



EDUCATION INSURANCE



Preventing School Violence

**Risk Management Techniques
for K-12 Schools**



Your Safety is Our Priority

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Thank you for taking the first step toward a safer educational institution. In this guide, you will find helpful tips, practical advice and real-world examples you can use to continue building your school's safety program.

The material you will find here is based on nearly 50 years of safety inspections and claims service for thousands of organizations across the country.

This guide represents just one area of a K-12 school's overall safety plan. Any reliable risk management program should also include a comprehensive insurance package. GuideOne proudly offers coverage for private and charter schools to help reduce the risk of loss and liability.

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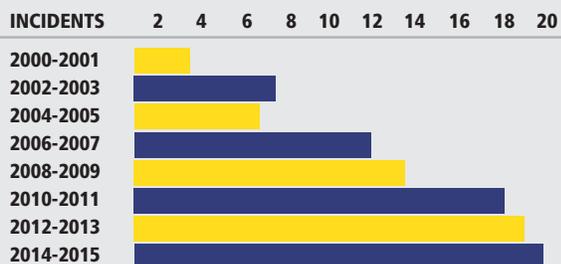
K-12 School Violence

Reports of K-12 school violence are on the rise. It seems a week seldom goes by that we don't hear about violence on a school campus. From the middle school student in South Carolina who brought a gun to a neighboring elementary school and shot a first grader to the Utah high school student who was disarmed on campus by his parents when they discovered a family gun missing, the stories are worrisome.

Active shooter incidents in the United States continue to rise in frequency, with new FBI statistics showing the highest average of incidents ever in a two-year period. Schools have frequently been locations for shootings. The possibility of someone bringing a weapon onto your campus is troublesome. However, there are a number of things your school can do to prepare for school violence and to prevent it from happening.

School violence is any violence that occurs on school property or during a school-sponsored event. Students and adults (including staff and guests) can be victims, perpetrators or witnesses.

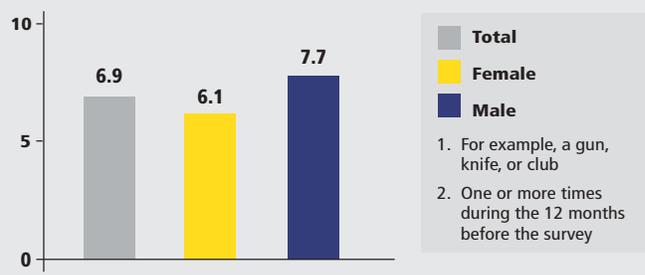
AVERAGE # OF ACTIVE SHOOTER INCIDENTS IN TWO-YEAR PERIOD



source file: ABC NEWS

YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM (YRBSS) 2013 - CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

Percentage of High School Students Threatened or Injured with a Weapon¹ on School Property²



National Youth Risk Behavior Survey Overview: Statistics available at <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/overview.htm>

School violence includes various behaviors. Some violent acts, such as bullying, pushing, and shoving, can cause more emotional harm than physical harm. Other forms of violence, such as gang violence and assault (with or without weapons), can lead to serious injury or even death.



IN A 2015 NATIONAL STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS (KANN L, 2015):

- ✓ 7.8% reported being in a physical fight on school property in the 12 months preceding the survey.

- ✓ 10.3% of male students and 5.0% of female students reported being in a physical fight on school property in the 12 months preceding the survey.

- ✓ 5.6% did not go to school on one or more days in the 30 days preceding the survey because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school.

- ✓ 4.1% reported carrying a weapon (gun, knife or club) on school property on one or more days in the 30 days preceding the survey.

- ✓ 6.0% reported being threatened or injured with a weapon (gun, knife or club) on school property one or more times in the 12 months preceding the survey.

Kann L, McManus T, Harris WA, et al. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 2015. MMWR Morb Mortal Surveil Summ. 2016;65(SS-06):1-174. Available from <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/ss/pdfs/ss6506.pdf>

However, there are many ways in which your school can reduce the risk of such incidents occurring. The following pages provide strategies you can take to create a safer school inside and out, along with tips for strengthening your partnership with students, parents and law enforcement.

13 Habits of Safe Schools

The schools with the best chance at preventing violence are the ones that offer supportive, solution-driven environments with open communication channels. Here's how they achieve that – and how your school can, too.

- 1. Focus on academic achievement.** Effective schools appreciate students' individual differences and convey the attitude that all children can achieve academically and behave appropriately. Expectations must be 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 this support are less likely to behave in socially desirable ways.
- 2. Involve families in meaningful ways.** Students whose families are involved in their growth in and outside the classroom are more likely to succeed in school and less likely to engage in antisocial activities. Effective schools also support families in expressing concerns about their children and support families in getting the help they need to address behaviors that cause concern. There should be effective two-way communication between the school and the family regarding behavioral issues – both sides need to be free to express concerns and information that could help.
- 3. Develop links to the community.** 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.
- 4. Emphasize positive relationships among students and staff.** Research shows that a positive relationship between students and adults who are 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. Make sure that opportunities exist for staff to spend quality, personal time with students.
- 5. Discuss safety issues openly.** You can reduce the risk of violence at your school by teaching children about the dangers of firearms and by sharing appropriate strategies for dealing with feelings, expressing anger in appropriate ways and resolving conflicts. Teach children that they are responsible for their own actions.
- 6. Treat students with equal respect.** A major source of conflict is the perceived or real problem of bias and unfair treatment of students because of race, gender, etc., by both staff and peers. Students who have been treated unfairly may become 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.
- 7. Create ways for students to share their concerns.** Peers are often the most likely group to know in advance about potential school violence. That's why it is important to implement ways for students to safely and discreetly report such troubling behaviors. In turn, students who report potential school violence must be protected.

- 8. Help children feel safe when expressing their feelings.** It is important that children feel safe when expressing their needs, fears and anxieties to school officials. When children 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.
- 9. Develop 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.
- 10. Offer extended day programs for children.** School-based before- and after-school programs can be effective in reducing violence. Such programs should be well-supervised and provide children with support and a range of activity options. The staff of these programs are often the most likely to connect with troubled students and assist with behavioral interventions as they are not seen as a teacher or administrator.
- 11. Promote good citizenship and character.** Schools reinforce and promote the shared values of their local communities, such as honesty, kindness, responsibility and respect for others, and one of the best ways to achieve this is to acknowledge that parents are the primary moral educators of their children and work in partnership with them.
- 12. Identify problems and assess progress toward solutions.** When you gather this information, share it with students, families and the community at large.
- 13. Support students in making the transition to adult life and the workplace.** Youth need assistance in planning their futures and in developing skills that will result in success. If your school doesn't already offer community service opportunities and work-study programs, look into offering them. These opportunities help connect students with the adults in your community, and the relationships they build foster a sense of hope and security for the future.

Ways to Ramp Up Building Security

Violence prevention starts with making sure your school is a safe and caring place. Effective and safe schools convey a strong sense of security. Experts suggest that you can enhance physical safety with the following strategies:

✓ **Supervise access to the building and grounds.** Request that all visitors check in at the office and that they be escorted on campus. Visitors should not have unsupervised access to children.

✓ **Adjust scheduling.** Minimize the amount of time in hallways where students have unsupervised activities.

✓ **Conduct a building safety audit.** Work with school security or local law enforcement experts to identify areas of campus that present security concerns.

✓ **Close school campuses during lunch periods.** People with criminal intent use the access to school grounds to conduct illegal and dangerous activities. Lunch time is a prime opportunity for others to access campus and for students to return to campus with contraband. Securing the campus reduces these risks.

✓ **Adopt a school policy on uniforms.** Studies show that standardizing school dress codes minimizes comparisons between students. This can help in curtailing bullying.

✓ **Prohibit students from areas where they are likely to engage in rule-breaking.** Students should not have access to cafeteria delivery areas, auditoriums, gymnasiums and other areas when not supervised.

✓ **Welcome an adult presence.** Encourage parents to visit the school when appropriate. Groups of adults on campus provide a visible deterrence to crime.

✓ **Stagger dismissal times and lunch periods.** Minimize the number of students in the hallway at any one time. Staggering times by grade level helps to minimize the risks of bullying, especially when elementary and high school students may be on the same campus.

✓ **Maintain school grounds.** “Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design” is the technique of minimizing risks by laying out buildings and landscaping in ways that provide maximum visibility and deterrence. This can include trimming bushes, increasing lighting and directing traffic through supervised areas.

External Threat Deterrence

Unfortunately many threats come from those with minimal or no connection to your school. They can come from a domestic dispute that makes its way to your campus, local gang activity or random acts. This type of violence is particularly troubling in that it usually comes with very few warning signs. However, there are things you can do to minimize the impact on your campus.

The goal is to minimize access to your facilities and plan for an effective and timely response.

✓ **Limit access to your campus.** This is the first step in trying to keep external threats off your campus. Having a fenced perimeter with signage requiring all visitors to sign in will make it more difficult for those with evil intent to have access to your students. In addition, all employees and contractors or vendors should wear some type of identification. It should be very clear to everyone on your campus if someone is present who does not belong there. While your campus should be a comfortable place for students and staff, uninvited guests should stick out and should immediately be directed to the office.

✓ **Identify and escort visitors.** When visitors come to the office, they should be greeted and given a temporary identification that clearly states where on campus they should be going and with whom they should be meeting. A parent who is volunteering in a classroom does not need access to the gymnasium, PE locker rooms or utility closets. Vendors should be escorted when possible.

✓ **Allow only one open entrance point during school hours.** Ideally, the campus should be laid out in such a way that the only open access during school hours would be through the school office. In a perfect world, the cafeteria delivery area should be outside the fenced perimeter and should have no access to students.

✓ **Keep exterior doors locked at all times.** Exterior doors (with the possible exception of those leading directly to the office) should be self-locking and should be kept locked. In addition, interior doors to unoccupied rooms should remain locked as well. This deters both criminals and students who are not where they should be. All classroom doors should have the ability to be locked from the interior very quickly. It may even be appropriate to keep these doors locked at all times.

✓ **Use video surveillance.** Where possible, there should be video surveillance of the entrances to your campus. These views should be monitored and recorded. Video cameras do not always capture everything, but their presence shows the public that you are committed to safety and security on your campus. It's all part of making uninvited guests feel very uncomfortable.



Team Up With Your Local Law Enforcement

Educators, police and juvenile authorities all play an integral part in preventing school crime. The presence of police at or near the school and local neighborhoods disrupts trouble spots that interfere with students traveling to and from school, prevents strangers from entering schools, identifies students who are selling drugs or are under the influence of drugs, and more. Plus, routinely patrolling school grounds better positions law enforcement to act quickly when they receive a request for help from school authorities. Rapid response is critical in a situation where many children are in harm's way.



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- ✓ **Establish a working relationship with your local police.** Encourage your local law enforcement to visit your school. The worst time and place to meet your local authorities is over the hood of their patrol cars when they are responding to an incident. Build relationships early and work together on response plans.
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- ✓ **Invite officers on campus and make them comfortable.** Let officers know that they are welcome to come in and use your restroom and grab a cup of coffee in between calls. Having an officer sit in his or her patrol care while writing reports on school grounds is a great crime deterrent and builds good-will.
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- ✓ **Offer your facilities for training opportunities.** Law enforcement agencies are often looking for locations to host classroom lectures, active shooter drills and other training sessions. During summer and winter break downtime, your school might be the perfect location for them to continue to hone their skills. What's in it for you? Officers will learn the layout of your facility.
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- ✓ **Hold a "Coffee with a Cop" or "Pizza with Police" event.** This type of casual forum encourages parents to meet the officers who patrol their children's school. Officers can provide information on enforcement activities and response plans for the neighborhood and the school.
-
- ✓ **Invite officers to participate in school activities.** Juvenile authorities and police both have specialized training in working with youth and can become involved directly with students outside the police station, courtroom or other correctional setting. They often develop a good relationship with students as a means of preventing a confrontation in the future. As the relationship builds, students see police and juvenile authorities as positive role models – and this broad respect for authority is essential in preventing crime.
-

Identifying the Warning Signs of Violence



Early Warning Signs

When it comes to preventing violence from within your school's community, the most valuable thing you can do is to learn the early warning signs of a child who is troubled, so that you and others can provide effective intervention.

Red Flags in an Elementary School Student

- ✓ Has trouble paying attention and concentrating
- ✓ Does poorly in school
- ✓ Often disrupts classroom activities
- ✓ Frequently gets into fights
- ✓ Watches many violent TV shows and movies, and/or plays violent video games
- ✓ Has few friends
- ✓ Consistently does not listen to adults
- ✓ Is cruel or violent towards pets or other animals
- ✓ Is easily frustrated
- ✓ Is not sensitive to the feelings of others

Red Flags in a Middle School or High School Student

- ✓ Does not listen to authority figures
- ✓ Pays no attention to the feelings or rights of others
- ✓ Relies on physical violence or threats of violence to solve problems
- ✓ Does poorly in school and often skips class
- ✓ Misses school frequently
- ✓ Gets suspended from or drops out of school
- ✓ Joins a gang, gets involved in fighting and/or steals or destroys property
- ✓ Drinks alcohol and/or uses inhalants or drugs

If you pick up on any of these warning signs in a student, the next step is to rally staff around the remedying issue. Behavioral Intervention teams are groups of school staff whose goal is to identify students with behavioral and/or psychological issues and address these issues before harm is done to the student or others. Typically this team will include the student's teacher(s), counselor and administrators. In some cases, it may be appropriate to also get input from playground supervisors, bus drivers and others who interact with the student on a regular basis. By comparing experiences and getting a more complete picture of the issue, it may be possible to provide a better Behavioral Intervention.

Imminent Warning Signs

Unlike early warning signs, which allow for intervention, imminent warning signs indicate that a student is very close to behaving in a way that is potentially dangerous to him or herself and/or others. Imminent warning signs include:

- ✓ Serious physical fighting with peers or family

- ✓ Severe destruction of property

- ✓ Severe rage for minor reasons

- ✓ Detailed threats of lethal violence

- ✓ Possession and/or use of firearms and other weapons

These behaviors require an IMMEDIATE RESPONSE. Safety must always be the first and foremost consideration when warning signs indicate that danger is imminent. This is the time to bring in trained professionals. In some cases, this may be the time to contact law enforcement.

Incident Planning and Response

Effective incident response is a result of careful planning. Every school should have a violence response plan. This plan should be part of a larger emergency preparedness plan and should include at least the following:



- 1. Security Assessments** – Work with your local authorities to survey your school grounds and look for specific issues, such as dark parking lots and unsupervised spaces behind buildings which create opportunities for problems.
- 2. Emergency Planning Team** – A team of individuals from across the campus should be trained in response procedures. Be sure to consider custodial, maintenance and food service staff as they often provide a broad understanding of the campus. This team will help develop the plan that all staff will implement.
- 3. Incident Plan** (action steps during an incident)
 - A. Call 911.** Contact law enforcement immediately when faced with a potentially violent situation. Most active shooter incidents are over in a matter of minutes. Get trained first responders on the way.
 - B. Isolate the threat.** Where possible, contain the individual who represents a threat by locking doors and hallways.
 - C. Protect students and staff.** When it isn't possible to safely evacuate students, keep them quietly grouped in the dark to minimize attention. Be sure to identify specific procedures for any special needs students.
 - D. Follow first responder's instructions.** The law enforcement officers who are the first to arrive on the scene don't have time for a lengthy discussion. They are trained to confront and "neutralize" the threat. They will not be stopping to help injured persons or assist with evacuation. Approach law enforcement slowly and in a non-threatening manner. Answer questions quickly and clearly.
- 4. Internal Communication Plan** – How will you communicate a violent incident to your staff? Most experts agree that clear communication is best. Avoid the use of codes. Simply state what the issue is and give clear, concise instruction on how to respond. Methods of communication may include an intercom system, campus radios and/or a text messaging system.

5. External Communications Plan – With whom do you need to communicate?

A. Board members and administrators will need to be apprised of the situation.

B. Parents will be concerned about their children and need instructions to be reunited with their student(s).

C. Media may begin arriving shortly after first responders. You will need a location identified where they can set up and a person who will give updates.

6. Training and Exercises – Plans are never fully implemented until those responsible can act out those plans based on muscle memory. In the same way that we have been trained to respond to a fire alarm by evacuating the building in an orderly fashion, students and staff should be trained in how to perform a reverse evacuation.

7. Post Incident Recovery – No response is perfect. There is always an opportunity to learn from what went well and what did not go well.

What Can You Do?

School crime is made up of everyday occurrences and can be reduced through everyday actions. The actions of students and parents help ensure a safer campus community. These ideas should be shared at student assemblies and parent meetings as well as published in school newsletters and other communication.

Students can...

Behave responsibly

- ✓ Resolve problems and disputes non-violently
 - ✓ Refrain from teasing, name calling, and other seemingly innocent behaviors that actually hurt others' feelings
 - ✓ Respect other students
 - ✓ Know and follow the school rules
-

Report crimes and threats to school officials

- ✓ Students know better than anyone else what is going on in their school
 - ✓ Reporting threats and crimes can protect students and sometimes even save lives
-

Get involved in or start anti-crime programs

- ✓ Students can directly reduce school crime by becoming peer counselors, serving as mediators, learning conflict resolution, etc.
-

Avoid being a victim

- ✓ Walk away from fights, avoid dangerous areas, decide who to associate with
-

Seek help

- ✓ Identify adults who they trust, because these adults often provide the necessary help and resources to resolve a troubling issue.
-

Parents can...

Communicate with their children and be available and approachable

- ✓ Consistency, honesty and understanding are critical
-

Provide clear and consistent discipline

- ✓ Parental views on crime, violence, weapons and appropriate self-defense are necessary, and children need to know that parents support school discipline policies
-

Model pro-social behavior

- ✓ One of the best ways to teach a child is by demonstration. Through everyday actions, parents teach their children how to interact socially, handle competition and defeat, discuss differences, etc. Children's exposure to negative influences makes the parent's role as a model of behavior even more important
-

Get involved with their children's school, as well as community organizations and activities

- ✓ Becoming active brings many benefits. It provides parents the opportunity to see more of what their children see, therefore gaining a deeper understanding of their children's needs
 - ✓ Make sure children attend class
 - ✓ Get to know teachers and administrators
 - ✓ Encourage children to engage in activities
 - ✓ Attend parent-teacher conferences
 - ✓ Know the school's discipline policy
-

Resources

Centers for Disease Control – www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention

National Crime Prevention Council – <http://www.ncpc.org/topics/school-safety>

US Department of Education – <https://www.ed.gov/school-safety>

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