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### 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](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/schoolviolence/index.html)

### **National Crime Prevention Council**

[www.ncpc.org/](http://www.ncpc.org/)

### **National School Safety Center**

[www.schoolsafety.us](http://www.schoolsafety.us)

### **National PTA**

[www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)

### **You may also want to look at:**

Elliott, D. S., et al. (Eds.). (1998). *Violence in American schools: A new perspective*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Garbarino, J. (2000). *Lost boys: Why our sons turn violent and how we can save them*. New York: Doubleday.

Garbarino, J. (2007) *See Jane hit: Why girls are growing more violent and what we can do about it*. New York: Penguin.

Garbarino, J. & deLara, E. (2003). *And words can hurt forever: How to protect adolescents from bullying, harassment, and emotional violence*. New York: Free Press.

Schaefer, C. E., & DiGeronimo, T. F. (1999). *How to talk to teens about really important things: Specific questions and answers and useful things to say*. San Francisco: Wiley.