

School Violence: A Dangerous Distraction

School shootings. Metal detectors and book bag searches. The guys who hang out in the basement stairwell. The diva who spreads vicious rumors by e-mail.

All of the above can cause feelings about school that range from slightly uncomfortable to terrifying. For some teens, just the idea of school shootings—like the one at Columbine High in Colorado in 1999—is enough to make them never want to go to school again. For young people who are targeted by bullies, trying to avoid getting picked on or beaten up often takes top priority. Learning—which is the point of school, after all—gets put on the back burner. School violence of any type is a serious problem. It's a distraction no one needs.

But is school safer than you think?

With all the anxiety surrounding school, it can be difficult to keep school violence in perspective. Surveys show that students think school is one of the most dangerous places in their world. But in terms of actual crimes, like physical assault and theft, statistics show that school is one of the safest places to be—safer than at home, walking down the street, or even hanging out at the mall.

More About School Violence

www.intheknowzone.com/schoolviolence



For example, in the past decade, your chance of being the victim of violence or theft at school has been cut in half. High school students who report carrying a gun on school property dropped from 12 percent to six percent. And the number of students who've been in a physical fight at school dropped 25 percent.

There's no denying that school shootings like the one at Columbine are extremely scary. They also attract so much media attention that it can be hard to put them out of your mind. But they're also extremely rare. There have been fewer than 40 school shootings of this type worldwide since 1996. It's twice as likely you'll be struck by lightning as it is that you'll be a homicide victim at school.

This doesn't mean school violence isn't a real problem. No matter where you go to school, you need to stay aware and use common sense to keep yourself safe.

For More Information

Go to www.intheknowzone.com for more information about school violence, with citations and links. Test your understanding with a quick quiz.

Don't stay in the dark.
Get In the Know!



SAFETY IS THE KEY TO SURVIVAL. *IN THE KNOW* **GO**

School Violence

*be the solution,
not the problem*



in the know

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A Safer School Starts With You

There are a number of things you not only can, but should do to help keep yourself and everyone at your school happy, healthy, and violence-free.

- 1. Report actual and potential violence to adults.** If you see someone being beaten up, if you're a victim of ongoing bullying, or if you overhear classmates talking as if they're intending to commit violence, you need to tell an adult who can address the problem.

There are two main reasons young people don't report violence to adults. The first is that some teens still think telling an adult is tattling, an attitude that should have been left behind in first grade. The mature response to potential or actual violence is to tell an adult who can put a stop to it. You're in school, not the Mafia, and in this case staying silent is not the honorable thing to do. Imagine how you'd feel if someone really got hurt, and you might have helped prevent it.

The other reason teens don't report violence is that they fear retaliation. Tell the adult to keep your name and any information you give confidential. Adults can usually handle the problem without ever letting anyone know how they found out about it.

Take threats of violence seriously and report them to an adult right away, for everyone's sake.



- 2. Watch for signs of violence in those around you.** People about to commit violence often show warning signs, such as:

- Losing their tempers almost every day
- Getting into fights
- Bragging about committing violence
- Committing serious property damage
- Taking dangerous risks
- Increasing use of alcohol or drugs
- Making detailed plans for acts of violence
- Threatening openly to hurt others
- Being cruel to animals
- Carrying or playing with weapons of any kind

If a friend fits this profile, try to get him to seek help. If he refuses, report his behavior, in confidence, to a responsible adult. It may be hard, but by doing so you're really being the best friend you can be.

- 3. Don't go looking for trouble**

You know where dangerous types are likely to hang out at your school. You know that nothing good is going to happen if you go there. It's simple—stay away.

If you have to pass through these areas, stick with friends and maintain an air of confidence. If you are confronted, walk away.

More About Safety

www.intheknowzone.com/schoolviolence/safety

- 4. There really is safety in numbers**

Bullies don't single out undersize victims as much as they do friendless ones. The bully's strategy is to isolate his target, which is a lot easier if the person has few friends to begin with. If you're concerned about your safety, stick with friends whenever possible.

- 5. Armed is dangerous**

Carrying a club, knife or gun is a really bad idea. You're much more likely to be caught with it than you are to use it. You'll be expelled if you're lucky and arrested if you aren't.

Weapons also tend to make you stupid. If you find yourself in a scary situation, you'll probably resort to using the weapon, rather than thinking your way out.

At that point, things can get really nasty. The worst outcome of all? You win. Your opponent goes to the hospital, or the morgue, and you go to prison for a long time.

Get real. All you know about armed combat is the stuff you see in movies and video games. In the real thing, everyone loses.



If you know that someone has a weapon at school, you need to tell an adult immediately. Be prepared to report the type of weapon, where you saw it, who was involved in any incident that took place, and the date and time.

If you see someone carrying a weapon, walk away as quickly as possible without drawing attention to yourself. Find an adult or call 9-1-1.

- 6. Treat others with respect**

The alternative to treating others as you'd like to be treated is to view everyone as a potential enemy, which is a miserable way to live your life. Always try to resolve conflicts by talking it out and compromising. Find an uninvolved student or an adult to mediate if necessary. If your school doesn't have a peer-mediation program, start one yourself with help from a teacher or school counselor.

Bottom line: School is probably one of the least dangerous places you spend time. If you stay aware and do the right thing, you can make it even safer.

