How big is this problem?
Even though it can feel like the news is filled with reports of school shootings and other violence, school-related violence is actually lower than in previous years. Statistically, school is the safest place for children to be. The majority of children are safe at school.

How can I talk to my teen about such a serious issue?
It is important to talk to your teenager about school violence and to listen to his thoughts and concerns on this issue.

- It is okay to express fear at what has been happening and compassion for the students and families who have survived these horrors.
- Explain that there is a difference between being different from other students and having severe problems that lead to extreme violence.
- Express to your teen how important it is to let you or another adult know if s/he hears another child threatening violence towards himself or others.
- Talk about what it might feel like to be an outcast at school and find out if your teen is having trouble fitting in.
- Teens are aware of social issues so talk with them about bigger issues, like gun control and what they can do to help keep their school safe.
- Talk with your kids about solving problems constructively; help them to find appropriate solutions to problems without using violence.

How can schools help keep kids safe?
Decreasing violence in schools requires a joint commitment from the school, the students, the parents, and the community. Here are some practices that schools have found to be effective:

- Increased supervision by administrators and security guards.
- Checking visitors’ IDs.
- Tracking all incidents of violence in full detail.
- Keeping track of students who have been in trouble in the past either in school or in the community.
- Increasing mental health services for students.
- Placing telephones in classrooms.
- Making peer counseling available.
- Teaching conflict resolution or anger management.
- Eliminating backpacks or restricting their use.

What do we know about the teens who are committing these crimes?
Students who are potentially violent tend to exhibit more than one of the following:

- Inability to recognize their own anger and redirect it so it does not lead to violent behavior.
- Difficulty recognizing others’ feelings.
- Feeling no remorse.
Believing that the only solution is to take matters into their own hands.
No positive role models.
Feeling unloved at home and unaccepted at school.
Experienced either physical or psychological abuse, or neglect.
Inability to see their future.

Be aware of these additional warning signs in teens:
- Name calling, abusive language, and threats of violence.
- Preoccupation with weapons or violence.
- Cruelty to animals.
- Problems with drugs or alcohol.
- Discipline problems at school such as truancy or expulsion.
- Few or no close friends, feeling like an outcast at school.
- Bullied or bullies others.
- Preference for movies, TV, music, video games, reading, or clothes with violent themes.
- Expressions of anger, frustration, or violence in writing or drawings.
- Depression or mood swings – there is a difference between feeling down one day and being depressed. It is not normal for teenagers to be severely depressed or extremely moody!
- Suicide threats or attempts.

Where to go for help

If you observe any of these behaviors in your teen or another teen, contact the school counselor, your physician, or a mental health professional.

Where you can go for more information:

Injury Center: Violence Prevention – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/schoolviolence/index.html

National Crime Prevention Council
www.ncpc.org/

National School Safety Center
www.schoolsafety.us

National PTA
www.pta.org

You may also want to look at:


