



Did You Know...?

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About Safer Schools

Parents Reaching Out connects with families, schools and communities in New Mexico. We offer information from many reliable sources. We thank the Parent Education Network, a project of Parents Helping Parents of Wyoming, Inc. for permitting us to share their PEN Notes publications in this information series.

America's schools are among the safest places to be on a day-to-day basis, due to the strong commitment of educators, parents and communities to their children. But, as we have witnessed, the violence that occurs in our neighborhoods and communities has found its way through the schoolhouse doors. However, if we understand (1) what leads to violence and (2) the types of support that research has shown are effective in preventing violence, we can make our schools safe. These problems can only be addressed when everyone-- at school, at home and in our communities—works together.

Characteristics of a safe school:

- **Create** ways for students to share their concerns and make them feel safe expressing their feelings. Peers are most likely to know about potential violence in advance.
- **Listen and believe** students and parents who express concerns.
- **Focus on individual strengths.** All children can achieve and learn and be appreciated for their individual differences.
- **Involve families in meaningful ways.** Students whose families are involved in their growth both in and out of school are more likely to experience success and less likely to become involved in antisocial activities. Develop strong links to the community.
- **Close ties must be made to families,** support services, police and church groups.
- **Develop positive relationships** between students and staff: Students look to adults for guidance, support and direction.
- **Discuss safety issues openly.** Involve both parents and students.
- **Treat students with equal respect.** No discrimination toward ethnicity, gender, race, social class, religion, disability, nationally, sexual orientation or physical appearance.
- **Have referrals in place for neglected or abused children.** Referrals must reflect federal and state guidelines. Offer before and after school programs for children, i.e. counseling, tutoring, mentoring, cultural arts, community service, access to computers and help with homework.
- **Promote good citizenship and character,** i.e. in working with civic and moral values, parents should be the primary moral educators and the schools should work in partnership with them.
- **Identify potentially dangerous problems.** Collect information and progress toward solutions; share knowledge with students, families and community.
- **Support students making the transition to adult life and the workplace,** i.e. community service opportunities, work-study programs and internships to foster a sense of hope and security.



Early Warning Signs

- **Social withdrawal**--gradual or complete, stemming from depression, rejection, persecution, feelings of unworthiness and lack of confidence.
- **Isolation**--and not having friends are associated with children who behave aggressively and violently.
- **Rejection**--Troubled children without support may express their emotional distress in negative ways such as violence.
- **Victim of violence**--Children who have experienced physical or sexual abuse can be violent to themselves and/or others.
- **Low school interest—poor academic performance**--may cause the frustrated, scolded and teased child to act out aggressively.
- **Uncontrolled anger**--that is expressed frequently and intensely over minor irritations.
- **History of discipline problems**--both at home and school suggest emotional needs are not met causing aggressive behavior.
- **Drug and alcohol use**--reduces self-control and exposes children and youth to violence.
- **Gang affiliation**--that supports anti-social values and behaviors may influence youth to adopt these values.
- **Inappropriate access to firearms**--can have an increased risk for violence especially if the child shows aggression, impulsiveness or other emotional problems.

Imminent Warning Signs:

- Serious physical fighting with peers or family members
- Severe destruction of property
- Severe rage for minor reasons
- Detailed threats of lethal violence
- Possession and/or use of firearms and other weapons
- Other self-inflicted behaviors or threats of suicide



Intervention:

- Share responsibilities by establishing partnerships among parents, children, school and community.
- Inform each other and listen to all partners when early warning signs are observed.
- Maintain confidentiality and everyone's right to privacy. Develop the capacity for staff, students and families to intervene.
- Support students in being responsible for their actions. Simplify staff requests for urgent assistance.
- Make interventions available as early as possible and use all resources. Analyze the context in which violent behavior occurs considering the child's age, cultural background, family experiences and values.
- Coordinate with existing school resources such as special education, drug free school, pupil services, and Title I.

Crises involving sudden violence are traumatic because they are rare and unexpected and we are left asking ourselves---what could have been done to prevent it? School safety is the job of teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and students. We must all commit to meeting the challenge of getting help for pupils who show signs of being troubled.

"Did You Know...?" fact sheets are developed by Parents Reaching Out in collaboration with the New Mexico Public Education Department under a grant from the US Department of Education Office of Innovation and Improvement. Views expressed do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education and should not be assumed to be an endorsement by the Federal Government.