

At Issue

A RISK MANAGEMENT NEWSLETTER FOR
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS



Improving Security at K-12 Schools

By: Elaine Horne, Senior Risk Control Specialist,
Wright Specialty Insurance

There were five mass shooting incidences last year in the U.S., four of them on school campuses. The latest tragedy involved a shooter at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT where 27 people, including staff and students, were killed. Statistically, these violent and tragic events are so rare that the level of concern seems to be unwarranted. Odds are 1 in 8 that students will be involved in a physical fight; 1 in 15 that a student could be injured by a weapon; and only 1 in a 1,000,000 that a student will die in school.

www.infoplease.com/ipaA0777958.html

However, to Americans, the loss of any child's life is unacceptable. Everyone has a reasonable expectation of safety and security for students, parents, employees and members of the community.

Targeted shootings are not spontaneous. They are planned in advance, and shooters usually tell their friends about their plans. These students are trying to get attention and revenge. They are typically intelligent, high-performing boys. Other students see them as unattractive losers. Almost all of these shooters are mentally or emotionally ill. The shooting is their last act in a long search for acceptance and recognition. It

is not hard to understand why these students are often overlooked since high school teachers are with students only one hour per day on average. Teachers rarely discuss these kids with other teachers.

Another problem is students do not come forward when they notice something disturbing because they are concerned that they could be wrong and do not want to be perceived as tattletales. They do not know whether the crazy comments and behaviors actually mean anything. These failures to communicate contribute to the difficulty faced when trying to prevent shootings in schools. To stop shooters before they attack, we must capture the warning signals.

COMMON MISPERCEPTIONS:

These comments by school administrators from an investigation conducted by the U.S. Secret Service revealed the need for more education about school shootings.

1. "The kid just snapped" – Shootings are planned for weeks or months.
2. "No one knew anything" – There is always an adult who knew.
3. "He had not threatened anybody" –

IN THIS ISSUE

P.1	Improving Security at K-12 Schools
P.3	To Talk or Not to Talk? Why and How to Have Difficult Conversations
P.4	Q&A About School Safety During Indoor Activities and Severe Weather

They usually do not threaten anyone before the event.

4. "All kids have issues" – Shooters are suicidal and have low coping skills.
5. "We did everything we could" – Administrators and teachers are the shooter's #1 target.
6. "He never touched a gun before" – They usually get the guns from their home.
7. "They planned it alone" – Shooters usually have help to plan from other students.
8. "We need SWAT or metal detection" – It is over before SWAT can arrive at the scene.
9. "He did not fit the profile" – There is no common profile.

MEASURES THAT CAN BE TAKEN TO PREVENT THESE VIOLENT ACTS AT SCHOOL:

Create a threat assessment team including students because they know more than anyone about what is going on with their classmates. Educate the team about the following symptoms of a potential shooter.

1. They have a fixed set of ideas that cannot be changed.
2. They believe that they have been "wronged".
3. They have a plan.
4. They have access to weapons (knives or guns).
5. They are suicidal.
6. They have a preference for violence in poetry, music, videos.
7. They are always focused on past violent events.
8. Lookout for copycat terms such as "Natural Selection," a phrase coined by Klebold and Harris, the Columbine shooters.
9. Shooters make videos and usually post something on social media.

GENERAL SECURITY TIPS

1. Make sure that there is a clear view of who is approaching your front office.
2. Channel all traffic through one main entrance.
3. Station cameras at strategic locations including parking lots and monitor cameras as much as possible particularly at entrances.
4. Utilize signed visitor check-in/check-out procedures.
5. Security personnel should be visible throughout the campus.
6. Lock doors.
7. Do not use names or titles on parking spaces or on door plates.
8. Train ALL staff on lockdown procedures.
9. Conduct lockdown drills.
10. Provide adequate lighting in all interior and exterior locations.
11. Partner with other government groups in your community to share resources.

12. Coordinate with local law enforcement agencies.
13. Work with local emergency responders to complete a security assessment.

AFTER SCHOOL AND WEEKEND RISKS

1. Reduce the number of open doors.
2. Concentrate after-school and weekend activities in limited areas of the building.
3. Gate-off sections of the building not being used for after-school activities.
4. Build in specific security requirements in facility use contracts.
5. Assign dedicated personnel to schedule and coordinate after-school activities.
6. Assign adult supervision such as an activities coordinator, school security personnel.
7. Develop and implement an emergency/crisis guideline for after-school hours.
8. Conduct crime prevention, security and crisis preparedness training and awareness programs.



Useful Links:

www.schoolsecurity.org
(Access Control to School Campuses and Buildings)

www.campusafetymagazine.com
(How Teachers and Administrators Can Respond to Active Shooters)

www.secretservice.gov/ntac_ssi.shtml
(Threat Assessment in Schools)

www.safehavensintl.org
(Resources, videos, power point presentations, blogs)

To Talk or Not to Talk?

WHY AND HOW TO HAVE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

By: **Elissa Brown, Ph.D.**,

Professor of Psychology and Executive Director of the Child HELP Partnership, St. John's University



The end of 2012 brought two traumatic events to the northeastern U.S., both of which devastated the children and adults who were directly impacted. The power of trauma is that it also impacts those of us who were not directly impacted. The Child HELP Partnership, a specialized center for child trauma, was called upon by mental health professionals, educators, clergy, and media to offer advice after Hurricane Sandy and the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Questions that arose again and again were: "Should we tell our children? If so, how?"

As much as we want to protect our children from knowing about tragedy, we need to consider the consequences of not telling them. And we need to think about the reasons why we wouldn't. What role does our discomfort play in avoiding these conversations?

Below are my reasoning and suggestions for having these conversations. I have tried to consider my experiences with children and research on children's development. My goal is to empower you to open the lines of communication and deliver accurate, age-appropriate information to your children.

WHY TELL YOUR CHILDREN?

- Because, depending on their age, they are likely to find out — remember that your children probably have friends with older siblings who know...and talk about it.
- You want to be the source of information for your children — not another child, not the media, not even other adults (who may not realize the sensitivity of little ears).
- Knowledge is power — you don't want your children wondering what the other kids are whispering about in the corner.
- You do not want your children to think you are uncomfortable talking about upsetting topics (even if you are) — this can stop them from coming to you down the road when they need help.

HOW TO PREPARE:

- Make a plan with all of the caregivers of your children — have a united front.
- Think about what you want your children to learn — consider that you may have different take-home points for different children.
- Consider each child's personality and sensitivities, including how they have reacted to upsetting information in the past.
- Try to anticipate questions and prepare your answers. Some of the tougher questions that children may ask include:
 - Can this happen to me?
 - Why did that happen?
- Role-play the interaction with your spouse, another family member, or friend — someone who has a sense of how your children will respond.
- Turn off the media coverage.

AN OUTLINE OF THE CONVERSATION

- Start by asking your children what they know about the trauma. For example: "There seems to be a lot of buzz at the school lately. What is it about?" You will learn what about the situation is prominent for your children and whether they are misinformed.
- Tell them what happened. Your goal is to balance honesty with conveying a sense of safety. Use short phrases (e.g., "20 children were badly hurt in a school in Connecticut") and observe your children's responses.
- Encourage questions.

As much as we want to protect our children from knowing about tragedy, we need to consider the consequences of not telling them.

WHY AND HOW TO HAVE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS (continued)

- If the question is factual (e.g., “Did they die?”), answer it (i.e., “Yes”). Answer only the question that is asked — children tend to ask questions they can handle the answers to.
 - If the question is conceptual (e.g., “Why would someone do this?”), ask your children what they think. Their answer will provide guidance to you about next steps — follow their lead. It is okay to say that you need time to think about and/or research an answer to their question.
 - Not all parents will decide to tell. Remind your children that every parent gets to decide what they tell their children — it is not your children’s job to tell others.
 - That said, we all need social support after a trauma. Identify some friends with like-minded parents with whom your children can discuss the event. Eavesdrop to ensure that none of the children are becoming agitated during the discussion.
 - End the conversation by telling your children that it is natural for them to have more thoughts and/or questions over time. Encourage them to revisit the topic with you.
 - Inform your children’s caregivers about the conversation.
 - Connect with schools, other local resources, and national experts as needed.
- www.stjohns.edu/childhelppartnership



Common Questions and Answers

ABOUT SCHOOL SAFETY DURING INDOOR ACTIVITIES AND SEVERE WEATHER

By: David Bloodgood, Risk Control Specialist, Wright Specialty Insurance

Q: Our high school is known for its high quality productions of musicals and other performances which require elaborate sets on stage. What should we be looking out for to assure the safety of those working on performing arts productions?

A: While designing and building sets and working in preparation for the production is exciting and rewarding, equal attention must be paid to working safely. The effort should be led by someone with clear supervisory authority. Plan the job carefully from set design, materials selection and manpower considerations to construction and installation. Make plans for the possible rental and safe use of scaffolding if elevated platforms or set pieces are to be built. A review of safety rules should occur before construction begins. Insistence on using proper personal protective equipment (PPE) at all times should be made clear. Be sure the workspace



remains uncluttered, keeping it free from accumulating scraps, idle tools and power cords, etc. Keep construction materials organized. Be certain access to doors, stairs, fire extinguishers and electrical panels are kept clear of obstructions. In addition, prohibit the application of graffiti to backstage walls and ceilings. The Department of Labor forbids students from working at an elevation greater than six feet. All currently existing graffiti should be removed to discourage further application.



Q: The weight room at our high school has been renovated and expanded. The number of students using the weight room has grown as a result of adding all the new equipment. What is the best way to manage the weight room from a health and safety standpoint, now that there are so many more users?

A: A number of things come to mind to promote the safe use of your weight room. First, a set of rules must be posted conspicuously on the wall. These rules would require that supervision be present when the weight room is in use, that all weights be neatly racked after use, etc. Warm-up/Stretching signs and illustrations demonstrating the proper use of equipment must also be posted.

COMMON QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT SCHOOL SAFETY (continued)

Disinfecting spray and/or wipes should be readily available and frequently used. Any torn cushions on weight benches should be replaced, because they can no longer be properly disinfected. If adults or staff use the weight room, require a waiver and release to guard the district against liability.

Q: The last two years have produced destructive storms which dealt serious blows to many districts. What are the main components of weather related emergency planning for schools?

A: Violent thunderstorms and hazardous winter weather events occur in many regions of the U.S. Districts need to have an updated Severe Weather Emergency Plan and a designated "Severe Weather Coordinator" who is responsible for the development and implementation of the plan. A Deputy Severe Weather Coordinator should be named in the event of an absence. The district's safety committee is a good place to work out many details of the plan. Your method of acquiring severe weather information, such as the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio, must be established, as well as the means you will use to communicate with teachers, staff, students and their families. Include a plan for back-up communications that would work during a power outage. Identify Severe Weather Safety Zones in the building, and those most vulnerable areas such as entrances,



windows and window walls. Small interior rooms such as bathrooms, and windowless interior hallways formed by load bearing walls generally offer the best protection. Areas with large spanning roofs must be evacuated due to the potential for collapse. Upper floors must be evacuated to the lowest level(s) of the building. Be sure the plan makes provisions for activities which take place before or after school. If a severe weather event happens at the end of the day, consider delaying student departures when warnings or watches are in effect. Conducting drills twice yearly will assure preparedness when moments count. And providing Winter Weather Safety Training to students and staff at this time will help them understand the danger and more capably execute their role in an emergency.



The Right Partnership for You.®

333 Earle Ovington Blvd., Suite 505, Uniondale, NY 11553-3624
Toll Free: 1.877.976.2111 | Phone: 516.750.3903 | Fax: 516.227.2352

www.wrightspecialty.com