“At Least Do No Harm”
School Safety Practices to Avoid

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Summary

In the wake of recent school violence, communities press for tighter security in K-12 schools. As a result, schools may hurriedly adopt practices not only inappropriate but harmful.

Using the latest research to date on school safety, this presentation outlines assumptions and practices to avoid and offers alternatives to improve school safety.
We hope you will learn to.

1. Identify school safety practices that are inappropriate and potentially harmful.
2. Identify more appropriate alternatives to unsafe practices.
3. Locate expert guidance and training to improve school safety.
Let’s consider practices to avoid during each phase.
Prevention:
- Awareness
- Assessment
- Mitigation/Education

Recovery:
- Postvention
- Crisis Team Support
- Incident analysis and evaluation
- Refresher training

Response:
- Immediate actions to restore security and safety

Preparation:
- Planning
- Preparation (training)
- Crisis Communications Plan

A Model for School Crisis Prevention & Intervention
Do not overlook a core principle of workplace violence prevention.

Safety is everyone’s responsibility.
What does this really mean?

- Awareness training must include all school personnel, including office, cafeteria, facilities, and transportation staff.
- All stakeholders have a role in assessing and providing information about risk.
Assessing the Risk: Mapping Unowned Spaces

Ron Avi Astor
Where do schools go wrong?

“Very few schools know if they have 50 or 500 violent acts during the course of a month or a year. What people remember is what they heard or the most severe events. What we learned from our work in Israel is that giving recommendations to specific schools without knowing what is happening at the local site is usually not helpful. One school might have a serious problem with sexual harassment, at another school, it might be weapons use, yet, at another school it might be teachers being abusive to kids. Each one of these requires a very different strategy. Also, depending on who you talk to in schools, different groups might think that one form of violence is more common than other ones—often, word-of-mouth and rumors don’t reflect the entire picture of what happens in a large social setting like a school” (Astor, 2003).
Prospective Profiling

• No data exist demonstrating the validity or effectiveness of prospective profiling to identify potential perpetrators for any type of crime (Reddy et al., 2001).

• In fact, profiling may:
  – Over-identify students who will not engage in targeted violence – most youth who fit a certain profile will not engage in acts of targeted school violence
  – Under-identify students who may pose a serious risk – the profile may inappropriately exclude students who do not have the designated characteristics, but who may, in fact, pose a risk of targeted violence.
Referrals to Mental Health Professionals

• Most mental health professionals do not have formal training in assessing risk for targeted violence.
  – Assessing risk for general violence vs. targeted violence

• Standard psychological tests are of questionable utility to school-based targeted violence risk assessments.
  – Few school attackers had histories of mental disorders prior to their attack
  – The results psychological tests have not been connected to risk of targeted violence in schools.
Guiding Principles in Threat Assessment

**Principle 1: Avoid Profiling**

- There is no profile or single “type” of perpetrator of targeted violence.
  - In fact, researchers have found that the attackers are often quite diverse (Fein et al., 1995; Fein & Vossekuil, 1998, 1999; Vossekuil et al., 2002).

- Rather, violence is seen as the product of an interaction among the perpetrator, situation, target, and the setting.
Guiding Principles in Threat Assessment

**Principle 2: Making vs. Posing a Threat**

- There is a difference between making a threat and posing a threat.
- Many people who make threats do not pose a serious risk of harm to a target.
- Conversely, many who pose a serious risk of harm will not issue direct threats prior to an attack.
Guiding Principles in Threat Assessment

Principle 3: Targeted Violence is not Random

- Targeted violence IS NOT random, spontaneous, or a result of someone “just snapping.”
- Targeted violence IS seen as the result of an understandable, and an often discernible, pattern of thinking and behavior (Borum et al., 1999; Fein & Vossekuil, 1998; Fein et al., 1995; Vossekuil et al., 2002).
- What this finding suggests is that incidents of targeted violence may be preventable.
  - Because targeted violence occurs as a result of a behavioral process (i.e., it is not random), fact-based assessments would help to determine risk.
Implications for Practice: Developing a School Threat Assessment Plan

1. Identify one person to conduct threat assessments for the school or, preferably, assemble a multidisciplinary team to do the same.

2. Establish the authority and capacity to conduct threat assessments in school.

3. Establish mechanisms to identify, assess, and manage students who may pose a threat to the school or someone at school.

Fein et al. (2002)
Students have information and intelligence, too.

Don’t ignore bystanders.
An Illustration

Intelligence Lost
“In virtually all of the cases in this study the person told was a peer – a friend, schoolmate, or sibling. In only two cases did such a peer notify an adult of the idea or plan.”

“In fewer than one quarter of all incidents the attacker communicated a threat to his target(s) prior to the attack.”

(Vossekuil et al., 2000, p. 4)
The Bystander Study

1. When did they know?

Out of 91 cases reviewed:

- The majority received the information more than a day before the attack.
- 59% were told days or weeks in advance
- 22% were told month or years prior
- 19% were told a few hours or less before the attack.
2. Did bystanders share?

Only 4% of the individuals with prior knowledge attempted to dissuade the attacker from violence.
3. What did we learn about failure to disclose?

Four factors supported the belief that it could never happen:

- Belief that such talk was attention seeking behavior
- Belief that it would never actually be carried out
- The student making the threat did not seem serious – joking
- Overt and repetitive statements - led people to believe they were not serious.
4. Misjudgment

- Bystanders underestimated the immediacy.
  - They spend too much time pondering.

- The level of detail the attacker shared did *not* influence the bystander’s view of the seriousness or urgency.
Implications for School Policy

• Encourage rapid reporting of threats or disturbing behaviors
• Define safe avenues for reporting – including anonymous reporting
• Ensure that all those who report a threat or threatening situation will be treated with respect and that the information they provide will be closely guarded.
• Pledge to take action.
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**A Model for School Crisis Prevention & Intervention**
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Planning
Preparation (training)
Crisis Communications Plan
Don’t overlook a basic principle of crisis preparedness.

- Safe reunification of parents and their children is a well-established principle, yet few school personnel know the research in this area.
“Nearly half of parents, 45%, do not know the location to which their child would be evacuated as part of their school’s disaster plan. This is despite the fact that 61% of parents say they are familiar with their school’s plan.”

“Fewer than one-third of parents, 31%, would evacuate from their home or place of employment and reunite with their children later, if so directed. By contrast, 63% would disregard an evacuation order and go directly to their child’s school.”

(Redlener et al., 2008, p. 3)
“Slightly over half of U.S. parents surveyed believed the school buildings in their community could withstand a major natural disaster such as an earthquake or tornado. Even among those parents who trusted in the physical integrity of the school buildings, however, 61% would ignore evacuation orders and retrieve their children.”

(Redlener, Grant, & Abramson, 2008, p. 3)
What’s the implication?

“Efforts by policy-makers, school officials, and emergency managers to counter this behavior, even if it is done with the intent of protecting the children, likely will not significantly influence what parental actions will be when a crisis occurs. A failure to resolve this planning issue suggests that both strategies for ensuring the safety of children—evacuating with the rest of the school and waiting for parental pickup—will be jeopardized.” (Redlener et al., 2008, p. 6)
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What does “prepared" really mean?

Is your school *really* prepared?

NIMS Implementation Activities

- Adopt NIMS at the school and campus community level.
- Institutionalize the Incident Command System (ICS) for managing all emergency incidents and pre-planned school and campus events.
- Coordinate and support the development and use of integrated Multi-agency Coordination System (MACS).
- Establish a Public Information System (PIS) within the ICS framework.
- Establish NIMS strategy and timeline for full implementation.
- Update emergency management plans to incorporate NIMS and reflect National Response Framework (NRF).
- Participate in and promote mutual aid agreements.
- Incorporate NIMS and ICS into all emergency management training and exercises.
- Key school and campus personnel complete NIMS training.
- Incorporate corrective actions into preparedness and response plans and procedures.
Is your school really prepared?

NIMS Implementation Activities (continued)

- Participate in an All-Hazard Exercise Program
  - Schools and higher education institutions (HEIs) will participate with partners in an all-hazard exercise program based on NIMS that involves first responders from multiple disciplines, agencies, and organizations.

- Response Inventory
  - All schools and higher education institutions (HEIs) maintain an inventory of organizational response assets — equipment, resources, and supplies.

- Resource Acquisition
  - To the extent permissible by law, schools and higher education institutions (HEIs) ensure that relevant national standards and guidance to achieve equipment, communication, and data interoperability are incorporated into acquisition programs.

- Standard and Consistent Terminology
  - All schools and higher education institutions (HEIs) apply standardized and consistent terminology for school and campus incidents, including the establishment of plain English communication standards across the public safety sector.
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Immediate actions to restore security and safety
Be sure you don’t rely solely on emergency responders.
Who will be the first responders?

“If a school-based incident occurs, school personnel are the immediate responders — they provide first-aid, notify community response partners, and give command and management directives — all in advance of first response arrival” (NIMS, 2008, p. 3).
How prepared are school leaders?

- They aren’t.
- Many K-12 public school leaders and those they supervise are not prepared to respond to acts of violence, including an active shooter incident.
- A recent study of K-12 principals in this region found that they relied primarily on personal experience for learning how to respond to a school crisis (McCarty, 2011).
Why Not?

1. Education leadership preparation programs rarely offer substantial training in responding to school violence. [*Pitt does!*]

2. Educators typically do not have access to databases housing the scholarly literature on school violence.

3. School leaders who rely on Web sources may encounter misinformation while never discovering obscure and excellent reports prepared by leading experts.

4. School leaders do not experience crises often enough to amass an experiential expertise. Even if school staff members had an experience, their subsequent situations would require different and context-specific responses (Kerr, 2009; 2013).
Making Matters Worse

“Incident response training that is available to educators is typically offered through federal agencies or by local first responders who may not understand the conditions, systems, language, prior knowledge, and constraints of school personnel. In sum, law enforcement agencies lack a deep understanding of how schools work, while educators lack knowledge about best incident response practices.” (Kerr, 2013).
What’s the implication?

• School leaders need to undergo formal training based on the NIMS system.
• School crisis plans and team preparation must be collaboratively developed and implemented with emergency responders.
• All personnel should know and practice what to do in a crisis.
• Crisis communications should be in language understood by emergency responders, parents, students, and school personnel.
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Don’t overlook:

• Screening for those at risk for suicide
• Communications regarding risk factors and warning signs
• Safeguarding deceased’s possessions
• Avoidance of CISD debriefings for students
• Plans for anniversaries
For additional information, see:

For More Information

• “Emergency Planning” Website
  - The U.S. Department of Education’s (ED) Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS) offers the “Emergency Planning” Website designed to support administrators. It is accessible at http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/index.html

• Readiness and Emergency Management For Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center
  - ED also offers training, resources, and technical assistance to the education community through its REMS TA Center. The REMS TA Center is accessible at http://rems.ed.gov

• “School Preparedness” Website
  - DHS offers resources to the education community through its website named "School Preparedness." The site, offering information and resources, is accessible at http://www.dhs.gov/xprevprot/programs/gc_1183486267373.shtm

• National Integration Center (NIC) Incident Management Systems Integration Division (IMSID)
  - DHS created the NIC Incident Management Systems Integration Division. Administered through the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA), it oversees the maintenance and refinement of the NIMS and offers resources promoting its adoption. The NIC IMSID is accessible at http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/index.shtm
For More Information

- **NIMS Guides**
  - The National Integration Center (NIC) Incident Management Systems Division Home presents “NIMS Guides” on its website. The NIMS Guides provide clarification on NIMS and provides updates to specific elements of the NIMS document. It is accessible at http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/rm/guide.shtm

- **Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS) Web Portal**
  - DHS established LLIS to help first responders, emergency planners and managers, and homeland security partners share information to prevent, prepare for, and respond to terrorism. Additional information on gaining authorization and access to this secure web portal may be found at https://www.llis.gov

- **Emergency Management Institute (EMI)**
  - EMI is the FEMA training branch and provides training to the emergency management field. For example, EMI administers the “Introduction to the ICS for Schools” (IS-100.SC), which was developed collaboratively by DHS and ED for schools and HEIs. School emergency management officials can access the free, on-line independent study training courses through EMI’s website accessible at http://training.fema.gov/


References


