuit of their classmates at Columbine High School have forever changed our collective perception concerning youth violence. Our nation ached for the victims of the shootings, not only for their injuries, but also over the loss of their childhood and innocence. We have come to realize that seeing juxtaposed images of children carrying such weapons creates within us a sense of indignation. We are angered because we believe these children did not obtain necessary supports and community interventions that already exist to prevent such actions.

During the 1990s, our nation witnessed several highly publicized school-based acts of violence. The continual reoccurrence of such incidents serves to reinforce the notion that formerly unheard-of events are now becoming commonplace. It is to our discredit that we accept these episodes as ordinary. We must cultivate a sense of outrage and delve further into their causes and actual incident rates. By reviewing the data and findings up close, we will discover some encouraging trends and remarkable successes in the effort to stem youth violence.

School Violence, A Historical Perspective

In our not-too-distant past, school was depicted as a place for active learning, where childhood curiosity was served, as mutual respect existed between pupil and teacher. Corporal discipline was meted out in a measured fashion, and students accordingly accepted their punishment, when deserved. Such an idyllic version of the “good ol’ days” did not represent emerging societal trends unique to the United States. The aforementioned school model existed up until the early nineteenth century in the United States, where the majority of citizens lived in rural areas and students divided their days between farm chores and local school education. Our school calendar still accommodates the agricultural work cycle by providing a summer break for students during peak planting and harvesting seasons on farms.

In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, massive waves of immigrants from Europe created new educational and societal challenges. The need for uniform educational standards and professional teacher training fostered curriculum development and the refinement of teaching methodologies. As we approached the twentieth century, compulsory educational laws were written and enforced, and secondary school was no longer a secular luxury of the well-to-do who were college bound. Now, all students were mandated to complete a standardized curriculum (Wiles and Bondi 1989). Educators and psychologists established and further defined the concepts of childhood learning—Piaget’s theoretical paradigm that human development occurred in stages of progressively learned tasks became the blueprint for formulating curricula at the various grade levels. Child labor laws codified the concept that children required supervision and special protection by society, with clear stipulations for parental responsibilities, as well as rights afforded to children.

The mid-twentieth century witnessed explosive technological change reflected in educational settings. Society moved into the information age; teachers faced the task of organizing the continual stream of information resulting from this revolution. The model for the typical American family was nuclear, living isolated in suburban settings and accessing the community only through the use of the automobile. Teenagers were also courted as a consumer market in their own right—a group prosperous enough to support its own separate demand for clothing, music, and entertainment. By the mid-twentieth century, the identity of American adolescents was defined as rebellious youth, whose music, dress, and speech departed markedly from their parents’ own adolescent expression. Further development of youth marketing channels, such as MTV, created explicit video images depicting drug use and unbridled sexual activity without negative consequences. With the advent of sophisticated technology, extreme violence was now easily depicted in popular movies, television, and video games and touted as the inevitable outcome of any conflict. Several factors now influenced youth behavior:

- the growing infusion of drugs into mainstream America
- the easy accessibility of guns
- the pervasive youth culture with harmful messages supported by the popular media
- the decline of the family structure

Societal safety nets vanished as the number of homeless, foster, and abused/neglected children increased exponentially. The onset of the AIDS epidemic and the reduction in health care spending boded ill for children who, all-too-frequently, made early decisions to engage in drug use and sexual activity. Finally, constant exposure to violent images in both real life and through videos taught youth a false message: that violence is an appropriate choice of action. These influences on youth's attitudes have created the misperception that youth violence is an inevitable rite of passage for many, and that both educational and community settings are unprepared to cope with these inevitable episodes.

A Closer Look at Risk Factors

According to a recent report by the Office of the Surgeon General (2001), serious violence, including aggravated assault, robbery, rape, and homicide, is most likely to occur during the second decade of life. In addition, a disturbing statistical trend showed the number of violent acts committed by high school seniors increased nearly 50 percent in the past twenty years.

Misperceptions concerning the causality beyond youth violence abound, including:

- Conduct-disordered children are predetermined to commit violence in adolescence.
- African American and Hispanic youths are more likely to be involved in violence. (Arrest rates differ, but not self-reported incidents.)
- Violent youths will be arrested for a violent crime. (Most will never be arrested for a violent crime.)
- Incarcerating youth in adult facilities will "cure them." (Introducing youth into adult facilities indoctrinates them with the core value system of adult criminals.)

Rigorous evaluation of these misperceptions revealed a flaw in our approach and led us to discern that youth's personal characteristics interact in various ways with environmental risk factors. In short, we re-examined our own approach to solving this problem and found that cause and effect do not necessarily form a linear relationship.

Research supporting this report also reveals that there are several identifiable factors that predispose youth toward both violent and non-violent behavioral choices. Identification of such factors is deemed critical in developing targeted interventions. The research points to the early onset of violent behavior (before puberty), which contributes to a longer personal history of violent crimes than those who begin perpetrating violent crimes after puberty. The co-occurrence of drug use, early sexual activity, and violent actions make up a risky lifestyle, which, as a whole, has been implicated as a significant factor contributing to a continuation of a violent lifestyle. In fact, the involvement in criminal behavior (not only violent behavior) has been shown to predispose children toward violent actions. The presence of individualized personal characteristics and strong environmental supports has been shown to counter the probability of a youth's choice to engage in violent behavior.

Schools Face Societal Trend

The school typically has been viewed as the setting where societal trends are reflected. To some, it may come as a surprise that students are more likely to be injured *away* from school than at the school environment itself (Task Force on School Violence 1999). According to the report from the New York State Lieutenant Governor's Task Force, trends show that student violence against other students has declined and that younger students (9th grade vs. 12th grade) were more likely to carry weapons and become involved in violent confrontations at school. In New York State, less than 10 percent of students have been threatened or carried a weapon to school or missed school due to safety concerns. Yet this number represents a significant number of students who live with the threat of violence on a daily basis.

The percentage of teachers reported as victims of serious violent crime is much smaller than student victims: 4 teachers per 1,000, versus 10 students per 1,000 (in 1996). An encouraging trend shows the decline in the use of weapons at school, a finding also reflected in the U.S. Surgeon General's report. The statistic that shows fewer students bringing firearms to school (in 1999) is a reversal of a ten-year trend of youth violence that peaked in 1993. Overall, students in New York State are safer from the threat of firearms than students in other states.

This is not to state that comprehensive school safety planning is unwarranted or unnecessary. There are still disturbing trends showing that youth arrests for violent actions, such as aggravated assault, remain nearly 70 percent higher than pre-epidemic levels (Office of the Surgeon General 2001). Careful analysis of community and individual risk factors and development of a comprehensive school planning model can create an effective antidote against the incidence of youth-based violence.

Setting the Stage for Safer Schools

- ✓ What constitutes violence?
- ✓ Are there acceptable forms of violence?
- ✓ Is violence something new to Americans?





The New York State Picture

**Safe Schools Against Violence
in Education (SAVE)**

The New York State Picture

Safe Schools Against Violence in Education (SAVE)

OBJECTIVES

After this learning experience, participants will be able to:

1. explain the SAVE legislation and its impact on New York state schools

CONTENT

At the close of the 2000 legislative session, a bill was introduced and passed in New York State. That bill is known as SAVE, Safe Schools Against Violence in Education. SAVE addresses many important issues that affect education. For most components of SAVE, the full compliance date is July 1, 2001. Included in the SAVE legislation are

1. School Safety Plans

The board of education of every school district must develop a comprehensive district-wide safety plan to include:

Policies and procedures for:

- responding to threats
- responding to acts of violence
- appropriate prevention/intervention strategies, such as:
 - training for security personnel (for example: de-escalate potentially violent situation)
 - conflict resolution
 - peer mediation
 - youth courts
 - extended day
- contacting law enforcement
- contacting parents and/or guardians
- school building security
- dissemination of informative materials regarding early detection of potentially violent behaviors

- annual school safety training for staff and students
- developing strategies to improve communication among students and between students and staff

This plan must include a representative of the board of education, students, teachers, administrators, parent organizations, and other school and school safety personnel. Representatives must be appointed by the board of education.

2. Building Level Emergency Response Plans

This team is appointed by the principal with guidelines established by the board of education. Team membership shall include teachers, administrators, parent organizations, school safety personnel, community members, law enforcement, and local ambulance or other emergency response agencies. This plan needs to be submitted to local law enforcement agencies and the New York State Police.

Plan must include:

- policies and procedures for safe evacuation, to include evacuation routes, shelter sites, procedures for addressing medical needs, transportation, and emergency notification to parents
- designation of an emergency response team
- access to floor plans, blueprints, schematics of school interior, grounds, and road maps of surrounding area
- internal and external communication system
- implementation of incident command system (ICS)
- procedures to review and conduct drills and exercises to test components of plan
- policies and procedures for securing and restricting access to crime scene

3. Codes of Conduct

Requires schools to adopt codes of conduct for the maintenance of order on school grounds and to file such codes with the New York State Education Department.

Minimum elements include:

- appropriate dress and language
- security issues
- removal from classroom
- disciplinary procedures for violators

- policies and procedures for detention, suspension, and removal of disruptive pupil
- procedures for reporting code violations and imposing penalties
- provisions for notifying law enforcement of violations (violent crimes)
- procedures for parental notification
- committee to review actions relating to the code
- procedures regarding PINS petitions and juvenile delinquency provisions
- procedures for referral to human services agencies
- minimum suspension periods for students who are repeatedly and substantially disruptive
- minimum suspension periods for acts that qualify a student as violent

Items 1. School Safety Plans, and 2. Codes of Conduct, are subject to a public hearing, reviewed and updated annually, and filed with the commissioner of education no later than 30 days after adoption.

4. Teacher Authority/Principal Authority

Allows teachers to remove disruptive or violent pupils from the classroom, consistent with district codes of conduct, with appropriate procedural safeguards for affected students.

Adds principals to those empowered to suspend pupils from school entirely, without specific board delegation of that authority.

Requires districts to include, in their codes of conduct, minimum periods of suspension for violent or repeatedly disruptive pupils.

Disruptive pupil is defined as one who:

- is substantially disruptive of the educational process or interferes with the teacher's authority over the classroom

Violent Pupil is defined as one who:

- commits an act of violence on a teacher, other school district employee, or fellow student
- possesses, displays, or threatens to use a gun, knife, or other dangerous weapon
- damages or destroys the personal property of a teacher or other school district employee
- damages or destroys school district property

Removal Procedures:

- Teachers report and refer violent pupil to administration for minimum suspension period.
- Administration has authority to suspend for up to five days without delegation from board of education.
- District shall implement policies and procedures to provide for continued educational programming for removed pupil.
- Student must be informed of reason for removal by teacher.
- Principal must be informed of reason for student removal by teacher.
- Sets time lines for negotiations of removal to student and parent.
- Requires notification of charges and an explanation for suspension with timelines as required by legislation.

5. Uniform Violent Incident Reporting

- To be established by the New York State Education Department and the New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services.
- Schools shall report annually to the commissioner of education:
 - number and types of violent incidents
 - number of suspensions and other forms of discipline
 - actions taken by the school
 - ages and grades of disciplined pupils

This includes an annual report to the governor and the legislature regarding the prevalence of violent incidents on school grounds and inclusion of such information on school report cards.

6. Instruction in Civility, Citizenship, and Character Education

Requires districts to include a civility, citizenship, and character education component in the K–12 course of instruction concerning the principles of honesty, tolerance, personal responsibility, respect for others, observance of laws and rules, courtesy, dignity, and other positive traits.

7. Health Curriculum

Requires the Board of Regents to review the current health curriculum requirements to ensure that students have sufficient time and instruction to develop skills to address issues of violence prevention and mental health.

8. Interpersonal Violence Prevention Education

Commissioner shall develop and distribute an interpersonal violence prevention package to schools for use in health and related areas.

9. School Violence Prevention Training

- Must be included in Superintendent's Conference Days annually.
- All individuals seeking certification as of February 2001 must have completed a two-hour course in violence prevention.
- Must address violence prevention training for current staff in the yearly professional development plan.

10. Whistle Blower Protection

Protection for those employees who report violent incidents, whereby an employee may not be disciplined or fired for reporting these incidents and is protected from any civil liability.

11. Fingerprinting

- Requires prospective school district employees and applicants for certification to be fingerprinted for a criminal history background check in order to be cleared for employment.
- Does not apply to volunteers.
- Does not apply to current employees of a school district. However, if a current employee terminates employment and seeks employment in a different school district, the individual must undergo the fingerprinting process. This law will also apply if a currently certified individual applies for additional certification, such as a teacher applying for an administrator's certificate.
- The New York State Education Department will collect fingerprints and a \$74 processing fee from each applicant and submit to the New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services. Provisions exist for a waiver of the fee for applicants for employment who demonstrate to the district that payment of the fee would create a financial hardship. Criminal history records, if any, will be sent by the New York State Department of Criminal Justice and FBI to the State Education Department for review and consideration of whether any convictions or outstanding arrests justify denial of clearance for employment or certification. Applicants who are denied clearance will be afforded an opportunity to challenge the determination by the State Education Department and to review and challenge content of criminal history records through the Department of Criminal Justice Service process.

12. Assaults on Teachers

Increases assaults to a Class D felony from Class A misdemeanor.

13. Child Abuse Reporting

- Defines child abuse in an educational setting.
- Requires the immediate reporting of allegations of child abuse in an educational setting to school authorities, parents, and law enforcement.
- Defines mandatory reporters.
- Requires a written report of allegations transmitted to school administrator.
- Administrator determines whether there is reasonable suspicion, notifies parents if determination is made, and forwards report to law enforcement.
- District attorney required to notify superintendent of the filing of an indictment, conviction, suspension, or determination of a criminal investigation.
- District attorney notifies the commissioner of conviction of a certified individual.

14. Prohibiting Silent Resignations

- Ends practice of allowing person to resign rather than disclose allegations of child abuse.
- Class E felony, punishable by up to four years in prison, civil penalty not to exceed \$20,000.00 for those superintendents that allow employee to resign under these circumstances.
- Individuals who in good faith comply with the reporting requirements will be entitled to immunity from any civil or criminal liability that might otherwise result from such actions.

15. Teacher Discipline

Provides for a range of discipline measures. In addition to revocation of a teaching certificate, discipline will now include suspension, continuing education, limitation on certificates and monetary fines.

16. Court Notification

Requires family and criminal courts to notify schools about juvenile delinquency adjudications.

- Increases coordination between the juvenile justice system and schools.
- Requires school to appoint a Designated Educational Official (DEO) to receive records and coordinate student's participation in programs.
- Cannot be part of permanent record.
- Information can only be used in the execution of student's educational plan.

Safe Schools Against Violence in Education Act (SAFE)

- ✓ School Safety Plans
- ✓ Building Level Emergency Response Plans
- ✓ Codes of Conduct
- ✓ Teacher Authority / Principal Authority
- ✓ Uniform Violent Incident Reporting
- ✓ Instruction in Civility, Citizenship, and Character Education



Safe Schools Against Violence in Education Act (SAFE)

- ✓ Health Curriculum
- ✓ Interpersonal Violence
Prevention Education
- ✓ School Violence
Prevention Training
- ✓ Whistle Blower
Protection
- ✓ Fingerprinting



Safe Schools Against Violence in Education Act (SAFE)

- ✓ Assaults on Teachers
- ✓ Child Abuse Reporting
- ✓ Prohibiting Silent Resignations
- ✓ Teacher Discipline
- ✓ Court Notification





Prevention in K-12 Schools

Is What You're Doing Getting the Results You Want?

OBJECTIVES

After this learning experience, participants will be able to:

1. describe the relationship between systems change, data, and the use of teams in developing a positive school climate

CONTENT

SAVE now requires all schools to establish safety teams. These teams can effect change in a district more effectively when guided by appropriate data. With better data collection and tracking, a school district can be more proactive in dealing with school safety issues and potential problems. Information can be viewed in many different ways, allowing for consistency in reporting and resolving incidents. At-risk students can be identified sooner, and problem solving will be more effective if it is designed to fit the identified problems.

The following steps in the process of change relate to the U.S. Department of Education's Principles of Effectiveness.

(See <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS/>)

Needs Assessment

(PRINCIPLE I)

"A grant recipient shall base its program on a thorough assessment of objective data about the drug and violence problems in their schools and communities served" (USDOE SDFS 1998).

Subjective data may also be included to enhance the school's assessment. Subjective data may come from focus groups, parent input, student feedback, and community meetings.

School safety teams use both subjective and objective sources of data to identify potential areas of risk and intervention strategies for their buildings.

Data can be organized and analyzed around five domains:

- social-political environment
- community
- school system
- families in the school community
- individual students and peer groups

Action Planning—Measurable Goals and Objectives

(PRINCIPLE II)

“Recipients of federal funds shall, with the assistance of a local or regional advisory council, which includes community representatives, establish a set of measurable goals and objectives, and design its activities to meet those goals and objectives” (USDOE SDFS 1998).

School safety teams can be critical planners in the process of change. School safety teams can develop their goals and objectives from the analysis of the data found in the five domains. An essential component of the planning process is ongoing technical assistance provided by staff with expertise in school safety.

Research Approaches to Violence Prevention

(PRINCIPLE III)

“A grant recipient shall design and implement its activities based on research or evaluation that provides evidence that the strategies used prevent or reduce drug use, violence, or destructive behavior” (USDOE SDFS 1998).

Millions of prevention dollars have been expended on programs for which there is no evidence of effectiveness. School safety teams can be trained to critically review research-based approaches. Teams can begin to evaluate these questions:

- Which programs are more effective, commercially produced or research-based?

- What does a comprehensive prevention program look like?
- Which strategies are effective?
- What are the best strategies/programs for our school? (Consider population, target group, data-based problem.)

Evaluation

(PRINCIPLE IV)

“Grant recipient shall evaluate its program periodically to assess its progress toward achieving its goals and objectives and use its evaluation results to refine, improve, and strengthen its program and to refine its goals and objectives as appropriate” (USDOE SDFS 1998).

A planned, systematic, and well-designed evaluation yields information to guide program modifications and document effectiveness of efforts. There are three general categories of evaluation:

1. process evaluation—describes the program’s features
2. impact evaluation—provides an immediate measure for a program
3. outcome evaluation—measures the effects of a program

School safety teams are trained to understand and employ these categories of evaluation.



Risk and Protective Factors Framework

OBJECTIVES

After this learning experience, participants will be able to:

1. identify risk and protective factors
2. describe classroom strategies to increase protective factors

CONTENT

Studies over the past two decades have tried to determine the origins and pathways of drug abuse and violence. Several factors have been identified that differentiate those who use drugs from those who do not. Factors associated with greater potential for drug use are called “risk” factors. Risk factors fall into the following categories: family, school, community, individual/peers, and environment. Those associated with reduced potential for such use are called “protective” factors. Protective factors fall into the following categories: individual characteristics, bonding, healthy beliefs and clear standards (National Institute on Drug Abuse 1997).

Risk-focused prevention is based on the premise that problem prevention stems from the identification and reduction of risk factors and the enhancement of protective, or resiliency, factors. If we can reduce risks while increasing protection throughout the course of young people’s development, we can prevent these problems and promote healthy, pro-social development (Hawkins and Catalano 1993).

RISK FACTORS

Risk factors are characteristics that often occur for those young people who develop alcohol, drug, and other problems. Risk factors exist in multiple domains, and the more risk factors present, the greater the likelihood for the co-occurrence of behavior problems. Common risk factors predict diverse behavior problems; risk factors show great consistency in effects across different races, cultures, and classes.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Young people who are exposed to multiple risk factors do not always become substance abusers, juvenile delinquents, school dropouts, or teen parents. Rather, protective factors, aspects of people's lives that counter risk factors, may provide buffers against these potentially dangerous behaviors for some young people. Protective factors refer to methods that ameliorate risk factors, sometimes changing the way a person responds to certain risks. There are three categories of protective factors (Hawkins, Catalano, and Miller 1992; Werner and Smith 1992; Rutter 1987).

They are

- individual characteristics
- bonding
- healthy beliefs and clear standards

Individual Characteristics: Individuals' resilient temperaments can help them adjust to or recover from problems. Youngsters who enjoy social interactions and elicit positive attention from others are at reduced risk for future problems. Research also confirms that given equal exposure to risks, girls are less likely than boys to develop health and behavior problems in adolescence.

Bonding: Young people who are attached and committed to their families, schools, friends, and communities are less likely to develop problems. Positive relationships with family members, teachers, and other adults who recognize and encourage a young person's competence, as well as close friendships, all help to promote positive connections and commitment. Children involved in positive relationships are also more likely to strive to achieve the goals valued by their significant others. Positive bonding can make up for many of the disadvantages caused by risk factors.

Healthy Beliefs and Clear Standards: Schools, families, and/or peer groups must explicitly teach children healthy beliefs and set and enforce clear standards for their behavior. Healthy beliefs include believing it is best for children to be drug-free, civic-minded, and to do well in school. Clear standards include establishing, communicating, and enforcing clear no-drug and no-alcohol family rules, the expectation that a youngster will do well in school, and consistent family rules against problem behavior.

Individual Factors

- ✓ Internalizing disorders
- ✓ Hyperactivity, concentration problems, restlessness, and risk taking
- ✓ Aggressiveness
- ✓ Early initiation of violent behavior
- ✓ Involvement in other forms of antisocial behavior
- ✓ Beliefs and attitudes favorable to deviant or antisocial behavior



Family Factors

- ✓ Parental criminality
- ✓ Child maltreatment
- ✓ Poor family management practices
- ✓ Low levels of parental involvement
- ✓ Poor family bonding and family conflict
- ✓ Parental attitudes favorable to substance use and violence
- ✓ Parent-child separation



School Factors

- ✓ Academic failure
- ✓ Low bonding to school
- ✓ Truancy and dropping out of school
- ✓ Frequent school transitions



Peer-related Factors

- ✓ Delinquent
siblings
- ✓ Delinquent
peers
- ✓ Gang
membership



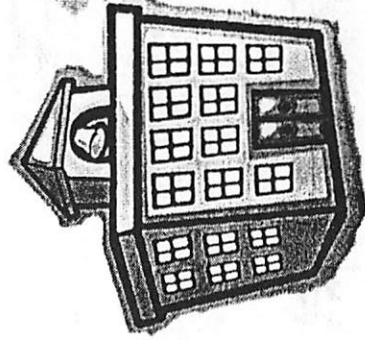
Community and Neighborhood Factors


- ✓ Poverty
- ✓ Community disorganization
- ✓ Availability of drugs and firearms
- ✓ Neighborhood adults involved in crime
- ✓ Exposure to violence and racial prejudice



Protective Factors

- ✓ individual characteristics
- ✓ bonding
- ✓ healthy beliefs and clear standards





Strategies for Prevention

OBJECTIVES

After this learning experience, participants will be able to:

1. identify three violence prevention domains—legal/regulatory, education, environmental
2. describe key elements of promising prevention programs
3. explain educational strategies that the literature defines as promising

CONTENT

What do we mean by prevention? Are certain strategies more effective than others? If so, how do we know which strategies/programs are effective? Are there certain skills or elements that all successful prevention programs have? What are they? Which programs are more effective—commercially produced or research based? What does a comprehensive prevention program look like?

The research discusses three critical areas that are typically addressed in prevention. These are education, which provides information and teaches skills; legal/regulatory, which includes codes of conduct, rules, laws, and discipline codes; and environmental, composed of two areas, physical and social. Physical environment includes things such as lighting, landscaping, widening of hallways, modifications and/or changes to the actual physical plant. Social environment includes activities such as after-school programs, day-care programs, or alternative activities. All of these domains should be included and addressed in a comprehensive plan.

Two decades of research have yielded key elements of effective prevention programs (Fetro 1991; DHHS 1992). Some of these elements can stand alone, but if schools incorporate all of them, there will be a greater chance for success. The key elements include:

- information
- communication and assertiveness skills
- decision-making skills
- refusal/resistance skills

- coping skills
- goal-setting activities
- peer helpers/peer education
- parent involvement
- public information and education campaigns

Information: Effective drug abuse prevention programs recognize that children and adolescents are more interested in concrete information and the “here and now” experiences than they are in information about possibilities in the distant future. Information should be accurate and relevant and should emphasize short-term and negative consequences.

Communication and Assertiveness Skills: Young people need to know how to initiate a conversation, express thoughts and feelings, listen, disagree or agree, and give clear verbal and non-verbal messages.

Decision-making Skills: Early instruction about the decision-making process equips students with skills to help them solve problems that arise in social situations. Strong decision-making skills can increase students’ sense of control, and thus enhance self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Refusal/Resistance Skills: These skill types are a critical component of prevention programs. “Just say no” is not enough. Students must be taught how to say no clearly without jeopardizing peer relationships.

Coping Skills: These are methods that help people cope with emotions, stress, or problems. These include physical activity, self-monitoring, relaxation, alternative activities, hobbies, and social support.

Goal-setting Activities: Most adolescents base their decisions on immediate rather than long-term consequences. When making lifestyle decisions, students need to understand the importance of looking ahead and considering future goals. Goal-setting activities help students identify short- and long-term goals and develop methods and steps necessary to achieve their goals.

Peer Helpers/Peer Education: Programs that use students to teach their peers about violence prevention are a powerful force among adolescents. They can be used effectively to help shape norms and behaviors in this group.

Parent Involvement: Involve parents in program activities and homework assignments, particularly in lower grade levels. This involvement can (1) increase students’ interest in classroom activities; (2) enhance communication between students and parents/caregivers; (3) provide a vehicle for parents to discuss their ideas, opinions, and values; (4) strengthen family bonds; and (5) enhance academic involvement.

Public Information and Education Campaigns: Campaigns designed to inform and educate can draw attention to an issue and help define acceptable behavior for a community. Activities that provide general information to the public are most effective when combined with other activities in a comprehensive program.

Upon review of the literature in the area of substance abuse and violence prevention, we discover that certain educational strategies have consistently shown promise. They are mentoring, conflict resolution/peer mediation, social skills and/or life skills, parent involvement, and the use of peers. These **strategies** seem to employ the **skills** most often believed to reduce violence—anger management, empathy and perspective taking, social problem solving, communication, general social skills, and peace building. For example, developing empathy is a critical component in both social skills training and conflict resolution programs. Learning effective ways to express thoughts, ideas, feelings, and opinions (communication) is a social skill.

Many of these types of programs try to create an environment where students can become connected to school and/or community (mentoring). Programs that use mentoring as a strategy are also addressing a critical protective factor—bonding.

Research in the area of prevention continues to yield new information. The strategies we applied yesterday may not be applicable tomorrow, based on the ever-growing body of new research. There is much confusion in the field when it comes to defining terms such as *effective*, *research-based*, and *promising program*. This list is not exhaustive. The U.S. Department of Education's Principles of Effectiveness define these terms as follows:

- **Effective Program**—A program that demonstrates effectiveness in the following three areas:
 1. preventing or reducing substance abuse or violent and disruptive behavior
 2. changing the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs that lead to substance abuse and violent behavior
 3. promoting or strengthening behaviors and skills

An effective program is also research based.

- **Promising Program**—A program that shows promise for reducing drug use or violence or for increasing protective factors. Promising programs need further evaluation before they may be termed effective.

Preventive Strategies

- ✓ Education
- ✓ Legal/Regulatory
- ✓ Environmental



Key Elements of Effective Programs

- ✓ information
- ✓ communication and assertiveness skills
- ✓ decision-making skills
- ✓ refusal/resistance skills
- ✓ coping skills



Key Elements of Effective Programs

- ✓ goal-setting activities
- ✓ peer helpers / peer education
- ✓ parent involvement
- ✓ public information and education campaigns



Educational Strategies of Promise

- ✓ Social Skills
- ✓ Mentoring
- ✓ Anger Management
- ✓ Empathy and Perspective Taking
- ✓ Conflict Resolution



Understanding the Individual

OBJECTIVES

After this learning experience, participants will be able to:

1. identify early warning signs of potentially violent individuals' behavior
2. describe their role in the referral process
3. identify ways to assist troubled students

CONTENT

In response to the violence that was plaguing some of our nation's schools, the Department of Education, in conjunction with the Department of Justice and other federal agencies, developed the *Early Warning Signs—Timely Response** document. This handbook was not developed as a checklist or as an excuse to exclude, but as a tool—a resource to assist us in identifying and assisting children who are in need.

The *Early Warning Signs—Timely Response Guide* encourages participants to adhere to these principles:

- Do no harm.
- Avoid stereotypes.
- Understand violence and aggression within a context.
- View warning signs within a developmental context.
- Understand that children typically display multiple warning signs.

*This document and the implementation guide, *Safe Guarding Our Children*, can be downloaded from the following Website: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/ActionGuide>



Appendixes



OJJDP

John J. Wilson, Acting Administrator

April 2000

JUVENILE JUSTICE BULLETIN

Predictors of Youth Violence

J. David Hawkins, Todd I. Herrenkohl, David P. Farrington, Devon Brewer, Richard F. Catalano, Tracy W. Harachi, and Lynn Cothorn

Identifying and addressing the predictors of youth violence at appropriate points in youth development is important for prevention. Unfortunately, there have been few high-quality longitudinal studies of the predictors of youth violence. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Study Group on Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders (Study Group) brought 22 researchers together for 2 years to analyze current research on risk and protective factors and the development of serious and violent juvenile offending careers.

Together, data from the long-term studies that have identified predictors of youth violence can help determine violence prevention policy and practice. This Bulletin describes the strength and duration of changeable risk and protective factors for youth violence at points in youth development when they appear most salient. These predictors are potential targets for prevention and intervention. If risk factors can be decreased and protective factors enhanced by preventive action, then the likelihood of violence should be reduced.

Study Sample

The quantitative results of a large number of studies were synthesized using meta-

analysis procedures. The 66 studies examined here were drawn from Lipsey and Derzon's bibliography (1998) and supplemented by research reports provided by OJJDP Study Group members and analyses of the Seattle Social Development Project longitudinal data set. The studies selected for this review met the following six criteria:

- ◆ Subjects were juveniles living in their community (i.e., they were not incarcerated) when they were first assessed.
- ◆ Subjects were not chosen for having committed prior criminal or violent offenses.
- ◆ Studies measured interpersonal physical violence or acts resulting in physical injury or threat of physical injury to another person, excluding suicidal behavior.
- ◆ Studies identified a modifiable indicator of a meaningful predictor or risk factor. Studies of interactions between multiple risk factors were excluded, as were discussions of race and gender, as predictors of violence.
- ◆ The study design was longitudinal, with results based on prospective or retrospective data so that exposure to risk factors preceded violence.

From the Administrator

If we could confidently predict which youth would be prone to commit violent acts and at which stage in their development such delinquency was most likely to erupt, it would significantly strengthen our efforts to prevent juvenile violence.

Accordingly, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Study Group on Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders devoted 2 years to analyzing the research on risk and protective factors for serious and violent juvenile offending, including predictors of juvenile violence derived from the findings of long-term studies.

This Bulletin describes a number of such risk and protective factors, including individual, family, school, peer-related, community/neighborhood, and situational factors.

Although we need additional research on juvenile violence, the information this Bulletin provides will enhance our understanding of the predictors of youth violence. I would also call your attention to the Study Group Report and to the Bulletin summarizing it, both of which may be obtained from OJJDP's Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse.

John J. Wilson
Acting Administrator

- ◆ Individual subjects served as the unit of analysis for both independent and dependent variables.

Methodology

A statistical analysis was performed to determine the strength of the association between particular risk factors and the violence incurred. To account for the fact that each study used different methods, this relationship was expressed as a correlation coefficient, which was arrived at using standard meta-analytical procedures (Rosenthal, 1991). The findings from two or more studies were summarized as a weighted mean correlation, which gives more weight to studies with large samples than to studies with small samples.

The strength of the association between a risk factor and subsequent violence can also be expressed as an odds ratio (the odds of violence in the group with a particular risk factor divided by the odds of violence in the group without that risk factor). An odds ratio expresses the degree of increased risk for violence associated with the presence of a risk factor in a population. For example, an odds ratio of 2 indicates a doubling of risk. This Bulletin provides odds ratios for predictors when they were given or could be compiled from the information provided in a study.

Results

Predictors are arranged in five domains: individual, family, school, peer-related, and community and neighborhood factors. The following malleable predictors of violence are discussed in more detail below.

- ◆ **Individual factors:**
 - ❖ Pregnancy and delivery complications.
 - ❖ Low resting heart rate.
 - ❖ Internalizing disorders.
 - ❖ Hyperactivity, concentration problems, restlessness, and risk taking.
 - ❖ Aggressiveness.
 - ❖ Early initiation of violent behavior.
 - ❖ Involvement in other forms of antisocial behavior.
 - ❖ Beliefs and attitudes favorable to deviant or antisocial behavior.

- ◆ **Family factors:**
 - ❖ Parental criminality.
 - ❖ Child maltreatment.
 - ❖ Poor family management practices.
 - ❖ Low levels of parental involvement.
 - ❖ Poor family bonding and family conflict.
 - ❖ Parental attitudes favorable to substance use and violence.
 - ❖ Parent-child separation.
- ◆ **School factors:**
 - ❖ Academic failure.
 - ❖ Low bonding to school.
 - ❖ Truancy and dropping out of school.
 - ❖ Frequent school transitions.
- ◆ **Peer-related factors:**
 - ❖ Delinquent siblings.
 - ❖ Delinquent peers.
 - ❖ Gang membership.
- ◆ **Community and neighborhood factors:**
 - ❖ Poverty.
 - ❖ Community disorganization.
 - ❖ Availability of drugs and firearms.
 - ❖ Neighborhood adults involved in crime.
 - ❖ Exposure to violence and racial prejudice.

Individual Medical and Physical Factors

Pregnancy and delivery complications. Prenatal and delivery trauma are somewhat predictive of later violence, although findings vary with the research methods used.

Kandel and Mednick (1991) found that 80 percent of violent offenders scored high in delivery complications, compared with 30 percent of property offenders and 47 percent of nonoffenders. However, other studies have not found an association between pregnancy and delivery complications and violence (Denno, 1990; Farrington, 1997). Mednick and Kandel found in an earlier study (1988) that a stable home environment served as a protective factor against prenatal trauma.

Low resting heart rate. This predictor is thought to indicate a fearless temperament or underarousal, which may predispose an individual to aggression and violence (Raine and Jones, 1987). Research indicates that a low resting pulse rate is a weak predictor of violent crime (Farrington, 1998; Wadsworth, 1976).

The evidence currently does not warrant using either of these predictors—pregnancy and delivery complications or low resting heart rate—to identify youth at risk for violent behavior. More research is needed on these factors and their possible effects on violence.

Individual Psychological Factors

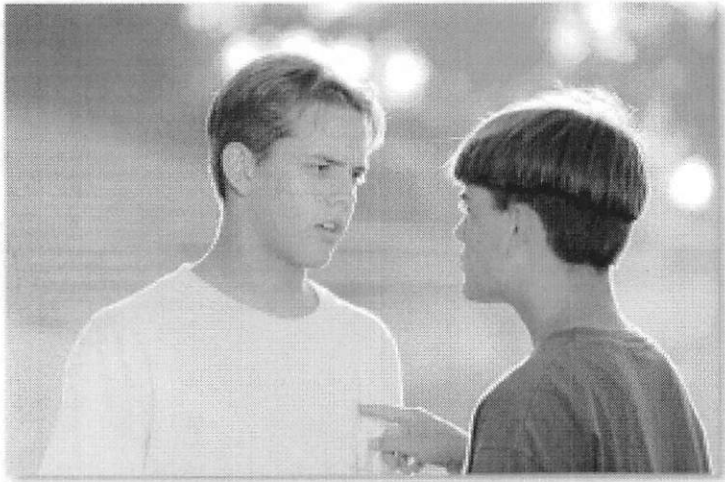
Internalizing disorders (nervousness/withdrawal, worrying, and anxiety). This category of psychological characteristics has a slight negative correlation with (Mitchell and Rosa, 1979), or is unrelated to, later violence (Farrington, 1989).

Hyperactivity, concentration problems, restlessness, and risk taking. Evidence from studies in this meta-analysis consistently suggests a correlation between these problems and later violent behavior.

In a longitudinal study in Sweden, 15 percent of boys with both restlessness and concentration difficulties at age 13 were arrested for violence by age 26. Boys with restlessness and concentration difficulties were five times more likely to be arrested for violence than boys without these characteristics (Klinterberg et al., 1993).

In another study, Farrington (1989) found that teacher ratings of male children's concentration problems and restlessness—including difficulty sitting still, the tendency to fidget, and frequent talkativeness—predicted later violence. Concentration problems also predicted academic difficulties, which predict later violence. Multivariate models are needed to understand the pathways leading to violent behavior.

Aggressiveness. Aggressive behavior measured from ages 6 to 13 consistently predicts later violence among males. Many researchers have noted the continuity in antisocial behavior from early aggression to violent crime (Loeber,



1990, 1996; Loeber and Hay, 1996; Olweus, 1979). A study in Orebro, Sweden, found that two-thirds of boys with high teacher-rated aggression scores at ages 10 and 13 had criminal records for violent offenses by age 26. They were more than six times more likely than boys who were not rated aggressive to be violent offenders (Stattin and Magnusson, 1989).

In a sample of African American boys in the Woodlawn area of Chicago, IL, nearly half of the 6-year-old boys who had been rated aggressive by teachers were arrested for violent crimes by age 33, compared with one-third of their nonaggressive counterparts (McCord and Ensminger, 1995). This relationship also held for males in hyperactive samples (Loney, Kramer, and Milich, 1983).

Research results for females are less consistent. McCord and Ensminger (1995) found similar results for males and females; however, Stattin and Magnusson (1989) did not find a relationship between early female aggression and later violent offenses.

Early initiation of violent behavior.

Research has shown that early onset of violence and delinquency is associated with more serious and chronic violence (Farrington, 1991; Piper, 1985; Thornberry, Huizinga, and Loeber, 1995; Tolan and Thomas, 1995). Farrington (1995) found that one-half of boys adjudicated delinquent for a violent offense between age 10 and age 16 were convicted of a violent crime by age 24, compared with only 8 percent of juveniles between age 10 and age

16 not adjudicated delinquent for a violent crime as juveniles.

Involvement in other forms of antisocial behavior. Involvement in antisocial behaviors, including stealing and destruction of property (Mitchell and Rosa, 1979); self-reported delinquency, smoking, and early sexual intercourse (Farrington, 1989); and drug selling (Maguin et al., 1995), is associated with a greater risk of violence among males. Robins (1966) found a similar pattern among male psychiatric patients but did not find similar patterns for females.

Beliefs and attitudes favorable to deviant or antisocial behavior. Dishonesty, antisocial beliefs and attitudes, attitudes favorable to violence, and hostility toward police have been found to predict later violence among males. Relationships between these predictors and violence are less consistent for females (Williams, 1994). Prevention programs that help youth develop positive beliefs and standards so that they can reject violence, cheating, and rule breaking may reduce the risk for violence.

Family Factors

Parental criminality. Baker and Mednick (1984) found that men ages 18–23 with criminal fathers were 3.8 times more likely to have committed violent criminal acts than those with noncriminal fathers. Farrington (1989) also found that boys who had a parent arrested before their 10th birthday were 2.2 times more likely

to commit violent crimes than those with noncriminal parents.

In contrast, Moffitt (1987) found that adults (ages 29–52) with criminal parents were not much more likely to be arrested for a violent offense than those with noncriminal parents. Further research is necessary to understand the contribution of parental criminality to child behavior.

The relationship between parental alcoholism and mental illness and children's violent behavior has been examined. McCord (1979) did not find a link between fathers' alcoholism and criminal conduct and their sons' later violence. In a study of male adoptees, Moffitt (1987) found a small and inconsistent relationship between parental mental illness and violence in children.

Child maltreatment. Studies have examined three forms of child maltreatment: physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. Evidence suggests that children who have been physically abused or neglected are more likely than others to commit violent crimes later in life (Widom, 1989; Zingraff et al., 1993; Smith and Thornberry, 1995).

Poor family management practices. Family management practices such as failure to set clear expectations for children's behavior, poor monitoring and supervision, and severe and inconsistent discipline consistently predict later delinquency and substance abuse (Capaldi and Patterson, 1996; Hawkins, Arthur, and Catalano, 1995). In a sample followed up on after 20 years, the McCords found that parents' poor supervision and aggressive discipline predicted their children's convictions for person crimes well into their forties (McCord, McCord, and Zola, 1959; McCord, 1979).

Wells and Rankin (1988) found that boys with very strict parents reported the most violence. Boys with very permissive parents reported the second highest level of violence. Boys with parents who were neither too strict nor too lax reported the least violence. Also, boys whose parents punished them inconsistently, sometimes punishing and sometimes ignoring the same behavior, were more likely to commit an offense against other persons than boys whose parents punished them more consistently. Parental punitiveness or harshness in discipline also predicted later violence.

Farrington (1989) found that poor child-rearing; an authoritarian parenting style; poor parental supervision; harsh parental discipline; a cruel, passive, or neglectful parenting attitude; and parental disagreement about childrearing each predicted later violence. Maguin and colleagues (1995) found that poor family management practices when boys were ages 14–16 predicted self-reported violence by age 18, although poor family management practices when boys were age 10 did not predict violence at age 18. An analysis of a subsample of the Seattle Social Development Project data found that proactive family management practices at age 14 reduced the likelihood of self-reported violence at age 16 for African American and Caucasian males and females (Williams, 1994).

Low levels of parental involvement.

Strong parental involvement can function as a protective factor against violence. Conversely, a lack of parental interaction and involvement with children may increase children's future risk for violence. Williams (1994) found that parent-child communication and involvement at age 14 predicted less self-reported violent behavior at age 16. This relationship was weaker for females than for males. Similarly, Farrington (1989) found that sons whose fathers did not engage in leisure activities with them more often exhibited violent behavior as teenagers and adults and were more likely to be convicted for a violent offense.

Poor family bonding and conflict. Few studies have looked specifically at the relationship between family bonding and violent behavior. Some research has shown a nonsignificant relationship between poor family bonding and violence (Williams, 1994; Elliott, 1994). Studies investigating this link should distinguish between bonding to prosocial versus antisocial or criminal family members (Foshee and Bauman, 1992).

Exposure to high levels of marital and family conflict also appears to increase the risk of later violence (Farrington, 1989; McCord, 1979; Maguin et al., 1995; Elliott, 1994).

Parental attitudes favorable to substance use and violence. Research indicates that parental attitudes favorable to behaviors such as alcohol use predict use of alcohol and drugs by youth (Peterson et al., 1994),

but little research has examined the impact of parental attitudes to violence on children's behavior. One study showed that children who at age 10 had parents who were tolerant of violent behavior were more likely to report violent behavior by age 18 (Maguin et al., 1995).

Residential mobility. Little research has focused on the effect of a family's mobility on youth violence. Maguin and colleagues (1995) found that the number of changes in residence in the past year, assessed when boys were age 16, predicted self-reported violent behavior by 18. Residential mobility assessed when boys were age 14, however, did not significantly predict violence at age 18. This discrepancy may indicate that residential moves have short-term effects on behavior, but more research is needed to understand the relationship.

Parent-child separation. Evidence indicates that disruptions of parent-child relationships predict later violent behavior in children. Parent-child separation before age 10 has been found to predict violence (Farrington, 1989; Wadsworth, 1978). Henry and colleagues (1996) found that having a single-parent family when boys were age 13 predicted their convictions for violence by age 18. An association also has been found between leaving home at an early age and high levels

of violence in both men and women (McCord and Ensminger, 1995). However, many other factors that also predict violence can contribute to parent-child separations. Multivariate studies are needed to understand the interactions among these factors.

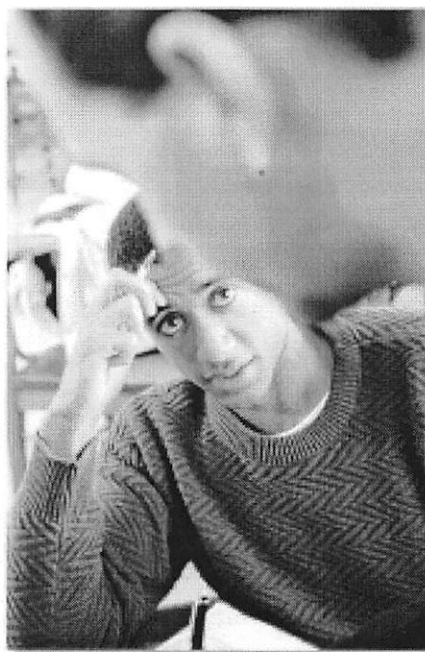
School Factors

Various aspects of school-related experiences, such as low educational achievement, low interest in education, dropping out of school, truancy, and poor-quality schools, have been hypothesized to contribute to criminal and violent behavior (Hawkins, Farrington, and Catalano, 1998).

Academic failure. Poor academic achievement has consistently predicted later delinquency (Maguin and Loeber, 1996; Denno, 1990). Academic failure in the elementary grades also increases risk for later violent behavior (Farrington, 1989; Maguin et al., 1995). The relationship between poor academic achievement and later violence has been found to be stronger for females than for males.

Low bonding to school. Research generally supports the hypothesis that bonding to school is a protective factor against crime (Catalano and Hawkins, 1996; Hirschi, 1969). Williams (1994) found that school bonding was a stronger protective factor against violence in African American students and in boys and was less linked to violence in Caucasian students and in girls. Maguin and colleagues (1995) found that low commitment to school and low educational aspirations at age 10 did not predict later violence, but at ages 14 and 16 these factors increased the risk for violence. Other researchers have reported that lack of school bonding was not a significant predictor of serious and violent offending (Elliott, 1994; Mitchell and Rosa, 1979).

Truancy and dropping out of school. Farrington (1989) found that youth with high truancy rates at ages 12–14 were more likely to engage in violence as adolescents and adults; leaving school before the age of 15 also predicted later violence. Truancy and dropping out may be indicators of low school bonding, but children also may miss school or leave school early for other reasons (Janosz et al., 1996).



Frequent school transitions. Maguin and colleagues (1995) found that youth who had changed schools often in the past year at ages 14 and 16 were more violent at age 18 than those who had not. Conclusions must be drawn carefully, however, because school transitions can be related to other factors that predict violence.

High delinquency rate school. Farrington (1989) found that boys who at age 11 attended schools with high delinquency rates reported more violent behavior than other youth.

Peer-Related Factors

Delinquent siblings. Farrington (1989) found that having delinquent siblings by age 10 predicted later convictions for violence. Maguin and colleagues (1995) found that the association between having delinquent siblings and being convicted for violence was stronger when sibling delinquency occurred closer in time to the violent youth's offense and later in that youth's development, indicating that antisocial siblings have a stronger negative influence during their sibling's adolescence than earlier in the child's development. Williams (1994) found that the influence of delinquent siblings was stronger on girls than on boys.

Delinquent peers. Delinquent peers also may have a greater influence on later violence during an individual's adolescence than they do earlier in development (Moffitt, 1993). Research has shown that adolescents whose peers disapproved of delinquent behavior were less likely to report having committed delinquent acts (Elliott, 1994), including sexual assaults (Ageton, 1983).

Gang membership. Battin and colleagues (1998) showed that being a gang member contributes more to delinquency than does having delinquent peers.

Community and Neighborhood Factors

Community factors, including poverty, low neighborhood attachment and community disorganization, the availability of drugs and firearms, exposure to violence and racial prejudice, laws and norms favorable to violence, and frequent media portrayals of violence,



may contribute to crime and violence (Brewer et al., 1995).

Poverty. Being raised in poverty has been found to contribute to a greater likelihood of involvement in crime and violence (Sampson and Lauritsen, 1994). Self-reported felony assault and robbery have been found to be twice as common among youth living in poverty as among middle-class youth (Elliott, Huizinga, and Menard, 1989). Low family income predicted self-reported teen violence and convictions for violent offenses in several studies (Farrington, 1989; Wikström, 1985; Hogh and Wolf, 1983; Henry et al., 1996).

Community disorganization. Maguin and colleagues (1995) examined community disorganization and low neighborhood attachment as predictors of violence. Community disorganization (that is, the presence of crime, drug-selling, gangs, and poor housing) was a better predictor of violence than low attachment to a neighborhood.

Availability of drugs and firearms. In one study, a prevalence of drugs and firearms in the community predicted greater variety in violent behaviors at age 18 (Maguin et al., 1995).

Neighborhood adults involved in crime. Maguin and colleagues (1995) found that children who knew many adult criminals were more likely to engage in violent behavior by age 18. More longitudinal studies investigating the influence of this factor on youth violence are needed.

Exposure to violence and racial prejudice.

Exposure to violence in the home and elsewhere increases a child's risk for involvement in violent behavior later in life (Paschall, 1996). McCord and Ensminger (1995) also found that African American study participants who reported having experienced racial discrimination committed more violent acts.

Situational Factors

Situational factors are the circumstances that surround a violent event and influence the outcome of that event. These factors may be predictors of violent behavior and may include the presence of a weapon, consumption of alcohol or other drugs by the offender or victim, the behavior of bystanders, the motives of the offender, the relationship of the offender to the victim, and the behavior of the victim (Sampson and Lauritsen, 1994; Farrington and Loeber, 1999). However, the contribution of these factors is difficult to assess because data have not been collected from other situations with similar characteristics in which violence did not occur. Longitudinal studies to investigate these situational triggers are needed.

Multiple Predictors and Strength of Prediction

In the Seattle Social Development Project, Herrenkohl and colleagues (in press) investigated the power of diverse factors seen at ages 10, 14, and 16 to predict violent behavior by the age of 18. More

Predictors of Violent or Serious Delinquency by Age Group: A Comparative Ranking¹

Introduction

Researchers Mark W. Lipsey and James H. Derzon (1998) examined predictors of violent or serious delinquency in adolescence and early adulthood. Applying the procedures used for a meta-analysis, Lipsey and Derzon compiled information from published and unpublished research into a database that indexed the strength of the relationship between the predictor variable and the criterion variable in terms of effect sizes. Through a statistical analysis, the relative strength of different types of predictor variables was measured at different ages, and procedures were used to control for methodological differences between studies. The first goal was to determine which predictors seen at adolescence had the strongest empirical associations with subsequent violence or delinquency. The second goal was to identify which of those associations were of sufficient magnitude to help identify at-risk juveniles to receive intervention.

Results

The table on page 7 lists the predictors of violent or serious delinquency at ages 6–11 and ages 12–14 in the order of significance determined by the statistical analysis and in groups based on estimated aggregated effect size.

The most interesting comparisons follow:

- ◆ The best predictors of violent or serious delinquency differ according to age group. A juvenile offense at ages 6–11 is the strongest predictor of subsequent violent or serious delinquency even if the offense did not involve violence. For the 12–14 age group, a juvenile offense is the second most powerful predictor of future violence. Substance abuse is among the best predictors of future violence for children ages 6–11 but one of the poorest predictors for children ages 12–14.
- ◆ The two strongest predictors of subsequent violence for the 12–14 age group—the lack of social ties and

involvement with antisocial peers—have to do with interpersonal relations. The same predictors, however, are relatively weak for the 6–11 age group.

- ◆ Relatively fixed personal characteristics are the second- and third-rank predictors of subsequent violence for the 6–11 age group. The ages 12–14 group has a heavier representation of behavioral predictors of subsequent violence (i.e., general offenses, aggression, and school performance).
- ◆ Broken homes and abusive parents are among the poorest predictors of subsequent violence for both age groups.
- ◆ The significance of antisocial peers and substance abuse is reversed in the two age groups. Whereas having antisocial peers is a strong predictor for the age 12–14 group, it is a weak predictor for the age 6–11 group.

Implications for Intervention

For an intervention to be effective, the targeted risk factors must be amenable to change. The strongest predictors of subsequent violence for both age groups are relatively malleable factors. Because they are cumulative, the second rank of variables for the 6–11 age group, the effects of antisocial parents and socioeconomic status, may not be very amenable to change—and gender is not subject to change. The predictors in the first, second, and third rank (except for male gender) for juveniles ages 12–14 are malleable.

Because many of the strongest predictors of subsequent violence can be changed, they offer possible targets for successful intervention. This suggests that disrupting early patterns of antisocial behavior and negative peer support is a promising strategy for the prevention of violence and serious delinquency.

For more information about the meta-analysis discussed here, please see Lipsey and Derzon, 1998.

continued on next page

¹ This sidebar is based on "Predictors of Violent or Serious Delinquency in Adolescence and Early Adulthood," by M.W. Lipsey and J.H. Derzon, in *Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders: Risk Factors and Successful Interventions*, edited by Rolf Loeber and David P. Farrington (Sage Publications, Inc., 1998).

than 17 percent of youth committed a violent act by age 18, and 80 percent of them were expected to do so based on significant predictors seen at age 10. Eighty-four percent were expected to do so based on the significant predictors seen at age 16. The results of the Seattle project are described below for each domain—individual, family, school, peers, and community and neighborhood (Herrenkohl et al., in press).

◆ Individual:

- ◆ Hyperactivity or attention deficits at age 10, 14, or 16 doubled the risk of violent behavior at age 18.
- ◆ Sensation seeking and involvement in drug selling at ages 14 and 16 more than tripled the risk of involvement in violence.

◆ Family:

- ◆ Parental attitudes favorable to violence when subjects were age 10

more than doubled the risk that subjects would engage in violence at age 18.

- ◆ Poor family management practices and family conflict when subjects were age 10 were not significant predictors of later violence. However, poor family management practices when subjects were age 14 doubled the risk for later involvement in violence.

Table: Ranking of Ages 6–11 and Ages 12–14 Predictors of Violent or Serious Delinquency at Ages 15–25

Predictors at Ages 6–11	Predictors at Ages 12–14
Rank 1 Group	
General offenses (.38) Substance use (.30)	Social ties (.39) Antisocial peers (.37)
Rank 2 Group	
Gender (male) (.26) Family socioeconomic status (.24) Antisocial parents (.23)	General offenses (.26)
Rank 3 Group	
Aggression (.21) Ethnicity (.20)	Aggression (.19) School attitude/performance (.19) Psychological condition (.19) Parent-child relations (.19) Gender (male) (.19) Physical violence (.18)
Rank 4 Group	
Psychological condition (.15) Parent-child relations (.15) Social ties (.15) Problem behavior (.13) School attitude/performance (.13) Medical/physical characteristics (.13) IQ (.12) Other family characteristics (.12)	Antisocial parents (.16) Person crimes (.14) Problem behavior (.12) IQ (.11)
Rank 5 Group	
Broken home (.09) Abusive parents (.07) Antisocial peers (.04)	Broken home (.10) Family socioeconomic status (.10) Abusive parents (.09) Other family characteristics (.08) Substance abuse (.06) Ethnicity (.04)

Note: The value in parentheses is the mean correlation between the predictor and the outcome, adjusted to equate the source studies on relevant methodological features.

- ❖ Parental criminality when subjects were age 14 (not assessed at age 10) more than doubled the risk for involvement in violence at age 18.
- ❖ When subjects were age 16, parental criminality, poor family management, family conflict, and residential mobility at least doubled the risk for involvement in violence at age 18.

◆ **School:**

- ❖ Low academic performance at ages 10, 14, and 16 predicted an increased risk for involvement in violence at age 18.
- ❖ Behavior problems at school (as rated by teachers) when subjects were age 10 significantly predicted involvement in violence at age 18.

- ❖ Low commitment to schooling, low educational aspirations, and multiple school transitions at ages 14 and 16 predicted a significantly increased risk for involvement in violence at age 18.

◆ **Peers:**

- ❖ Having delinquent friends at ages 10, 14, and 16 predicted an increased risk for later involvement in violence.
- ❖ Gang membership at age 14 more than tripled the risk for involvement in violence at age 18.
- ❖ Gang membership when subjects were age 16 more than quadrupled the risk for involvement in violence at age 18.

◆ **Community and neighborhood:**

- ❖ Community disorganization, the availability of drugs, and knowing adults involved in criminal activities at ages 14 and 16 all were associated with an increased risk for later involvement in violence.

Conclusion

More research needs to be done on youth violence, including studies that contrast violent offenders and nonviolent offenders/nonoffenders. Research is also required to better understand the protective factors that mitigate the effects of risk exposure. Many predictors of violent behavior are predictors of other problems, such as substance abuse, delinquency, school dropout, and teen pregnancy (Dryfoos, 1991; Hawkins, Catalano, and Miller, 1992). The risk of violence is also compounded by the number of risk factors involved. The Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development (Farrington, 1997) found that the percentage of youth convicted for violent crimes increased from only 3 percent for those with no risk factors to 31 percent for those with four risk factors (low family income, large family size, low nonverbal IQ at ages 8–19, and poor parental childrearing behavior).

The larger the number of risk factors to which an individual is exposed, the greater the probability that the individual will engage in violent behavior. Multicomponent interventions targeting identification of shared predictors and

constellations of risk factors may be more effective in preventing violence than those that target single risk factors.

For more information about this meta-analysis, the studies that were examined, and the procedures that were used, see Hawkins et al., 1998.

For Further Information

The following publications are available from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse (JJC). For more information or to order a copy, contact JJC, 800-638-8736 (phone), 301-519-5600 (fax), puborder@ncjrs.org (e-mail), www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org (Internet).

- ◆ **Summary of Study Group's Final Report.** To help communities and practitioners learn more about serious and violent juvenile offenders, OJJDP released a Bulletin that summarizes the Study Group's final report. The 8-page Bulletin, *Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders* (May 1998), is available (free of charge) from JJC.
- ◆ **Final Study Group Report.** The Study Group's final report, *Never Too Early, Never Too Late: Risk Factors and Successful Interventions for Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders* (Loeber and Farrington, 1997), is also available (for a fee) from JJC.

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OJJDP Study Group

In 1995, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) convened a Study Group on Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders, a distinguished panel brought together to build a research base for policymakers and practitioners who deal with juveniles who engage in serious and violent conduct. The group, chaired by Drs. Rolf Loeber and David P. Farrington, included 22 leading juvenile justice and criminology scholars selected on the basis of their expert knowledge of different aspects of serious and violent juvenile (SVJ) offending. The OJJDP Study Group documented existing information about SVJ offenders, examined programs for SVJ offenders, evaluated the programs' performance, and recommended further research and evaluation efforts needed to prevent and control SVJ offending.

The Study Group's final report, *Never Too Early, Never Too Late: Risk Factors and Successful Interventions for Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders*, was completed in 1997 under grant number 95-JD-FX-0018. The conclusions of the Study Group were subsequently set forth in a volume entitled *Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders: Risk Factors and Successful Interventions*, edited by the Study Group's coauthors, Rolf Loeber and David P. Farrington, and published by Sage Publications, Inc., in 1998.

This Bulletin was adapted from two chapters of the published volume. The main text was adapted from "A Review of Predictors of Youth Violence," by J. David Hawkins, Todd I. Herrenkohl, David P. Farrington, Devon Brewer, Richard F. Catalano, and Tracy W. Harachi. The sidebar text and table were adapted from "Predictors of Violent or Serious Delinquency in Adolescence and Early Adulthood," by Mark W. Lipsey and James H. Derzon.

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A Guide to Safe Schools

Organizations Supporting This Guide

American Association of
School Administrators

American Counseling
Association

American Federation of
Teachers

American School Counselors
Association

Council of Administrators of
Special Education

Council for Exceptional
Children

Federation of Families for
Children's Mental Health

National Association of
Elementary School
Principals

National Association of
School Psychologists

National Association of
Secondary School
Principals

National Association of
State Boards of Education

National Education
Association

National Mental Health
Association

National Middle Schools
Association

National PTA

National School Boards
Association

National School Public
Relations Association

Police Executive Research
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August 1998



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202

August 22, 1998

Dear Principal and Teachers:

On June 13, after the tragic loss of life and injuries at Thurston High School in Springfield, Oregon, President Clinton directed the Department of Education and the Department of Justice to develop an early warning guide to help "adults reach out to troubled children quickly and effectively." This guide responds to that Presidential request. It is our sincere hope that this guide will provide you with the practical help needed to keep every child in your school out of harm's way.

America's schools are among the safest places to be on a day-to-day basis, due to the strong commitment of educators, parents, and communities to their children. Nevertheless, last year's tragic and sudden acts of violence in our nation's schools remind us that no community can be complacent in its efforts to make its schools even safer. An effective and safe school is the vital center of every community whether it is in a large urban area or a small rural community.

Central to this guide are the key insights that keeping children safe is a community-wide effort and that effective schools create environments where children and young people truly feel connected. This is why our common goal must be to reconnect with every child and particularly with those young people who are isolated and troubled.

This guide should be seen as part of an overall effort to make sure that every school in this nation has a comprehensive violence prevention plan in place. We also caution you to recognize that over labeling and using this guide to stigmatize children in a cursory way that leads to over-reaction is harmful. The guidelines in this report are based on research and the positive experiences of schools around the country where the value and potential of each and every child is cherished and where good practices have produced, and continue to produce, successful students and communities.

We are grateful to the many experts, agencies, and associations in education, law enforcement, juvenile justice, mental health, and other social services that worked closely with us to make sure that this report is available for the start of school this fall. We hope that you and your students and staff, as well as parents and the community, will benefit from this information.

Sincerely,

Richard W. Riley
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education

Janet Reno
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice



Early Warning, Timely Response

A Guide to Safe Schools

Although most schools are safe, the violence that occurs in our neighborhoods and communities has found its way inside the schoolhouse door. However, if we understand what leads to violence and the types of support that research has shown are effective in preventing violence, we can make our schools safer.

Research-based practices can help school communities—administrators, teachers, families, students, support staff, and community members—recognize the warning signs early, so children can get the help they need before it is too late. This guide presents a brief summary of the research on violence prevention and intervention and crisis response in schools. It tells school communities:

- **What to look for**—the early warning signs that relate to violence and other troubling behaviors.
- **What to do**—the action steps that school communities can take to prevent violence and other troubling behaviors, to intervene and get help for troubled children, and to respond to school violence when it occurs.

Sections in this guide include:

- **Section 1: Introduction.** All staff, students, parents, and members of the community must be part of creating a safe school environment. Schools must have in place approaches for addressing the needs of all children who have troubling behaviors. This section describes the rationale for the guide and suggests how it can be used by school communities to develop a plan of action.
- **Section 2: Characteristics of a School That Is Safe and Responsive to All Children.** Well functioning schools foster learning, safety, and socially appropriate behaviors. They have a strong academic focus and support students in achieving high standards, foster positive relationships between school staff and students, and promote meaningful parental and community involvement. This section describes characteristics of schools that support prevention, appropriate intervention, and effective crisis response.
- **Section 3: Early Warning Signs.** There are early warning

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signs that, when viewed in context, can signal a troubled child. Educators and parents—and in some cases, students—can use several significant principles to ensure that the early warning signs are not misinterpreted. This section presents early warning signs, imminent warning signs, and the principles that ensure these signs will not be misinterpreted. It concludes with a brief description of using the early warning signs to shape intervention practices.

- **Section 4: Getting Help for Troubled Children.** Effective interventions for improving the behavior of troubled children are well documented in the research literature. This section presents research- and expert-based principles that should provide the foundation for all intervention development. It describes what to do when intervening early with students who are at risk for behavioral problems, when responding with intensive interventions for individual children, and when providing a foundation to prevent and reduce violent behavior.
- **Section 5: Developing a Prevention and Response Plan.** Effective schools create a violence prevention and response plan and form a team that can ensure it is implemented. They use approaches and strategies based on research about what

works. This section offers suggestions for developing such plans.

- **Section 6: Responding to Crisis.** Effective and safe schools are well prepared for any potential crisis or violent act. This section describes what to do when intervening during a crisis to ensure safety and when responding in the aftermath of crisis. The principles that underlie effective crisis response are included.
- **Section 7: Conclusion.** This section summarizes the guide.
- **Section 8: Methodology, Contributors, and Research Support.** This guide synthesizes an extensive knowledge base on violence and violence prevention. This section describes the rigorous development and review process that was used. It also provides information about the project's Web site.

A final section lists resources that can be contacted for more information.

The information in this guide is not intended as a comprehensive prevention, intervention, and response plan—school communities could do *everything* recommended and still experience violence. Rather, the intent is to provide school communities with reliable and practical information about what they can do to be prepared and to reduce the likelihood of violence.





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A Guide to Safe Schools

Most schools are safe. Although fewer than one percent of all violent deaths of children occur on school grounds—indeed, a child is far more likely to be killed in the community or at home—no school is immune.

The violence that occurs in our neighborhoods and communities has found its way inside the schoolhouse door. And while we can take some solace in the knowledge that schools are among the safest places for young people, we must do more. School violence reflects a much broader problem, one that can only be addressed when everyone—at school, at home, and in the community—works together.

The 1997-1998 school year served as a dramatic wake-up call to the fact that guns do come to school, and some students will use them to kill. One after the other, school communities across the country—from Oregon to Virginia, from Arkansas to Pennsylvania, from Mississippi to Kentucky—have been forced to face the fact that violence can happen to them. And while these serious incidents trouble us deeply, they should not prevent us from acting to prevent school violence of any kind.

There is ample documentation that prevention and early intervention efforts can reduce violence and other troubling behaviors in schools. Research-based practices can help school commu-

nities recognize the warning signs early, so children can get the help they need before it is too late. In fact, research suggests that some of the most promising prevention and intervention strategies involve the entire educational community—administrators, teachers, families, students, support staff, and community members—working together to form positive relationships with all children.

If we understand what leads to violence and the types of support that research has shown are effective in preventing violence and other troubling behaviors, we can make our schools safer.

About This Guide

This guide presents a brief summary of the research on violence prevention and intervention and crisis response in schools (see Section 8 for a review of methodology and information on how to locate the research). It tells members of school communities—especially administrators, teachers, staff, families, students, and community-based professionals:

- **What to look for**—the early warning signs that relate to violence and other troubling behaviors.
- **What to do**—the action steps that school communities can take to prevent violence and other troubling behaviors, to intervene and get help for



troubled children, and to respond to school violence when it occurs.

The information in each section is not intended as a comprehensive prevention, intervention, and response system or plan. Indeed, school violence occurs in a unique context in every school and every situation, making a one-size-fits-all scheme impossible. Moreover, school communities could do **everything** recommended and still experience violence. Rather, this guide is designed to provide school communities with reliable and practical information about what they can do to be prepared and to reduce the likelihood of violence.

Creating a safe school requires having in place many preventive measures for children's mental and emotional problems—as well as a comprehensive approach to early identification of **all** warning signs that might lead to violence toward self or others. The term “violence” as used in this booklet, refers to a broad range of troubling behaviors and emotions shown by students—including serious aggression, physical attacks, suicide, dangerous use of drugs, and other dangerous interpersonal behaviors. However, the early warning signs presented in this document focus primarily on aggressive and violent behaviors toward others. The guide does not attempt to address all of the warning signs related to depression and suicide. Nevertheless, some of the signs of potential violence toward others are also signs of depression and suicidal risk, which should be addressed through early iden-

tification and appropriate intervention.

Using the Guide To Develop a Plan of Action

All staff, students, parents, and members of the community must be part of creating a safe school environment:

- **Everyone** has a personal responsibility for reducing the risk of violence. We must take steps to maintain order, demonstrate mutual respect and caring for one another, and ensure that children who are troubled get the help they need.
- **Everyone** should have an understanding of the early warning signs that help identify students who may be headed for trouble.
- **Everyone** should be prepared to respond appropriately in a crisis situation.

Research and expert-based information offers a wealth of knowledge about preventing violence in schools. The following sections provide information—what to look for and what to do—that school communities can use when developing or enhancing violence prevention and response plans (see Section 5 for more information about these plans).

We hope that school communities will use this document as a guide as they begin the prevention and healing process today, at all age and grade levels, and for all students.

“Violence is a major concern to parents, students, teachers, and the administration of any school. We have found that our best plan starts with prevention and awareness. At our middle school, the school psychologist, in conjunction with the assistant principal, has developed an anti-intimidation and threat plan. Our school statistics reflect a dramatic decline in violence from the 1996-97 to the 1997-98 school year. We treat each and every student with respect. We are finding that they in turn are demonstrating a more respectful attitude.”

G. Norma Villar Baker,
Principal, Midvale, UT

Characteristics of a School That Is Safe and Responsive to All Children

Well functioning schools foster learning, safety, and socially appropriate behaviors. They have a strong academic focus and support students in achieving high standards, foster positive relationships between school staff and students, and promote meaningful parental and community involvement. Most prevention programs in effective schools address multiple factors and recognize that safety and order are related to children's social, emotional, and academic development.

Effective prevention, intervention, and crisis response strategies operate best in school communities that:

- **Focus on academic achievement.** Effective schools convey the attitude that all children can achieve academically and behave appropriately, while at the same time appreciating individual differences. Adequate resources and programs help ensure that expectations are met. Expectations are communicated clearly, with the understanding that meeting such expectations is a responsibility of the student, the school, and the home. Students who do not receive the support they need are less likely to behave in socially desirable ways.
- **Involve families in meaningful ways.** Students whose families are involved in their growth in and outside of school are more likely to experience school success and less likely to become involved in antisocial activities. School communities must make parents feel welcome in school, address barriers to their participation, and keep families positively engaged in their children's education. Effective schools also support families in expressing concerns about their children—and they support families in getting the help they need to address behaviors that cause concern.
- **Develop links to the community.** Everyone must be committed to improving schools. Schools that have close ties to families, support services, community police, the faith-based community, and the community at large can benefit from many valuable resources. When these links are weak, the risk of school violence is heightened and the opportunity to serve children who are at risk for violence or who may be affected by it is decreased.
- **Emphasize positive relationships among students and staff.** Research shows that a



"I just recently got out of the hospital. I was a victim of a shooting at my school. I've been teaching for 20 years and I never thought it could happen at my school. Some of the kids knew about it before it happened, but they didn't want to say anything—they have a code of honor and they did not want to tattle tale. But someone has to stand up, someone has to take a stand because, if you don't, then somebody else is going to get hurt."

**Gregory Carter, Teacher,
Richmond, VA**

positive relationship with an adult who is available to provide support when needed is one of the most critical factors in preventing student violence. Students often look to adults in the school community for guidance, support, and direction. Some children need help overcoming feelings of isolation and support in developing connections to others. Effective schools make sure that opportunities exist for adults to spend quality, personal time with children. Effective schools also foster positive student interpersonal relations—they encourage students to help each other and to feel comfortable assisting others in getting help when needed.

- **Discuss safety issues openly.** Children come to school with many different perceptions—and misconceptions—about death, violence, and the use of weapons. Schools can reduce the risk of violence by teaching children about the dangers of firearms, as well as appropriate strategies for dealing with feelings, expressing anger in appropriate ways, and resolving conflicts. Schools also should teach children that they are responsible for their actions and that the choices they make have consequences for which they will be held accountable.
- **Treat students with equal respect.** A major source of conflict in many schools is the perceived or real problem of bias and unfair treatment of students because of ethnicity, gender, race, social class, religion, disability, nationality, sexual

orientation, physical appearance, or some other factor—both by staff and by peers. Students who have been treated unfairly may become scapegoats and/or targets of violence. In some cases, victims may react in aggressive ways. Effective schools communicate to students and the greater community that all children are valued and respected. There is a deliberate and systematic effort—for example, displaying children's artwork, posting academic work prominently throughout the building, respecting students' diversity—to establish a climate that demonstrates care and a sense of community.

- **Create ways for students to share their concerns.** It has been found that peers often are the most likely group to know in advance about potential school violence. Schools must create ways for students to safely report such troubling behaviors that may lead to dangerous situations. And students who report potential school violence must be protected. It is important for schools to support and foster positive relationships between students and adults so students will feel safe providing information about a potentially dangerous situation.
- **Help children feel safe expressing their feelings.** It is very important that children feel safe when expressing their needs, fears, and anxieties to school staff. When they do not have access to caring adults, feelings of isolation, rejection, and disappointment are more likely to occur, increasing the probability of acting-out behaviors.

- **Have in place a system for referring children who are suspected of being abused or neglected.** The referral system must be appropriate and reflect federal and state guidelines.
- **Offer extended day programs for children.** School-based before- and after-school programs can be effective in reducing violence. Effective programs are well supervised and provide children with support and a range of options, such as counseling, tutoring, mentoring, cultural arts, community service, clubs, access to computers, and help with homework.
- **Promote good citizenship and character.** In addition to their academic mission, schools must help students become good citizens. First, schools stand for the civic values set forth in our Constitution and Bill of Rights (patriotism; freedom of religion, speech, and press; equal protection/nondiscrimination; and due process/fairness). Schools also reinforce and promote the shared values of their local communities, such as honesty, kindness, responsibility, and respect for others. Schools should acknowledge that parents are the primary moral educators of their children and work in partnership with them.
- **Identify problems and assess progress toward solutions.** Schools must openly and objec-

tively examine circumstances that are potentially dangerous for students and staff and situations where members of the school community feel threatened or intimidated. Safe schools continually assess progress by identifying problems and collecting information regarding progress toward solutions. Moreover, effective schools share this information with students, families, and the community at large.

- **Support students in making the transition to adult life and the workplace.** Youth need assistance in planning their future and in developing skills that will result in success. For example, schools can provide students with community service opportunities, work-study programs, and apprenticeships that help connect them to caring adults in the community. These relationships, when established early, foster in youth a sense of hope and security for the future.

Research has demonstrated repeatedly that school communities can do a great deal to prevent violence. Having in place a safe and responsive foundation helps **all** children—and it enables school communities to provide more efficient and effective services to students who need more support. The next step is to learn the early warning signs of a child who is troubled, so that effective interventions can be provided.

"We must avoid fragmentation in implementing programs. The concepts in preventing and responding to violence must be integrated into effective school reform, including socially and academically supportive instruction and caring, a welcoming atmosphere, and providing good options for recreation and enrichment."

Howard Adelman, Professor of Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles





Early Warning Signs

Why didn't we see it coming? In the wake of violence, we ask this question not so much to place blame, but to understand better what we can do to prevent such an occurrence from ever happening again. We review over and over in our minds the days leading up to the incident—did the child say or do anything that would have cued us in to the impending crisis? Did we miss an opportunity to help?

There are early warning signs in most cases of violence to self and others—certain behavioral and emotional signs that, when viewed in context, can signal a troubled child. But early warning signs are just that—indicators that a student may need help.

Such signs may or may not indicate a serious problem—they do not necessarily mean that a child is prone to violence toward self or others. Rather, early warning signs provide us with the impetus to check out our concerns and address the child's needs. Early warning signs allow us to act responsibly by getting help for the child before problems escalate.

Early warning signs can help frame concern for a child. However, it is important to avoid inappropriately labeling or stigmatizing individual students because they appear to fit a specific profile or set of early warning indicators. It's okay to be worried about

a child, but it's not okay to overreact and jump to conclusions.

Teachers and administrators—and other school support staff—are not professionally trained to analyze children's feelings and motives. But they are on the front line when it comes to observing troublesome behavior and making referrals to appropriate professionals, such as school psychologists, social workers, counselors, and nurses. They also play a significant role in responding to diagnostic information provided by specialists. Thus, it is no surprise that effective schools take special care in training the entire school community to understand and identify early warning signs.

When staff members seek help for a troubled child, when friends report worries about a peer or friend, when parents raise concerns about their child's thoughts or habits, children can get the help they need. By actively sharing information, a school community can provide quick, effective responses.

Principles for Identifying the Early Warning Signs of School Violence

Educators and families can increase their ability to recognize early warning signs by establishing close, caring, and supportive

Use the Signs Responsibly

It is important to avoid inappropriately labeling or stigmatizing individual students because they appear to fit a specific profile or set of early warning indicators. It's okay to be worried about a child, but it's not okay to overreact and jump to conclusions.

relationships with children and youth—getting to know them well enough to be aware of their needs, feelings, attitudes, and behavior patterns. Educators and parents together can review school records for patterns of behavior or sudden changes in behavior.

Unfortunately, **there is a real danger that early warning signs will be misinterpreted.** Educators and parents—and in some cases, students—can ensure that the early warning signs are not misinterpreted by using several significant principles to better understand them. These principles include:

- **Do no harm.** There are certain risks associated with using early warning signs to identify children who are troubled. First and foremost, the intent should be to get help for a child early. The early warning signs should not be used as rationale to exclude, isolate, or punish a child. Nor should they be used as a checklist for formally identifying, mislabeling, or stereotyping children. Formal disability identification under federal law requires individualized evaluation by qualified professionals. In addition, all referrals to outside agencies based on the early warning signs must be kept confidential and must be done with parental consent (except referrals for suspected child abuse or neglect).
- **Understand violence and aggression within a context.** Violence is contextual. Violent and aggressive behavior as an expression of emotion may have many antecedent factors—factors that exist within the school, the home, and the larger social environment. In fact, for those children who are at risk for aggression and violence, certain environments or situations can set it off. Some children may act out if stress becomes too great, if they lack positive coping skills, and if they have learned to react with aggression.
- **Avoid stereotypes.** Stereotypes can interfere with—and even harm—the school community's ability to identify and help children. It is important to be aware of false cues—including race, socio-economic status, cognitive or academic ability, or physical appearance. In fact, such stereotypes can unfairly harm children, especially when the school community acts upon them.
- **View warning signs within a developmental context.** Children and youth at different levels of development have varying social and emotional capabilities. They may express their needs differently in elementary, middle, and high school. The point is to know what is developmentally typical behavior, so that behaviors are not misinterpreted.
- **Understand that children typically exhibit multiple warning signs.** It is common for children who are troubled to exhibit multiple signs. Research confirms that most children who are troubled and at risk for aggression exhibit more than one warning sign, repeatedly, and with increasing intensity over time. Thus, it is important not to overreact to single signs, words, or actions.

"When doing consultation with school staff and families, we advise them to think of the early warning signs within a context. We encourage them to look for combinations of warning signs that might tell us the student's behavior is changing and becoming more problematic."

Deborah Crockett, School Psychologist, Atlanta, GA





Early Warning Signs

It is not always possible to predict behavior that will lead to violence. However, educators and parents—and sometimes students—can recognize certain early warning signs. In some situations and for some youth, different combinations of events, behaviors, and emotions may lead to aggressive rage or violent behavior toward self or others. A good rule of thumb is to assume that these warning signs, especially when they are presented in combination, indicate a need for further analysis to determine an appropriate intervention.

We know from research that most children who become violent toward self or others feel rejected and psychologically victimized. In most cases, children exhibit aggressive behavior early in life and, if not provided support, will continue a progressive developmental pattern toward severe aggression or violence. However, research also shows that when children have a positive, meaningful connection to an adult—whether it be at home, in school, or in the community—the potential for violence is reduced significantly.

None of these signs alone is sufficient for predicting aggression and violence. Moreover, it is inappropriate—and potentially harmful—to use the early warning signs as a checklist against which to match individual children. Rather, the early warning signs are offered only as an aid in identifying and referring children who may need help. School communities must ensure that staff and students only use the early warning signs for identification and referral purposes—only trained professionals

should make diagnoses in consultation with the child's parents or guardian.

The following early warning signs are presented with the following qualifications: They are not equally significant and they are not presented in order of seriousness. The early warning signs include:

- ***Social withdrawal.*** In some situations, gradual and eventually complete withdrawal from social contacts can be an important indicator of a troubled child. The withdrawal often stems from feelings of depression, rejection, persecution, unworthiness, and lack of confidence.
- ***Excessive feelings of isolation and being alone.*** Research has shown that the majority of children who are isolated and appear to be friendless are not violent. In fact, these feelings are sometimes characteristic of children and youth who may be troubled, withdrawn, or have internal issues that hinder development of social affiliations. However, research also has shown that in some cases feelings of isolation and not having friends are associated with children who behave aggressively and violently.
- ***Excessive feelings of rejection.*** In the process of growing up, and in the course of adolescent development, many young people experience emotionally painful rejection. Children who are troubled often are isolated from their mentally healthy peers. Their responses to rejection will depend on many background factors. Without support, they may be at risk of ex-

Use the Signs Responsibly

None of these signs alone is sufficient for predicting aggression and violence. Moreover, it is inappropriate—and potentially harmful—to use the early warning signs as a checklist against which to match individual children.

pressing their emotional distress in negative ways—including violence. Some aggressive children who are rejected by non-aggressive peers seek out aggressive friends who, in turn, reinforce their violent tendencies.

- ***Being a victim of violence.*** Children who are victims of violence—including physical or sexual abuse—in the community, at school, or at home are sometimes at risk themselves of becoming violent toward themselves or others.
- ***Feelings of being picked on and persecuted.*** The youth who feels constantly picked on, teased, bullied, singled out for ridicule, and humiliated at home or at school may initially withdraw socially. If not given adequate support in addressing these feelings, some children may vent them in inappropriate ways—including possible aggression or violence.
- ***Low school interest and poor academic performance.*** Poor school achievement can be the result of many factors. It is important to consider whether there is a drastic change in performance and/or poor performance becomes a chronic condition that limits the child's capacity to learn. In some situations—such as when the low achiever feels frustrated, unworthy, chastised, and denigrated—acting out and aggressive behaviors may occur. It is important to assess the emotional and cognitive reasons for the academic performance change to determine the true nature of the problem.
- ***Expression of violence in writings and drawings.*** Children

and youth often express their thoughts, feelings, desires, and intentions in their drawings and in stories, poetry, and other written expressive forms. Many children produce work about violent themes that for the most part is harmless when taken in context. However, an overrepresentation of violence in writings and drawings that is directed at specific individuals (family members, peers, other adults) consistently over time, may signal emotional problems and the potential for violence. Because there is a real danger in misdiagnosing such a sign, it is important to seek the guidance of a qualified professional—such as a school psychologist, counselor, or other mental health specialist—to determine its meaning.

- ***Uncontrolled anger.*** Everyone gets angry; anger is a natural emotion. However, anger that is expressed frequently and intensely in response to minor irritants may signal potential violent behavior toward self or others.
- ***Patterns of impulsive and chronic hitting, intimidating, and bullying behaviors.*** Children often engage in acts of shoving and mild aggression. However, some mildly aggressive behaviors such as constant hitting and bullying of others that occur early in children's lives, if left unattended, might later escalate into more serious behaviors.
- ***History of discipline problems.*** Chronic behavior and disciplinary problems both in school and at home may suggest that underlying emotional needs are not being met. These unmet





needs may be manifested in acting out and aggressive behaviors. These problems may set the stage for the child to violate norms and rules, defy authority, disengage from school, and engage in aggressive behaviors with other children and adults.

- **Past history of violent and aggressive behavior.** Unless provided with support and counseling, a youth who has a history of aggressive or violent behavior is likely to repeat those behaviors. Aggressive and violent acts may be directed toward other individuals, be expressed in cruelty to animals, or include fire setting. Youth who show an early pattern of antisocial behavior frequently and across multiple settings are particularly at risk for future aggressive and antisocial behavior. Similarly, youth who engage in overt behaviors such as bullying, generalized aggression and defiance, and covert behaviors such as stealing, vandalism, lying, cheating, and fire setting also are at risk for more serious aggressive behavior. Research suggests that age of onset may be a key factor in interpreting early warning signs. For example, children who engage in aggression and drug abuse at an early age (before age 12) are more likely to show violence later on than are children who begin such behavior at an older age. In the presence of such signs it is important to review the child's history with behavioral experts and seek parents' observations and insights.
- **Intolerance for differences and prejudicial attitudes.** All children have likes and dislikes. However, an intense prejudice

toward others based on racial, ethnic, religious, language, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and physical appearance—when coupled with other factors—may lead to violent assaults against those who are perceived to be different. Membership in hate groups or the willingness to victimize individuals with disabilities or health problems also should be treated as early warning signs.

- **Drug use and alcohol use.** Apart from being unhealthy behaviors, drug use and alcohol use reduces self-control and exposes children and youth to violence, either as perpetrators, as victims, or both.
- **Affiliation with gangs.** Gangs that support anti-social values and behaviors—including extortion, intimidation, and acts of violence toward other students—cause fear and stress among other students. Youth who are influenced by these groups—those who emulate and copy their behavior, as well as those who become affiliated with them—may adopt these values and act in violent or aggressive ways in certain situations. Gang-related violence and turf battles are common occurrences tied to the use of drugs that often result in injury and/or death.
- **Inappropriate access to, possession of, and use of firearms.** Children and youth who inappropriately possess or have access to firearms can have an increased risk for violence. Research shows that such youngsters also have a higher probability of becoming victims. Families can reduce inappropriate access and use by restrict-

ing, monitoring, and supervising children's access to firearms and other weapons. Children who have a history of aggression, impulsiveness, or other emotional problems should not have access to firearms and other weapons.

- **Serious threats of violence.** Idle threats are a common response to frustration. Alternatively, one of the most reliable indicators that a youth is likely to commit a dangerous act toward self or others is a detailed and specific threat to use violence. Recent incidents across the country clearly indicate that threats to commit violence against oneself or others should be taken very seriously. Steps must be taken to understand the nature of these threats and to prevent them from being carried out.

Identifying and Responding to Imminent Warning Signs

Unlike early warning signs, imminent warning signs indicate that a student is very close to behaving in a way that is potentially dangerous to self and/or to others. Imminent warning signs require an immediate response.

No single warning sign can predict that a dangerous act will occur. Rather, imminent warning signs usually are presented as a sequence of overt, serious, hostile behaviors or threats directed at peers, staff, or other individuals. Usually, imminent warning signs are evident to more than one staff member—as well as to the child's family.

Imminent warning signs may include:

- Serious physical fighting with peers or family members.
- Severe destruction of property.
- Severe rage for seemingly minor reasons.
- Detailed threats of lethal violence.
- Possession and/or use of firearms and other weapons.
- Other self-injurious behaviors or threats of suicide.

When warning signs indicate that danger is imminent, safety must **always** be the first and foremost consideration. Action must be taken immediately. Immediate intervention by school authorities and possibly law enforcement officers is needed when a child:

- Has presented a detailed plan (time, place, method) to harm or kill others—particularly if the child has a history of aggression or has attempted to carry out threats in the past.
- Is carrying a weapon, particularly a firearm, and has threatened to use it.

In situations where students present other threatening behaviors, **parents should be informed of the concerns immediately.** School communities also have the responsibility to seek assistance from appropriate agencies, such as child and family services and community mental health. These responses should reflect school board policies and be consistent with the violence prevention and response plan (for more information see Section 5).

Know the Law

The *Gun Free Schools Act* requires that each state receiving federal funds under the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) must have put in effect, by October 1995, a state law requiring local educational agencies to expel from school for a period of not less than one year a student who is determined to have brought a firearm to school.

Each state's law also must allow the chief administering officer of the local educational agency to modify the expulsion requirement on a case-by-case basis. All local educational agencies receiving ESEA funds must have a policy that requires the referral of any student who brings a firearm to school to the criminal justice or juvenile justice system.





Using the Early Warning Signs To Shape Intervention Practices

An early warning sign is not a predictor that a child or youth will commit a violent act toward self or others. Effective schools recognize the potential in every child to overcome difficult experiences and to control negative emotions. Adults in these school communities use their knowledge of early warning signs to address problems before they escalate into violence.

Effective school communities support staff, students, and families in understanding the early warning signs. Support strategies include having:

- School board policies in place that support training and ongoing consultation. The entire school community knows how to identify early warning signs, and understands the principles that support them.
- School leaders who encourage others to raise concerns about observed early warning signs and to report all observations of imminent warning signs immediately. This is in addition to school district policies that sanction and promote the identification of early warning signs.
- Easy access to a team of specialists trained in evaluating and addressing serious behavioral and academic concerns.

Each school community should develop a procedure that students and staff can follow when reporting their concerns about a child who exhibits early warning signs. For example, in many schools the principal is the first point of contact. In cases that do not pose imminent danger, the principal contacts a school psychologist or other qualified professional, who takes responsibility for addressing the concern immediately. If the concern is determined to be serious—but not to pose a threat of imminent danger—the child’s family should be contacted. The family should be consulted before implementing any interventions with the child. In cases where school-based contextual factors are determined to be causing or exacerbating the child’s troubling behavior, the school should act quickly to modify them.

It is often difficult to acknowledge that a child is troubled. Everyone—including administrators, families, teachers, school staff, students, and community members—may find it too troubling sometimes to admit that a child close to them needs help. When faced with resistance or denial, school communities must persist to ensure that children get the help they need.

Understanding early and imminent warning signs is an essential step in ensuring a safe school. The next step involves supporting the emotional and behavioral adjustment of children.

“Being proactive and having the ability to consult and meet with my school psychologist on an ongoing basis has helped create a positive school environment in terms of resolving student issues prior to their reaching a crisis level.”

**J. Randy Alton, Teacher,
Bethesda, MD**

Intervention: Getting Help for Troubled Children

Prevention approaches have proved effective in enabling school communities to decrease the frequency and intensity of behavior problems. However, prevention programs alone cannot eliminate the problems of all students. Some 5 to 10 percent of students will need more intensive interventions to decrease their high-risk behaviors, although the percentage can vary among schools and communities.

What happens when we recognize early warning signs in a child?

The message is clear: It's okay to be concerned when you notice warning signs in a child—and it's even more appropriate to do something about those concerns. School communities that encourage staff, families, and students to raise concerns about observed warning signs—and that have in place a process for getting help to troubled children once they are identified—are more likely to have effective schools with reduced disruption, bullying, fighting, and other forms of aggression.

Principles Underlying Intervention

Violence prevention and response plans should consider both prevention and intervention. Plans also should provide all staff with easy access to a team of special-

ists trained in evaluating serious behavioral and academic concerns. Eligible students should have access to special education services, and classroom teachers should be able to consult school psychologists, other mental health specialists, counselors, reading specialists, and special educators.

Effective practices for improving the behavior of troubled children are well documented in the research literature. Research has shown that effective interventions are culturally appropriate, family-supported, individualized, coordinated, and monitored. Further, interventions are more effective when they are designed and implemented consistently over time with input from the child, the family, and appropriate professionals. Schools also can draw upon the resources of their community to strengthen and enhance intervention planning.

When drafting a violence prevention and response plan, it is helpful to consider certain principles that research or expert-based experience show have a significant impact on success. The principles include:

- **Share responsibility by establishing a partnership with the child, school, home, and community.** Coordinated service systems should be available for children who are at risk for violent behavior. Effective schools



"Partnerships with local community agencies have created a safer school and community."

Sally Baas, Educator, Coon Rapids, MN

"Students should feel a sense of responsibility to inform someone if they're made aware of an individual who may perform a violent act. They should not feel like they are tattling, but more in the sense of saving someone's life. Students should have a role on the school's violence prevention and response team because they know what points of student life and school to target."

Elsa Quiroga, Graduate of Mount Eden High School and Student, University of California at Berkeley

reach out to include families and the entire community in the education of children. In addition, effective schools coordinate and collaborate with child and family service agencies, law enforcement and juvenile justice systems, mental health agencies, businesses, faith and ethnic leaders, and other community agencies.

- **Inform parents and listen to them when early warning signs are observed.** Parents should be involved as soon as possible. Effective and safe schools make persistent efforts to involve parents by: informing them routinely about school discipline policies, procedures, and rules, and about their children's behavior (both good and bad); involving them in making decisions concerning schoolwide disciplinary policies and procedures; and encouraging them to participate in prevention programs, intervention programs, and crisis planning. Parents need to know what school-based interventions are being used with their children and how they can support their success.
 - **Maintain confidentiality and parents' rights to privacy.** Parental involvement and consent is required before personally identifiable information is shared with other agencies, except in the case of emergencies or suspicion of abuse. The *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* (FERPA), a federal law that addresses the privacy of education records, must be observed in all referrals to or sharing of information with other community agencies. Furthermore, parent-approved interagency communication must
- be kept confidential. FERPA does not prevent disclosure of personally identifiable information to appropriate parties—such as law enforcement officials, trained medical personnel, and other emergency personnel—when responsible personnel determine there is an acute emergency (imminent danger).
- **Develop the capacity of staff, students, and families to intervene.** Many school staff members are afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing when faced with a potentially violent student. Effective schools provide the entire school community—teachers, students, parents, support staff—with training and support in responding to imminent warning signs, preventing violence, and intervening safely and effectively. Interventions must be monitored by professionals who are competent in the approach. According to researchers, programs do not succeed without the ongoing support of administrators, parents, and community leaders.
 - **Support students in being responsible for their actions.** Effective school communities encourage students to see themselves as responsible for their actions, and actively engage them in planning, implementing, and evaluating violence prevention initiatives.
 - **Simplify staff requests for urgent assistance.** Many school systems and community agencies have complex legalistic referral systems with timelines and waiting lists. Children who are at risk of endangering them-

Tips for Parents

▲ Parents can help create safe schools. Here are some ideas that parents in other communities have tried:

- Discuss the school's discipline policy with your child. Show your support for the rules, and help your child understand the reasons for them.
- Involve your child in setting rules for appropriate behavior at home.
- Talk with your child about the violence he or she sees—on television, in video games, and possibly in the neighborhood. Help your child understand the consequences of violence.
- Teach your child how to solve problems. Praise your child when he or she follows through.
- Help your child find ways to show anger that do not involve verbally or physically hurting others. When you get angry, use it as an opportunity to model these appropriate responses for your child—and talk about it.
- Help your child understand the value of accepting individual differences.
- Note any disturbing behaviors in your child. For example, frequent angry outbursts, excessive fighting and bullying of other children, cruelty to animals, fire setting, frequent behavior problems at school and in the neighborhood, lack of friends, and alcohol or drug use can be signs of serious problems. Get help for your child. Talk with a trusted professional in your child's school or in the community.
- Keep lines of communication open with your child—even when it is tough. Encourage your child always to let you know where and with whom he or she will be. Get to know your child's friends.
- Listen to your child if he or she shares concerns about friends who may be exhibiting troubling behaviors. Share this information with a trusted professional, such as the school psychologist, principal, or teacher.
- Be involved in your child's school life by supporting and reviewing homework, talking with his or her teacher(s), and attending school functions such as parent conferences, class programs, open houses, and PTA meetings.
- Work with your child's school to make it more responsive to all students and to all families. Share your ideas about how the school can encourage family involvement, welcome **all** families, and include them in meaningful ways in their children's education.
- Encourage your school to offer before- and after-school programs.
- Volunteer to work with school-based groups concerned with violence prevention. If none exist, offer to form one.
- Find out if there is a violence prevention group in your community. Offer to participate in the group's activities.
- Talk with the parents of your child's friends. Discuss how you can form a team to ensure your children's safety.
- Find out if your employer offers provisions for parents to participate in school activities.





"Our school system has created a student services team—including the principal, a special educator, the school psychologist, other behavioral support personnel, the child development specialist, and others—that meets weekly to address safety and success for all students. Our teachers and families have easy access to this team. As part of our plan, we conduct a campus-by-campus risk assessment in coordination with city, county, and state law enforcement agencies. We provide interventions for children who are troubled and connect them and their families to community agencies and mental health services."

Lee Patterson
Assistant Superintendent
Roseburg, OR

selves or others cannot be placed on waiting lists.

- **Make interventions available as early as possible.** Too frequently, interventions are not made available until the student becomes violent or is adjudicated as a youthful offender. Interventions for children who have reached this stage are both costly, restrictive, and relatively inefficient. Effective schools build mechanisms into their intervention processes to ensure that referrals are addressed promptly, and that feedback is provided to the referring individual.
- **Use sustained, multiple, coordinated interventions.** It is rare that children are violent or disruptive only in school. Thus, interventions that are most successful are comprehensive, sustained, and properly implemented. They help families and staff work together to help the child. Coordinated efforts draw resources from community agencies that are respectful of and responsive to the needs of families. Isolated, inconsistent, short-term, and fragmented interventions will not be successful—and may actually do harm.
- **Analyze the contexts in which violent behavior occurs.** School communities can enhance their effectiveness by conducting a functional analysis of the factors that set off violence and problem behaviors. In determining an appropriate course of action, consider the child's age, cultural background, and family experiences and values. Decisions about interventions should be measured against a standard of reasonableness to

ensure the likelihood that they will be implemented effectively.

- **Build upon and coordinate internal school resources.** In developing and implementing violence prevention and response plans, effective schools draw upon the resources of various school-based programs and staff—such as special education, safe and drug free school programs, pupil services, and Title I.

Violent behavior is a problem for everyone. It is a normal response to become angry or even frightened in the presence of a violent child. But, it is essential that these emotional reactions be controlled. The goal must always be to ensure safety and seek help for the child.

Intervening Early with Students Who Are at Risk for Behavioral Problems

The incidence of violent acts against students or staff is low. However, pre-violent behaviors—such as threats, bullying, and classroom disruptions—are common. Thus, early responses to warning signs are most effective in preventing problems from escalating.

Intervention programs that reduce behavior problems and related school violence typically are multifaceted, long-term, and broad reaching. They also are rigorously implemented. Effective early intervention efforts include working with small groups or individual students to provide direct support, as well as linking children and their families to necessary community services and/or

Action Steps for Students

▲ ***There is much students can do to help create safe schools. Talk to your teachers, parents, and counselor to find out how you can get involved and do your part to make your school safe. Here are some ideas that students in other schools have tried:***

- Listen to your friends if they share troubling feelings or thoughts. Encourage them to get help from a trusted adult—such as a school psychologist, counselor, social worker, leader from the faith community, or other professional. If you are very concerned, seek help for them. Share your concerns with your parents.
- Create, join, or support student organizations that combat violence, such as “Students Against Destructive Decisions” and “Young Heroes Program.”
- Work with local businesses and community groups to organize youth-oriented activities that help young people think of ways to prevent school and community violence. Share your ideas for how these community groups and businesses can support your efforts.
- Organize an assembly and invite your school psychologist, school social worker, and counselor—in addition to student panelists—to share ideas about how to deal with violence, intimidation, and bullying.
- Get involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating your school’s violence prevention and response plan.
- Participate in violence prevention programs such as peer mediation and conflict resolution. Employ your new skills in other settings, such as the home, neighborhood, and community.
- Work with your teachers and administrators to create a safe process for reporting threats, intimidation, weapon possession, drug selling, gang activity, graffiti, and vandalism. Use the process.
- Ask for permission to invite a law enforcement officer to your school to conduct a safety audit and share safety tips, such as traveling in groups and avoiding areas known to be unsafe. Share your ideas with the officer.
- Help to develop and participate in activities that promote student understanding of differences and that respect the rights of all.
- Volunteer to be a mentor for younger students and/or provide tutoring to your peers.
- Know your school’s code of conduct and model responsible behavior. Avoid being part of a crowd when fights break out. Refrain from teasing, bullying, and intimidating peers.
- Be a role model—take personal responsibility by reacting to anger without physically or verbally harming others.
- Seek help from your parents or a trusted adult—such as a school psychologist, social worker, counselor, teacher—if you are experiencing intense feelings of anger, fear, anxiety, or depression.





providing these services in the school.

Examples of early intervention components that work include:

- Providing training and support to staff, students, and families in understanding factors that can set off and/or exacerbate aggressive outbursts.
- Teaching the child alternative, socially appropriate replacement responses—such as problem solving and anger control skills.
- Providing skill training, therapeutic assistance, and other support to the family through community-based services.
- Encouraging the family to make sure that firearms are out of the child's immediate reach. Law enforcement officers can provide families with information about safe firearm storage as well as guidelines for addressing children's access to and possession of firearms.

In some cases, more comprehensive early interventions are called for to address the needs of troubled children. Focused, coordinated, proven interventions reduce violent behavior. Following are several comprehensive approaches that effective schools are using to provide early intervention to students who are at risk of becoming violent toward themselves or others.

**Intervention Tactic:
Teaching Positive
Interaction Skills**

Although most schools do teach positive social interaction skills indirectly, some have adopted social skills programs specifically designed to prevent or reduce an-

tisocial behavior in troubled children. In fact, the direct teaching of social problem solving and social decision making is now a standard feature of most effective drug and violence prevention programs. Children who are at risk of becoming violent toward themselves or others need additional support. They often need to learn interpersonal, problem solving, and conflict resolution skills at home and in school. They also may need more intensive assistance in learning how to stop and think before they react, and to listen effectively.

**Intervention Tactic:
Providing
Comprehensive Services**

In some cases, the early intervention may involve getting services to families. The violence prevention and response team together with the child and family designs a comprehensive intervention plan that focuses on reducing aggressive behaviors and supporting responsible behaviors at school, in the home, and in the community. When multiple services are required there also must be psychological counseling and ongoing consultation with classroom teachers, school staff, and the family to ensure intended results occur. All services—including community services—must be coordinated and progress must be monitored and evaluated carefully.

**Intervention Tactic:
Referring the Child for
Special Education
Evaluation**

If there is evidence of persistent problem behavior or poor academic achievement, it may be ap-

"Since we developed the high school peer mediation program, we have seen a decline in physical fights. We are defusing potentially dangerous situations."

Terry Davis, School
Psychologist, Natick, MA

appropriate to conduct a formal assessment to determine if the child is disabled and eligible for special education and related services under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA). If a multidisciplinary team determines that the child is eligible for services under the IDEA, an individualized educational program (IEP) should be developed by a team that includes a parent, a regular educator, a special educator, an evaluator, a representative of the local school district, the child (if appropriate), and others as appropriate. This team will identify the support necessary to enable the child to learn—including the strategies and support systems necessary to address any behavior that may impede the child's learning or the learning of his or her peers.

Providing Intensive, Individualized Interventions for Students with Severe Behavioral Problems

Children who show dangerous patterns and a potential for more serious violence usually require more intensive interventions that involve multiple agencies, community-based service providers, and intense family support. By working with families and community services, schools can comprehensively and effectively intervene.

Effective individualized interventions provide a range of services for students. Multiple, intensive, focused approaches used over time can reduce the chances for continued offenses and the potential for violence. The child, his or

her family, and appropriate school staff should be involved in developing and monitoring the interventions.

Nontraditional schooling in an alternative school or therapeutic facility may be required in severe cases where the safety of students and staff remains a concern, or when the complexity of the intervention plan warrants it. Research has shown that effective alternative programs can have long-term positive results by reducing expulsions and court referrals. Effective alternative programs support students in meeting high academic and behavioral standards. They provide anger and impulse control training, psychological counseling, effective academic and remedial instruction, and vocational training as appropriate. Such programs also make provisions for active family involvement. Moreover, they offer guidance and staff support when the child returns to his or her regular school.

Providing a Foundation To Prevent and Reduce Violent Behavior

Schoolwide strategies create a foundation that is more responsive to children in general—**one that makes interventions for individual children more effective and efficient.**

Effective and safe schools are places where there is strong leadership, caring faculty, parent and community involvement—including law enforcement officials—and student participation in the design of programs and policies. Effective and safe schools also are places where prevention and intervention programs are based

"Everyone is trained to use consistent language. We remind students to stop and think. Students also know we will always follow through if they make poor behavioral choices. As a result, we have been able to diffuse violent situations."

Annette Lambeth
Assistant Principal
Chester County, PA

"Appropriate behavior and respect for others are emphasized at all times. However, despite our best efforts, unfortunate incidents do occur. When they do, it is our responsibility to provide appropriate support to meet the needs of every child."

Carol S. Parham,
Superintendent of Schools
Anne Arundel County, MD





upon careful assessment of student problems, where community members help set measurable goals and objectives, where research-based prevention and intervention approaches are used, and where evaluations are conducted regularly to ensure that the programs are meeting stated goals. Effective and safe schools are also places where teachers and staff have access to qualified consultants who can help them address behavioral and academic barriers to learning.

Effective schools ensure that the physical environment of the school is safe, and that schoolwide policies are in place to support responsible behaviors.

"The police are a school's greatest community asset when effectively preventing and responding to school violence. Building a relationship with law enforcement strengthens the school's ability to ensure safety."

Gil Kerlikowske
former Police Commissioner
Buffalo, NY

Characteristics of a Safe Physical Environment

Prevention starts by making sure the school campus is a safe and caring place. Effective and safe schools communicate a strong sense of security. Experts suggest that school officials can enhance physical safety by:

- Supervising access to the building and grounds.
- Reducing class size and school size.
- Adjusting scheduling to minimize time in the hallways or in potentially dangerous locations. Traffic flow patterns can be modified to limit potential for conflicts or altercations.
- Conducting a building safety audit in consultation with school security personnel and/or law enforcement experts. Effective schools adhere to federal, state, and local nondiscrimination and public safety

laws, and use guidelines set by the state department of education.

- Closing school campuses during lunch periods.
- Adopting a school policy on uniforms.
- Arranging supervision at critical times (for example, in hallways between classes) and having a plan to deploy supervisory staff to areas where incidents are likely to occur.
- Prohibiting students from congregating in areas where they are likely to engage in rule-breaking or intimidating and aggressive behaviors.
- Having adults visibly present throughout the school building. This includes encouraging parents to visit the school.
- Staggering dismissal times and lunch periods.
- Monitoring the surrounding school grounds—including landscaping, parking lots, and bus stops.
- Coordinating with local police to ensure that there are safe routes to and from school.

In addition to targeting areas for increased safety measures, schools also should identify safe areas where staff and children should go in the event of a crisis.

The physical condition of the school building also has an impact on student attitude, behavior, and motivation to achieve. Typically, there tend to be more incidents of fighting and violence in school buildings that are dirty, too cold or too hot, filled with graffiti, in need of repair, or unsanitary.

Characteristics of Schoolwide Policies that Support Responsible Behavior

The opportunities for inappropriate behaviors that precipitate violence are greater in a disorderly and undisciplined school climate. A growing number of schools are discovering that the most effective way to reduce suspensions, expulsions, office referrals, and other similar actions—strategies that do not result in making schools safer—is to emphasize a proactive approach to discipline.

Effective schools are implementing schoolwide campaigns that establish high expectations and provide support for socially appropriate behavior. They reinforce positive behavior and highlight sanctions against aggressive behavior. All staff, parents, students, and community members are informed about problem behavior, what they can do to counteract it, and how they can reinforce and reward positive behavior. In turn, the entire school community makes a commitment to behaving responsibly.

Effective and safe schools develop and consistently enforce schoolwide rules that are clear, broad-based, and fair. Rules and disciplinary procedures are developed collaboratively by representatives of the total educational community. They are communicated clearly to all parties—but most important, they are followed consistently by everyone.

School communities that have undertaken schoolwide approaches do the following things:

- Develop a schoolwide disciplinary policy that includes a code of conduct, specific rules and

consequences that can accommodate student differences on a case-by-case basis when necessary. (If one already exists, review and modify it if necessary.) Be sure to include a description of school anti-harassment and anti-violence policies and due process rights.

- Ensure that the cultural values and educational goals of the community are reflected in the rules. These values should be expressed in a statement that precedes the schoolwide disciplinary policy.
- Include school staff, students, and families in the development, discussion, and implementation of fair rules. Provide schoolwide and classroom support to implement these rules. Strategies that have been found to support students include class discussions, schoolwide assemblies, student government, and participation on discipline teams. In addition, peer mediation and conflict resolution have been implemented widely in schools to promote a climate of nonviolence.
- Be sure consequences are commensurate with the offense, and that rules are written and applied in a nondiscriminatory manner and accommodate cultural diversity.
- Make sure that if a negative consequence (such as withdrawing privileges) is used, it is combined with positive strategies for teaching socially appropriate behaviors and with strategies that address any external factors that might have caused the behavior.
- Include a zero tolerance statement for illegal possession of

"Everyone follows the same discipline plan. Everyone—including the lunch room workers and custodians—works as a team. There are always times when children forget the rules. But there is immediate intervention by faculty and staff, and even other children. The responsibility is on the students."

**Anna Allred, Parent
Lakeland, FL**

"It is necessary to provide training and support to staff. We have provided inservices on behavior management systems that are effective in regular classroom settings. These inservices have been of great benefit. Numerous schools throughout our district presently use stop and think, conflict resolution, and peer mediation."

**Denise Conrad, Teacher
Toledo, OH**





weapons, alcohol, or drugs. Provide services and support for students who have been suspended and/or expelled.

Recognizing the warning signs and responding with comprehensive interventions allows us to

help children eliminate negative behaviors and replace them with positive ones. Active sharing of information and a quick, effective response by the school community will ensure that the school is safer and the child is less troubled and can learn.

Developing a Prevention and Response Plan

Effective schools create a violence prevention and response plan and form a team that can ensure it is implemented. They use approaches and strategies based on research about what works.

Creating the Violence Prevention and Response Plan

A sound violence prevention and response plan reflects the common and the unique needs of educators, students, families, and the greater community. The plan outlines how all individuals in the school community—administrators, teachers, parents, students, bus drivers, support staff—will be prepared to spot the behavioral and emotional signs that indicate a child is troubled, and what they will need to do. The plan also details how school and community resources can be used to create safe environments and to manage responses to acute threats and incidents of violence.

An effective written plan includes:

- Descriptions of the early warning signs of potentially violent behavior and procedures for identifying children who exhibit these signs.
- Descriptions of effective prevention practices the school community has undertaken to

build a foundation that is responsive to **all** children and enhances the effectiveness of interventions.

- Descriptions of intervention strategies the school community can use to help troubled children. These include early interventions for students who are at risk of behavioral problems, and more intensive, individualized interventions and resources for students with severe behavioral problems or mental health needs.
- A crisis intervention plan that includes immediate responses for imminent warning signs and violent behavior, as well as a contingency plan to be used in the aftermath of a tragedy.

The plan must be consistent with federal, state, and local laws. It also should have the support of families and the local school board.

Recommendations in this guide will prove most meaningful when the entire school community is involved in developing and implementing the plan. In addition, everyone should be provided with relevant training and support on a regular basis. Finally, there should be a clearly delineated mechanism for monitoring and assessing violence prevention efforts.



Forming the Prevention and Response Team

It can be helpful to establish a school-based team to oversee the preparation and implementation of the prevention and response plan. This does not need to be a new team; however, a designated core group should be entrusted with this important responsibility.

The core team should ensure that every member of the greater school community accepts and adopts the violence prevention and response plan. This buy-in is essential if all members of the school community are expected to feel comfortable sharing concerns about children who appear troubled. Too often, caring individuals remain silent because they have no way to express their concerns.

Typically, the core team includes the building administrator, general and special education teachers, parent(s), and a pupil support services representative (a school psychologist, social worker, or counselor), school resource officer, and a safe and drug-free schools program coordinator. If no school psychologist or mental health professional is available to the staff, involve someone from an outside mental health agency. Other individuals may be added to the team depending on the task. For example, when undertaking schoolwide prevention planning, the team might be expanded to include students, representatives of community agencies and organizations, the school nurse, school board members, and support staff (secretaries, bus drivers, and custodians). Similarly, crisis response planning can be enhanced with the presence of a cen-

tral office administrator, security officer, and youth officer or community police team member.

The core team also should coordinate with any school advisory boards already in place. For example, most effective schools have developed an advisory board of parents and community leaders that meets regularly with school administrators. While these advisory groups generally offer advice and support, that role can be expanded to bringing resources related to violence prevention and intervention into the school.

Consider involving a variety of community leaders and parents when building the violence prevention and response team:

- Parent group leaders, such as PTA officers.
- Law enforcement personnel.
- Attorneys, judges, and probation officers.
- Clergy and other representatives of the faith community.
- Media representatives.
- Violence prevention group representatives.
- Mental health and child welfare personnel.
- Physicians and nurses.
- Family agency and family resource center staff.
- Business leaders.
- Recreation, cultural, and arts organizations staff.
- Youth workers and volunteers.
- Local officials, including school board members and representatives from special commissions.

"Our district initiated a safety task force involving parents, students, teachers, support staff, administrators, and community members to enhance our plan for safety and crisis management. It works."

Richard E. Berry,
Superintendent, Houston, TX

"We need to give attention to the segment of the population that includes bus drivers, secretaries, and cafeteria workers. They are a very important yet often overlooked group of people who can provide support to children."

Betty Stockton
School Psychologist
Jonesboro, AR

Action Planning Checklist

Prevention-Intervention-Crisis Response

▲ *What To Look For—Key Characteristics of Responsive and Safe Schools*

Does my school have characteristics that:

Are responsive to all children?

▲ *What To Look For—Early Warning Signs of Violence*

Has my school taken steps to ensure that all staff, students, and families:

Understand the principles underlying the identification of early warning signs?

Know how to identify and respond to imminent warning signs?

Are able to identify early warning signs?

▲ *What To Do—Intervention: Getting Help for Troubled Children*

Does my school:

Understand the principles underlying intervention?

Make early intervention available for students at risk of behavioral problems?

Provide individualized, intensive interventions for students with severe behavioral problems?

Have schoolwide preventive strategies in place that support early intervention?

▲ *What To Do—Crisis Response*

Does my school:

Understand the principles underlying crisis response?

Have a procedure for intervening during a crisis to ensure safety?

Know how to respond in the aftermath of tragedy?





- Interest group representatives and grass roots community organization members.
- College or university faculty.
- Members of local advisory boards.
- Other influential community members.

The school board should authorize and support the formation of

and the tasks undertaken by the violence prevention and response team.

While we cannot prevent all violence from occurring, we can do much to reduce the likelihood of its occurrence. Through thoughtful planning and the establishment of a school violence prevention and response team, we can avert many crises and be prepared when they do happen.

Responding to Crisis

Violence can happen at any time, anywhere. Effective and safe schools are well prepared for any potential crisis or violent act.

Crisis response is an important component of a violence prevention and response plan. Two components that should be addressed in that plan are:

- Intervening during a crisis to ensure safety.
- Responding in the aftermath of tragedy.

In addition to establishing a contingency plan, effective schools provide adequate preparation for their core violence prevention and response team. The team not only plans what to do when violence strikes, but it also ensures that staff and students know how to behave. Students and staff feel secure because there is a well-conceived plan and everyone understands what to do or whom to ask for instructions.

Principles Underlying Crisis Response

As with other interventions, crisis intervention planning is built on a foundation that is safe and responsive to children. Crisis planning should include:

- Training for teachers and staff in a range of skills—from dealing with escalating classroom

situations to responding to a serious crisis.

- Reference to district or state procedures. Many states now have recommended crisis intervention manuals available to their local education agencies and schools.
- Involvement of community agencies, including police, fire, and rescue, as well as hospital, health, social welfare, and mental health services. The faith community, juvenile justice, and related family support systems also have been successfully included in such team plans.
- Provision for the core team to meet regularly to identify potentially troubled or violent students and situations that may be dangerous.

Effective school communities also have made a point to find out about federal, state, and local resources that are available to help during and after a crisis, and to secure their support and involvement **before** a crisis occurs.

Intervening During a Crisis To Ensure Safety

Weapons used in or around schools, bomb threats or explosions, and fights, as well as natural disasters, accidents, and suicides call for immediate, planned



action, and long-term, post-crisis intervention. Planning for such contingencies reduces chaos and trauma. Thus, the crisis response part of the plan also must include contingency provisions. Such provisions may include:

- Evacuation procedures and other procedures to protect students and staff from harm. It is critical that schools identify safe areas where students and staff should go in a crisis. It also is important that schools practice having staff and students evacuate the premises in an orderly manner.
- An effective, fool-proof communication system. Individuals must have designated roles and responsibilities to prevent confusion.
- A process for securing immediate external support from law enforcement officials and other relevant community agencies.

All provisions and procedures should be monitored and reviewed regularly by the core team.

Just as staff should understand and practice fire drill procedures routinely, they should practice responding to the presence of firearms and other weapons, severe threats of violence, hostage situations, and other acts of terror. School communities can provide staff and students with such practice in the following ways:

- Provide inservice training for all faculty and staff to explain the plan and exactly what to do in a crisis. Where appropriate, include community police, youth workers, and other community members.
- Produce a written manual or small pamphlet or flip chart to

remind teachers and staff of their duties.

- Practice responding to the imminent warning signs of violence. Make sure **all** adults in the building have an understanding of what they might do to prevent violence (e.g., being observant, knowing when to get help, and modeling good problem solving, anger management, and/or conflict resolution skills) and how they can safely support each other.

Responding in the Aftermath of Crisis

Members of the crisis team should understand natural stress reactions. They also should be familiar with how different individuals might respond to death and loss, including developmental considerations, religious beliefs, and cultural values.

Effective schools ensure a coordinated community response. Professionals both within the school district and within the greater community should be involved to assist individuals who are at risk for severe stress reactions.

Schools that have experienced tragedy have included the following provisions in their response plans:

- **Help parents understand children's reactions to violence.** In the aftermath of tragedy, children may experience unrealistic fears of the future, have difficulty sleeping, become physically ill, and be easily distracted—to name a few of the common symptoms.
- **Help teachers and other staff deal with their reactions to the crisis.** Debriefing and grief

"Early intervention and quick response from our school district team resulted in no one getting hurt."

Pamela Cain
Superintendent
Wirt County, WV

Crisis Procedure Checklist

▲ *A crisis plan must address many complex contingencies. There should be a step-by-step procedure to use when a crisis occurs. An example follows:*

- Assess life/safety issues immediately.
 - Provide immediate emergency medical care.
 - Call 911 and notify police/rescue first. Call the superintendent second.
 - Convene the crisis team to assess the situation and implement the crisis response procedures.
 - Evaluate available and needed resources.
 - Alert school staff to the situation.
 - Activate the crisis communication procedure and system of verification.
 - Secure all areas.
 - Implement evacuation and other procedures to protect students and staff from harm. Avoid dismissing students to unknown care.
 - Adjust the bell schedule to ensure safety during the crisis.
 - Alert persons in charge of various information systems to prevent confusion and misinformation. Notify parents.
 - Contact appropriate community agencies and the school district's public information office, if appropriate.
 - Implement post-crisis procedures.
-





counseling is just as important for adults as it is for students.

- **Help students and faculty adjust after the crisis.** Provide both short-term and long-term mental health counseling following a crisis.
- **Help victims and family members of victims re-enter the school environment.** Often, school friends need guidance in how to act. The school community should work with students

and parents to design a plan that makes it easier for victims and their classmates to adjust.

- **Help students and teachers address the return of a previously removed student to the school community.** Whether the student is returning from a juvenile detention facility or a mental health facility, schools need to coordinate with staff from that facility to explore how to make the transition as uneventful as possible.

Conclusion

Crises involving sudden violence in schools are traumatic in large measure because they are rare and unexpected. Everyone is touched in some way. In the wake of such a crisis, members of the school community are asked—and ask themselves—what could have been done to prevent it.

We know from the research that schools can meet the challenge of reducing violence. The school community can be supported through:

- School board policies that address both prevention and intervention for troubled children and youth.
- Schoolwide violence prevention and response plans that include the entire school community in their development and implementation.
- Training in recognizing the early warning signs of potential violent behavior.

- Procedures that encourage staff, parents, and students to share their concerns about children who exhibit early warning signs.
- Procedures for responding quickly to concerns about troubled children.
- Adequate support in getting help for troubled children.

Everyone who cares about children cares about ending violence. It is time to break the silence that too often characterizes even the most well-meaning school communities. Research and expert-based information is available for school communities to use in developing and strengthening programs that can prevent crises.

School safety is everyone's job. Teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and students all must commit to meeting the challenge of getting help for children who show signs of being troubled.

“Coordinated school efforts can help. But the solution does not just rest in the schools. Together we must develop solutions that are community-wide and coordinated, that include schools, families, courts, law enforcement, community agencies, representatives of the faith community, business, and the broader community.”

**Willmer Cody, Kentucky
Commissioner of Education**



Methodology, Contributors, and Research Support

Also On The Web

- An annotated version of the guide with references to support each assertion as well as references to practical materials that can be employed to implement the recommendations it contains.
- Additional resources that can be employed to implement the recommendations contained in the guide.
- Links to other Web sites that provide useful and usable information.
- English and Spanish versions of the guide that can be downloaded for dissemination.

This guide synthesizes an extensive knowledge base on violence and violence prevention. It includes research from a variety of disciplines, as well as the experience and effective practices of teachers, school psychologists, counselors, social workers, family members, youth workers, and youth.

Much of the research found in this guide was funded by federal offices whose senior staff were involved in supporting and reviewing this document. They include:

- Office of Special Education Programs, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education.
- Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, U.S. Department of Education.
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and National Institute for Justice, U.S. Department of Justice.
- National Institute of Mental Health and Center for Mental Health Services, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The guide was produced by the Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice of the American Institutes for Research in collaboration with the National Association of School Psychologists. The project was led by:

- **Kevin P. Dwyer**, Principal Investigator, National Association of School Psychologists

- **David Osher**, Project Director, American Institutes for Research

The guide was developed in collaboration with **Cynthia Warger** of Warger, Eavy and Associates.

Each assertion in the guide is backed by empirical data and/or expert consensus. Research references can be found on the project's Web site at <http://www.air-dc.org/cecp/guide>.

The guide was conceptualized by an interdisciplinary expert panel. The writing team, led by Kevin P. Dwyer, included members of the expert panel—George Bear, Norris Haynes, Paul Kingery, Howard Knoff, Peter Sheras, Russell Skiba, Leslie Skinner, and Betty Stockton—in addition to David Osher and Cynthia Warger. The writing team drew upon the other expert panelists for guidance and for resources.

The first draft was reviewed for accuracy by the entire expert panel as well as staff from the federal agencies. The federal reviewers are listed on the project's Web site at <http://www.air-dc.org/cecp/guide>.

The second draft was reviewed by family members, teachers, principals, and youth, in addition to leaders of major national associations. The expert panel reviewed the document again at this stage. These reviewers are also listed on the project's Web site at <http://www.air-dc.org/cecp/guide>.

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<http://www.naspweb.org/center.html>

National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>

Center for Mental Health Services
Knowledge Exchange Network

<http://www.mentalhealth.org/index.htm>

