

School Safety and Threat Assessment

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- Director of the UVa Youth Violence Project and faculty associate of the Institute of Law, Psychiatry, and Public Policy.
- Trained as forensic clinical psychologist
- Lead author of Authoritative School Climate Survey
- Developed Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines

Main Points

1. School violence is a small part of the larger problem of gun violence. Schools are safer than the public perceives.
2. The fear of school violence has stimulated harmful consequences in school discipline and security.
3. Threat assessment is a useful tool to identify students in need of assistance.

Traumatic Effect of School Shootings



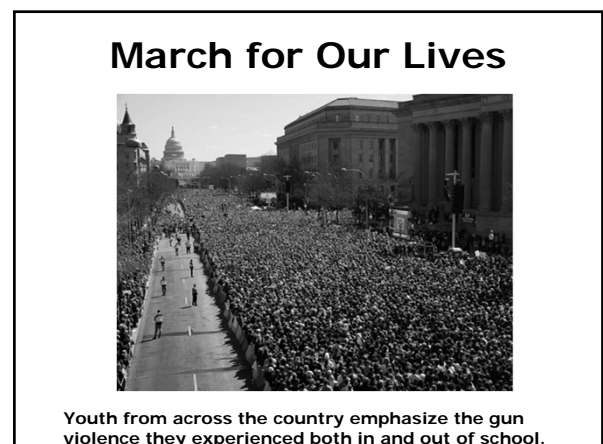
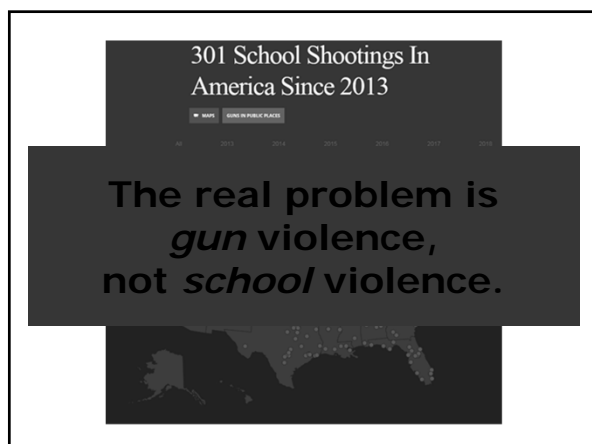
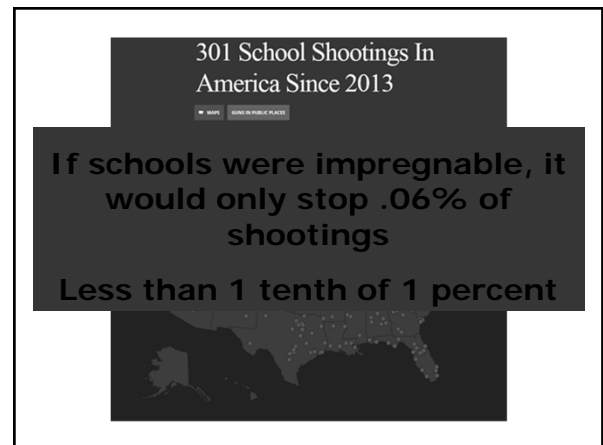
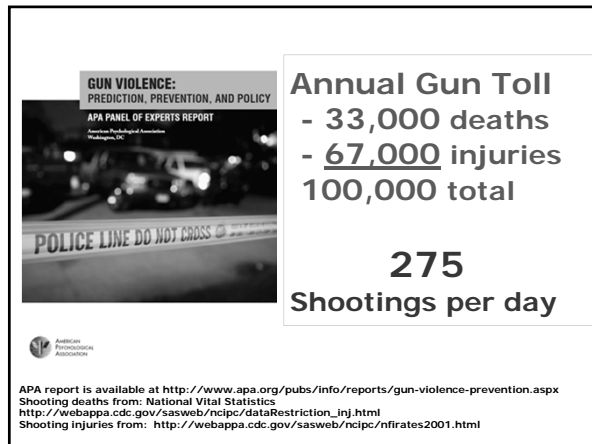
School shootings are so traumatic that they convince everyone that we extensive schools are unsafe and require extensive security measures.

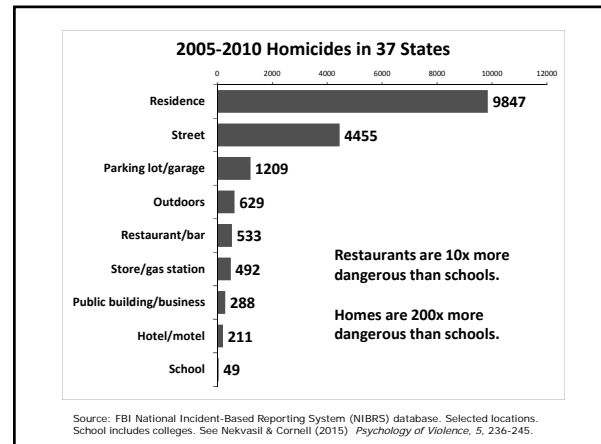
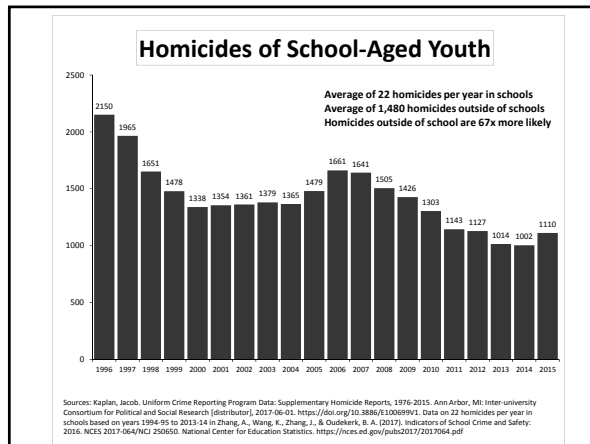


We need both recovery from trauma and a factual analysis of the best way to prevent more shootings.

301 School Shootings In America Since 2013







What Can Be Done About School Shootings? A Review of the Evidence

Randy Borum, Dewey G. Cornell, William Modzeleski, and Shane R. Jimerson

"Any given school can expect to experience a student homicide about once every 6,000 years."

125,000 schools ÷ 21 deaths/year

2010 *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 39, pp. 27-37

As schools cope with safety threats since Fla. shooting, parents and leaders try to balance concern with calm

SWAT members prepare to enter Dumont High School while the school was under lockdown in Dumont, N.J., on Feb. 26, 2018. A high school student was taken into custody after a reported social media threat that prompted the lockdown and a SWAT team response. (Amy Newman / The Record)

As schools cope with safety threats since Fla. shooting, parents and leaders try to balance concern with calm

- Copy cat hoaxes
- Attention-seeking
- Students in crisis

The Expansion of Zero Tolerance

From No Guns to

- No Toy Guns
- No Nail clippers
- No Plastic utensils
- No Finger-pointing
- No Jokes
- No Drawings
- No Rubber band shooting

No accidental violations

Zero Tolerance Suspensions



9 year old with
toy gun



12 year old
doodler



Poem about Sandy
Hook, "I understand
the killings..."

<http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/education/desk-doodling-toy-gun-incidents-clear-educators-lack-common-sense-article-1.194105>
<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/california-teen-suspended-newtown-poem-article-1.1230655>

APA Press Release
August 9, 2008
Contact Pam Villanti
APA Public Affairs Office
(202) 336-6707 (until 8/8)
(202) 336-6771 (between 8/9-8/13)
8/13/08

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



ZERO TOLERANCE POLICIES ARE NOT AS EFFECTIVE AS THOUGHT IN REDUCING VIOLENCE AND PROMOTING LEARNING IN SCHOOL, SAYS APA TASK FORCE

Research Finds that Mandatory Discipline Can Actually Increase Bad Behavior and Drop Out Rates in
Middle and Secondary Students

NEW ORLEANS -- A review of the school discipline research shows that zero tolerance policies developed in the 1980s to stop drug use and curtail unruly and violent behavior in schools are not as successful as thought in creating safer environments to learn. These policies, which mandate that schools severely punish disruptive students regardless of the infraction or its rationale, can actually increase bad behavior and also lead to higher drop out rates, according to the American Psychological Association's (APA) report. Based on these results, the APA today adopted a resolution recommending ways to target discipline more effectively in order to keep schools safe while also eliminating the need for a one-size-fits-all punishment for misbehavior.

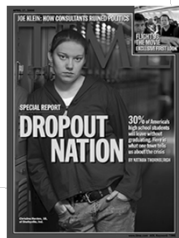
Zero tolerance is not effective.
Suspension associated with
poorer outcomes for students.

Suspension Practices

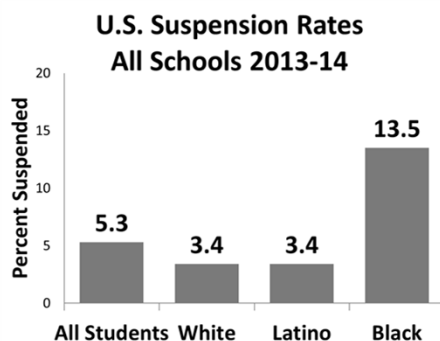
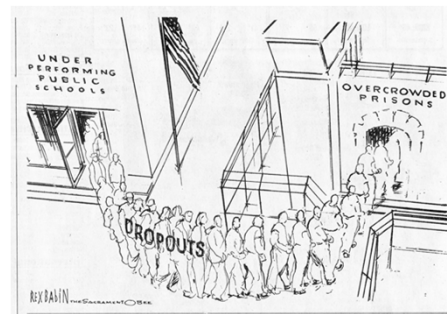
Suspension is a practice that has more
negative than positive effects on students:

- Fall behind in their classes
- Feel alienated and rejected
- Continue to misbehave and be suspended
- Drop out of school
- Juvenile court involvement

The school-to-prison pipeline

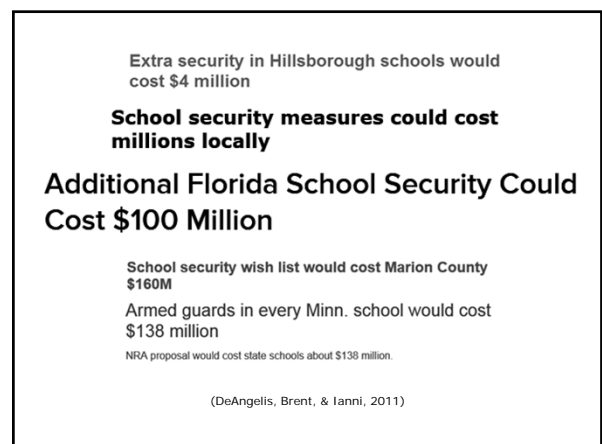
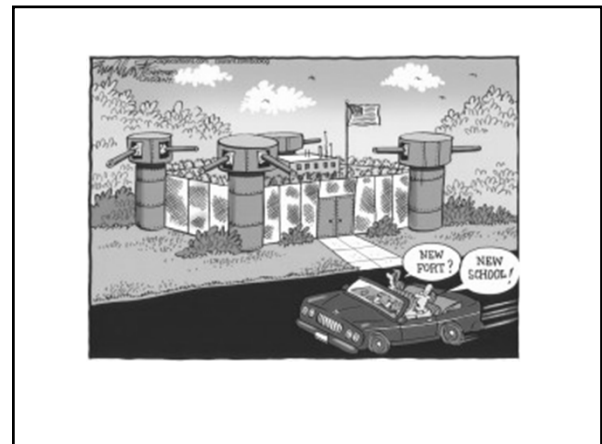
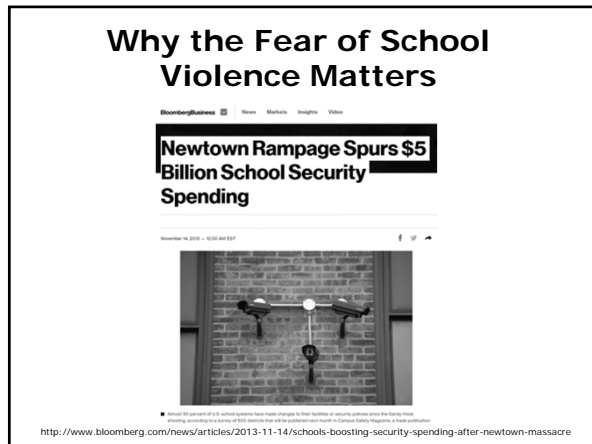


3.3 Million Suspensions Per Year Fuel the School to Prison Pipeline



Latest available data April 2018
https://ocrdata.ed.gov/StateNationalEstimations/Estimations_2013_14

School threat
assessment is a more
flexible alternative to
zero tolerance.



Extra security in Hillsborough schools would cost \$4 million

School security measures are expensive and deprive schools of resources that could be allocated to preventive measures such as anti-bullying programs and counseling services.

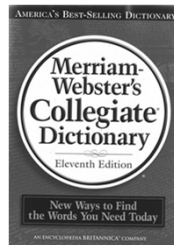
Armed guards in every Minn. school would cost \$138 million

NRA proposal would cost state schools about \$138 million.

*Every Per Pupil dollar spent for **Security** is a Per Pupil dollar **NOT** spent for **Instruction**.*

We should prevent shootings rather than simply prepare for them.

**Prevention means
"to keep something from
happening"**



Crisis response is not prevention.



A crisis occurs when prevention has failed.

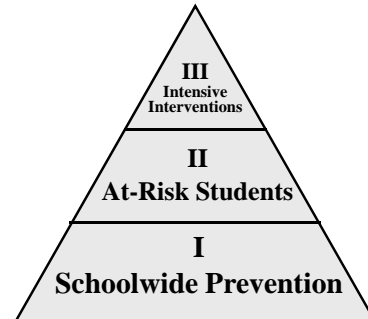
Photo of gunman

**Prevention must start
before the gunman is
at your door.**



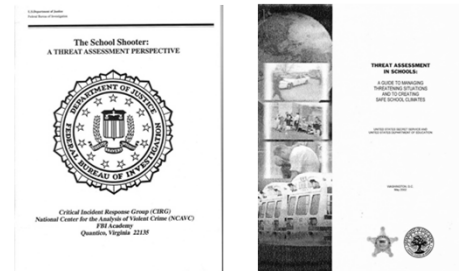
There are opportunities for prevention years before the shooting starts and leading up to the day it happens.

Three Tiers of Prevention in Schools



We need a shift in mindset from security to prevention.

The FBI, Secret Service, and Dept of Education recommended a threat assessment approach nearly 20 years ago.



What is Threat Assessment?

Threat assessment is a problem-solving approach to violence prevention that involves assessment and intervention with students who have threatened violence in some way.

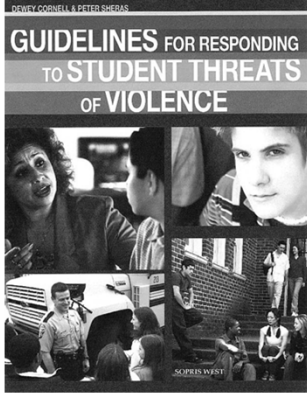
Threat Assessment is a violence prevention strategy.

1. Family members, friends, or others seek help when concerned about someone in distress or who is threatening violence.
2. The threat assessment team evaluates the seriousness of the threat.
3. The team initiates assistance to address the underlying problem, conflict or need. In the most serious cases, protective action is taken.

Threat Assessment Takes a Problem-Solving Approach

The team takes action based on the seriousness of the threat.

- What protective action, if any, is needed?
- What problem stimulated the threat?
- What can be done to resolve that problem?



- Threat assessment must be adapted for schools.
- Recognize developmental issues in children, social context of school.
- Goal is not punishment but successful education and healthy development.

Available from amazon.com

Team roles

Principal or Assistant Principal	Leads team.
School Resource Officer	Advises team, responds to illegal actions and emergencies.
Mental Health Staff (School counselors, psychologists, social workers)	Team member to conduct mental health assessments. Team member to take lead role in follow-up interventions.
Not required to serve on team Teachers, aides, other staff	Report threats, provide input to team. No additional workload.

School divisions may further specify team roles and include other staff to meet local needs.

Accurate Threat Assessment Avoids 2 Errors ...

1. Over-reaction

School Suspends Second Grader for Eating His Pop-Tart Into the Shape of a Gun

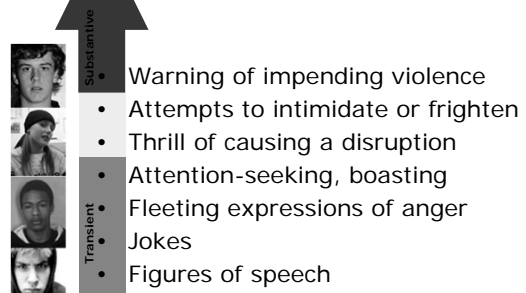


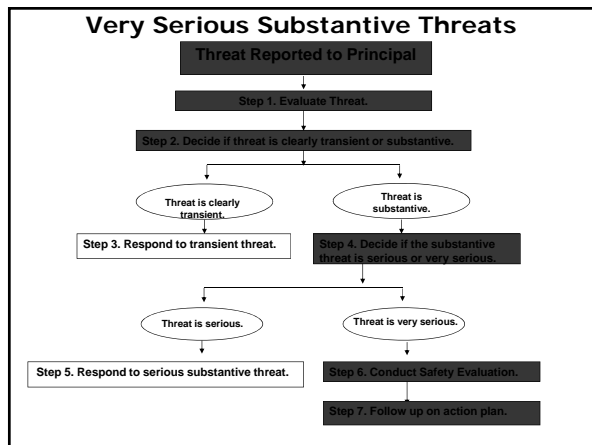
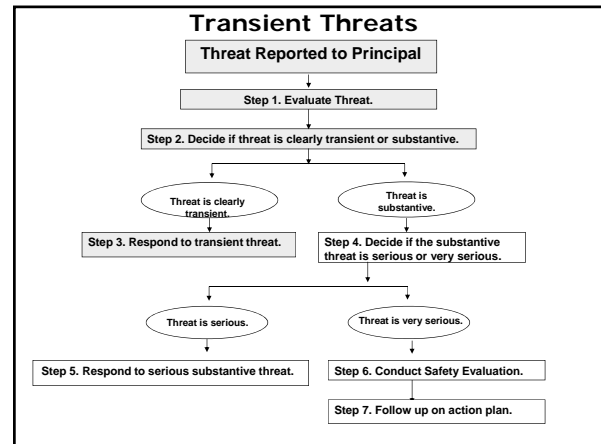
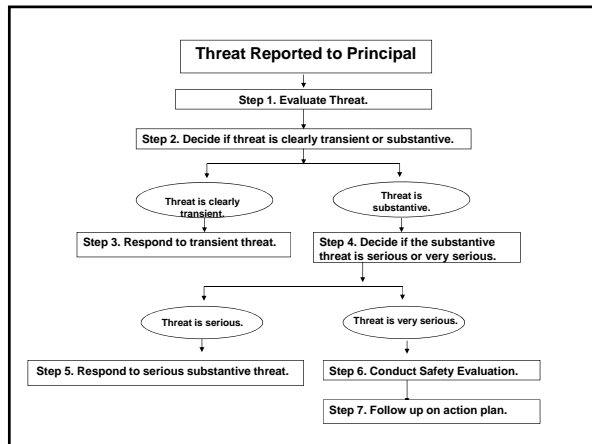
Accurate Threat Assessment Avoids 2 Errors ...

2. Under-Reaction



Continuum of Threats






 **Key Point**

*In a threat assessment, we try to determine **why** a student made a threat, and therefore how we can **prevent** the threat from being carried out.*

**Step 1.
Evaluate the threat.**

- Obtain an account of the threat and the context from the student and witnesses.
- Write down the exact threat.
- Obtain student's explanation of the threat's meaning and his/her intentions.
- Obtain witness perceptions of the threat's meaning.

Document your evaluation.



**Step 2.
Transient or Substantive?**

- Determine whether the threat is transient or substantive.
- The critical issue is not what the student threatened to do, but whether the student intends to carry out the threat.
- When in doubt, treat a threat as substantive.

Transient threats

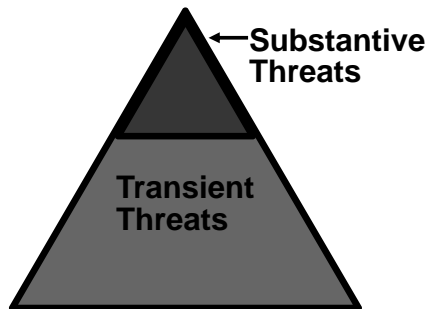


- Often are rhetorical remarks, not genuine expressions of intent to harm.
- At worst, express temporary feelings of anger or frustration.
- Usually can be resolved on the scene or in the office.
- After resolution, the threat no longer exists.
- Usually end with an apology or clarification.

Substantive threats

- Express intent to physically injure someone beyond the immediate situation.
- There is at least some risk the student will carry out the threat.
- Require that you take protective action, including warning intended victims and parents.
- May be legal violations and require police consultation.
- When in doubt, treat threats as substantive.

Transient versus substantive threats



Step 3. Responses to a transient threat.

- No need to take safety precautions.
- See that threat is resolved through explanation, apology, making amends.
- Provide counseling and education where appropriate.
- Administer discipline if appropriate.

Step 4. Serious or very serious substantive threat?

- Substantive assault threats are classified **serious**. ("I'm gonna beat him up.")
- Substantive threats to kill, rape, or inflict very serious injury are classified **very serious**. ("I'm gonna break his arm.")
- Substantive threats involving a weapon are classified **very serious**.



Step 5. Respond to serious substantive threat.

- Take precautions to protect potential victims. May consult with law enforcement.
- Notify intended victim and victim's parents.
- Notify student's parents.
- Discipline student for threat.
- Determine appropriate intervention for student, such as counseling or dispute mediation.
- Follow up to verify that threat has been resolved and interventions in progress.

Step 6. Conduct a Safety Evaluation for a Very Serious Substantive Threat.

Safety Evaluation conducted by a team.

- Principal leads the team.
- School psychologist or other mental health professional conducts Mental Health Assessment.
- School resource officer consults on legal issues.
- School counselor leads intervention planning.



Step 7. Follow up with Safety Plan.

- Determine action plan to reduce risk of violence.
- Identify appropriate interventions for student.
- Schedule follow-up contact with student to assess current risk and update plan.
- Document plan in Safety Evaluation Report.

Research on Threat Assessment

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