



VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN SCHOOLS

Enhancement Through Law Enforcement Partnerships

Practical advice gathered from experienced school resource officers on how law enforcement, schools, and districts can work together to keep schools safe.

Includes best practices on:

- *Choosing a school resource officer*
- *Establishing parameters*
- *Necessary training and resources*
- *Working with school officials*
- *Challenges*
- *Legal matters*
- *School climate*
- *Reporting systems*
- *Threat assessment teams*

LAW ENFORCEMENT IN SCHOOLS: PARTNERSHIPS, CHALLENGES, AND CONSIDERATIONS

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

Determine Need

- Overview:
 - Schools are diverse with varying needs.
 - Not all schools will need full-time school resource officers (SROs).
- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ In coordination with the school, conduct a needs assessment to determine goals and scope of law enforcement involvement.
 - ✓ At a minimum, ensure that the school has a relationship with local law enforcement and a point of contact in the local police department.
 - ✓ Include a school administrator or superintendent in the SRO selection process.

Specify the Relationship

- Overview:
 - Specifying the relationship from the beginning ensures the partnership is implemented in the most effective way possible.
 - This also ensures all parties are aware of their roles and responsibilities in the relationship.
- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ In coordination with the school partner, determine the following:
 - Who is the representative from each entity?
 - What level of involvement and commitment (both resources and time) is required?
 - What are the overall aims and objectives?
 - What are the roles of each of the involved parties (e.g., law enforcement officers [LEOs], teachers, school administrators) on a daily basis? In crisis situations?
 - To whom does the LEO report (e.g., police supervisor or school administrator)? How will conflicts between entities be resolved?
 - Should LEOs wear a uniform or be in plainclothes?
 - What is the procedure for working with outside agencies (e.g., child service agencies)?
 - How will the following legal issues be handled?
 - Search and seizure
 - Interviews of juveniles
 - Police access to students
 - Information sharing
 - Privacy restrictions
 - ✓ Document decisions in a *Memorandum of Understanding* (MOU).

Initial (and Ongoing) Training Considerations*

- Overview:
 - Working with juveniles poses unique challenges due to different developmental and legal considerations.
- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ Consider specialized training in the following areas:
 - Information sharing and laws regarding juveniles
 - Cultural sensitivity and linguistic differences
 - Problem solving
 - Critical incidents
 - School safety
 - Threat assessment
 - Reporting and dispatch systems
 - Adolescent development
 - Diversion programs
 - Mental health
 - Drug awareness and substance abuse
 - School discipline and code of conduct
 - Psychological First Aid
 - Working with students with disabilities

*Note: This is not an exhaustive list.

ENHANCING & MAINTAINING PARTNERSHIPS

Continuously Assess Relationships and Goals

- Overview:
 - Continuous assessment allows the parties to adapt and adjust strategies as needed.
- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ Conduct an *annual school climate survey* to assess strengths, identify areas that need improvement, and monitor progress.
 - ✓ Track school *crime statistics* and threats to assess changes over time and identify what's working and what's not.
 - ✓ In the aftermath of incidents of targeted school violence, consider how your current crisis management plan would have fared if the event happened in your school.
 - Adjust as needed.

Communicate Often

- Overview:
 - Infrequent or poor communication can contribute to students slipping through the cracks and students' needs not being met.
 - Constant communication allows both parties to address needs and problems in the partnership as they arise, which is crucial for success.

- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ Schedule meetings (e.g., monthly, quarterly) to ensure constant communication.
 - For officers not in the school on a regular basis:
 - Establish communication channels in advance of emergency situations.
 - Be aware of how to access the building (including key codes) and general layout of buildings and school grounds.

Collaborate With Other Community Agencies

- Overview:
 - Community agencies can provide resources and services to address students’ multi-faceted needs.
 - Collaboration outside of schools provides a broader picture of concerning behavior.
- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ Engage with other community agencies, including social service agencies, juvenile justice departments, and local organizations (e.g., churches, youth leagues).
 - At a minimum, be familiar with the services offered, and know contact information for community resources.
 - ✓ Be aware of information sharing laws (e.g., Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act regulations) and develop an information sharing protocol with other community agencies.
 - ✓ Work with all area police to integrate school and neighborhood safety efforts.
 - ✓ Include school officials, school-based LEOs, and all first responders in crisis intervention trainings.

Openly Communicate with Parents and Guardians

- Overview:
 - Communication with parents and guardians can aid in promoting a healthy environment and assessing risk.
- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ Interact early and often, not only when a student is in trouble or an incident has occurred.
 - ✓ Share both positive and concerning information.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES & CONSIDERATIONS

Internal Conflict & Outside Resistance

- Overview:
 - Law enforcement’s primary focus on school safety and school’s primary focus on education may lead to conflict.
 - Accept that LEOs may face resistance from school personnel, parents and guardians, or the broader community.

- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ Emphasize main goal of keeping students safe, which is necessary for successful learning.
 - ✓ Specify guidelines, roles, ways to resolve potential conflicts, and who has authority in various situations in the MOU.
 - ✓ Make clear distinctions between the handling of disciplinary vs. criminal actions (including gray areas).
 - ✓ Avoid harsh disciplinary policies when possible.
 - These can strain relationships, negatively impact climate and academic achievement, and discourage reporting.
 - ✓ Take a comprehensive approach to school safety.
 - Sanction for criminal violations *and* provide resources to address underlying issues and problems (e.g., substance abuse, mental health).

Developmental and Sensitivity Considerations

- Overview:
 - Students will process information and interactions differently based on their age and experiences.
- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ During interactions and communications, keep in mind:
 - Developmental maturity.
 - Prior trauma.
 - Cultural or linguistic differences.
 - Previous experiences with law enforcement.

SCHOOL-WIDE PREVENTION STRATEGIES: GOALS & POINTS TO COMMUNICATE

GOALS

Build Trusting Relationships

- Overview:
 - Trusting relationships can help students feel like someone cares and will listen.
 - They facilitate law enforcement awareness of concerns and potential threats to school safety.
 - Students are often the first to know of an impending attack.
- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ Establish relationships prior to an incident based on mutual trust and respect.
 - ✓ Strive to make students feel connected and supported.
 - ✓ Get to know the students by name.
 - ✓ Say hi to the students, ask them how their day is going, and express an interest in their lives.

- ✓ Show concern and try to relate to the students.
- ✓ Use respectful communication.

Be Visible and Establish a Presence in the School

- Overview:
 - Law enforcement presence helps to deter crime or de-escalate a situation.
 - Presence aids in building relationships.
- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ Greet everyone.
 - ✓ Visit classrooms and lunchrooms.
 - ✓ Provide supervision.
 - ✓ Be a trusting adult that students can go to.
 - ✓ For LEOs not assigned to the school full-time, make every effort to be visible when at the school.

Minimize Tolerance for Bullying

- Overview:
 - Bullying (either as a victim, perpetrator, or both) is often a precursor to school violence.
- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ Advocate ways to prevent bullying.
 - ✓ Educate students on what to do if they are aware of bullying or have experienced it themselves.
 - ✓ Foster a climate where bullying is unacceptable.
 - ✓ Work with the school to develop an anti-bullying program.

71% of perpetrators in targeted school attacks felt bullied and the most common motive was revenge.

Encourage Nonviolent Ways of Resolving Conflict

- Overview:
 - Conflict and disagreements can lead to resentment and violence.
- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ Teach students that violence is not an appropriate response to conflict.
 - ✓ Educate students on nonviolent conflict resolution strategies (e.g., peer mediation, active listening).
 - ✓ Promote respectful communication between students.

Provide Campus Safety-Related Training

- Overview:
 - Students are key to school safety.
 - Providing them with training ensures they know how to react during potentially dangerous or threatening situations.
- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ Consider training in the following areas:
 - Run, Hide, Fight method for active shooter incidents.
 - Leakage (i.e., the idea that a perpetrator’s desire to carry out an attack often “leaks” out in other areas).

- Bullying and internet safety.
- Difference between tattling or snitching and telling when someone is in danger.
- Safe school crisis training in collaboration with other first responders.
- How to respond during various crisis situations.
- Social media (i.e., how it should or should not be used in emergency situations).

KEY POINTS TO COMMUNICATE TO STUDENTS

When talking with students, especially younger students, always begin and end with a positive message.

Schools are Safe Places

- Overview:
 - Being and feeling safe are both necessary components for successful learning.
- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ Emphasize that in general, schools are safe places.
 - Incidents of school violence are rare.
 - Incidents of targeted school violence are even rarer.
 - ✓ Include specific examples of procedures in place that contribute to school safety (e.g., locked doors, surveillance cameras).
 - ✓ Allow students to ask questions about school safety.
 - ✓ Allow students to be involved in school safety planning.
 - ✓ Remind students that they should be cautious, prepared, and alert but that they don't need to endlessly worry.

Role of Law Enforcement

- Overview:
 - Students may not be aware of law enforcement's role in school safety and assume the LEO is only there to catch them doing something bad or to arrest them.
- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ Remind students that law enforcement is there to protect and help keep students safe.
 - ✓ Communicate ways LEOs help make the school a safer place.
 - Use specific, age-appropriate examples.
 - ✓ Let younger students see you in uniform in a safe space prior to an emergency.
 - This is especially important if your interactions with them are infrequent.

Students are Key to School Safety

- Overview:
 - School attacks are not random and are often planned in advance.
 - In 93% of incidents of targeted school violence, the perpetrator planned the attack in advance.
 - In 81% of planned incidents, others knew about the attack ahead of time.
 - Other students and peers are usually the first to know about an impending attack.

- Common reasons given for not reporting a threat or suspicious behavior include the following:
 - ❖ Being fearful of negative repercussions for reporting the behavior.
 - ❖ Not believing the threat was real.
 - ❖ Not knowing who to advise.
 - ❖ Thinking they had more time to decide how to react.
 - There are often warning signs before the attack.
 - In 93% of incidents of targeted school violence, the student engaged in behavior prior to the attack that elicited concern.
 - These statistics suggest that at least some aspects of targeted school violence can be **prevented** with proper reporting, assessment, and information sharing procedures in place.
- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ ***Let Students Know THEY Can Make a Difference in the Safety and Environment of Their School.***
 - Caution students to be alert and report any threats or suspicious behavior.
 - Share success stories with students.
 - Educate students on how to report.
 - Reassure students that their reports will be kept confidential and anonymous.
 - Teach students the difference between tattling/snitching and seeking help/telling a responsible adult when there is a problem or safety concern.
 - ✓ ***Spread the message...***

What you do matters and can save lives.

- ✓ Remind students (and teachers) to:
 - Take all threats seriously, even those done in a joking manner.
 - Report a threat, incident, or suspicious behavior, even if they think others are already aware.
 - Don't assume someone else has already said something.
 - Be aware of threats and posts made in online blogs and social media postings.

**TARGETED PREVENTION PRACTICES:
ASSESSING & DEALING WITH THREATS**

PRIOR TO AN INCIDENT

Work with schools to ensure the following critical resources are in place before you need them:

Policies and Procedures (P&P)

- Overview:
 - Provides guidance on how to respond to a threat or suspicious behavior, including:

- Consequences for making a threat (e.g., disciplinary actions and/or criminal charges).
 - How the threat will be handled.
 - Information on how students, faculty, and staff should report a threat.
- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ Work with the school to implement or revise current P&P to include the information above.

Threat Assessment Team (TAT)

- Overview:
 - Multidisciplinary team consisting of those already involved in the school on a regular basis.
 - TAT members are responsible for:
 - Assessing the threat once it reaches a predetermined threshold.
 - Determining appropriate action.
 - Developing an action plan (if needed).
- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ Include school administrator, counselor or mental health professional, SRO or local LE partner, legal counsel.
 - ✓ Ensure members are specifically trained on how to assess these situations.
 - ✓ Implement regularly scheduled meetings.
 - ✓ Consider follow-up actions for the student who made the threat.

Reporting Systems

- Overview:
 - Allows students to confidentially or anonymously report suspicious or threatening behavior.
 - *Anonymous* reporting systems:
 - Pro: Should help with fear of retribution, one of the main reasons students gave for not reporting when they knew of a pending attack.
 - Con: Prohibits the ability to follow-up with the student who reported the behavior.
- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ Ensure that information on how and where to report is readily available (e.g., on a poster in the hallway, student ID card, lanyard).
 - ✓ Consider having multiple methods to report (e.g., phone, text, email, web forum).
 - ✓ If not anonymous, reassure students that there will be no penalties for reporting in good-faith, even if it turns out to be nothing.
 - Determine whether there will be disciplinary action for students who deliberately give false or misleading information.

RESPONDING TO A THREAT

Threat Assessment

- Overview:
 - All threats need to be assessed to some degree.
 - Most will be dismissed quickly.
 - Some will require a more thorough assessment.

- Suggested action items:
 - ✓ Once a threat reaches a predetermined threshold, the TAT should conduct a full investigation where it:
 - Assesses the danger and likelihood of the individual carrying out the threat.
 - When assessing, consider information on context, amount of detail included, and potential motive.
 - Speaks with all involved, including the student who made the threat, anyone who may have overheard, and the student that reported the threat (if known).
 - ✓ Considers and attempts to address any underlying issues that may have prompted the threat or troubling behavior.

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10 TIPS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT IN SCHOOLS:

1. **Greet everyone.**
2. **Show an interest in students.**
3. **Establish yourself as someone students can trust and go to with their concerns.**
4. **Be visible in the school.**
5. **Educate students on school safety.**
6. **Emphasize nonviolent ways to resolve conflict.**
7. **Limit building access and monitor school guests.**
8. **Encourage students to take an active role in the safety of their school.**
9. **Work with the school to implement proper policies and procedures, a threat assessment team, and a reporting system.**
10. **Consider developmental maturity.**

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School Climate and Bully Prevention

- www.stopbullying.gov

Reporting and Threat Assessment

- U.S. Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center. <https://www.secretservice.gov/protection/ntac/>
- U.S. Department of Education, Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools, Technical Assistance Center. <http://rems.ed.gov>
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students. <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/oshs/index.html>
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¹ All Web sites included in this list (page 11 and 12) were accessible as of February 14, 2017.

Other Resources

- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act guidance. <https://ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>
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