

School Violence:

The onset of school violence throughout our country underscores the need for all of us to be better informed about the early warning signs that are often present and have the potential to escalate into another tragic incident.

Early identification and intervention offers the best plan of action to reduce these senseless acts by identifying high-risk students and providing them with help.

We must begin with the assumption that every incident has the potential to escalate into a violent episode.

We must always take threats of violence or threatening behavior seriously and follow some practical guidelines.

What You Should Look For:

There are often early warning signs in most cases of school violence.

Behavioral or emotional signs may be indicative of the potential risk of danger or of a troubled student.

Generally, behavioral changes, more disruptive acts or statements made by students, call attention to the need for intervention.

Using the Warning Signs Responsibly:

While early warning signs may identify a student who is at-risk, they may also create the potential for inappropriately labeling the child.

Caution should be taken not to overreact, while at the same time being genuinely concerned in

seeking professional help for the student.

Early Warning Signs – What to Look For:

Detailed Plan of Threats or Violence:

All threats should be taken seriously and evaluated appropriately.

One of the most reliable indicators of violence is when a student has developed a specific plan to carry out an act of violence.

These situations pose an imminent threat and warrant an IMMEDIATE RESPONSE.

Carrying Weapons, Firearms or Explosives:

Any student known or suspected of carrying weapons, firearms or explosives should warrant IMMEDIATE RESPONSE of school authorities and law enforcement agencies.

Encourage your children to bring to your attention or that of school personnel when they are aware or suspect that another student is carrying a weapon or has designed a plan to harm others.

History of Violence & Disciplinary Problems:

The best indicator of future behavior is that of the past.

A student who has a history of behavioral problems and aggressive behavior warranting ongoing disciplinary interaction poses the need for professional counseling.

Unmet emotional needs may present themselves in aggressive attitudes towards peers, defiance of authority, disengagement from school and social problems.

Parents, it is very important to have your child seen by a professional counselor if they have exhibited aggressive or

threatening behaviors.

These are often signs of a child crying out for help and warrant your undivided attention to these pleas.

Increased Disruptive & Uncontrollable Behavior:

Students that exhibit severe episodes of rage for seemingly minor reasons pose a serious threat of harming others.

Often, these outbursts are associated with increased disruptive behavior in the classroom and uncontrollable behavior that may escalate into severe problems.

Most students who exhibit these outbursts in the school setting have also demonstrated their inability to control anger at home.

Parents must realize that behaviors that are allowed and tolerated at home may have significantly different outcomes in a classroom setting, some of which may intensify your child's anger or aggressive behavior towards others.

Explicit Details of Violence in Drawings and Written Works:

Students often express their emotions and feelings in artwork or writing without harm.

One should be alerted and pay special attention to drawings of violence which are directed at other students, family members or school staff as well as repeated expressions of graphic violent themes.

Severe Fighting and Destruction of Property:

Students engaging in acts of aggressive behavior

such as fighting, bullying, hitting, vandalism, threatening, and defiance of authority are at-risk for more serious episodes.

Parents are encouraged to seek professional intervention on the part of a counselor before things get out of control.

Cruelty to Animals and Fire Setting:

Students who seem to enjoy such things as torturing or cruelty to animals, setting fires or similar acts pose a serious threat to their peers, school personnel and their families.

These behaviors often lead to more violent offenses.

Preoccupation with fire setting or destruction of property as well as a child's perceived pleasure or enjoyment in harming animals should raise concern for parents.

Social Withdrawal and Excessive Feelings of Isolation:

Withdrawal and isolation of a student from their peers and social activities may indicate a student is having psychological problems such as depression, feelings of rejection, inadequacy or persecution.

Be attentive to your child's comments especially those that are critical of others for belittling or making fun of them.

A child who is preoccupied or obsessed with getting back at others for being the target of their jokes crude comments may be in harms way of engaging in a violent outrage.

Poor Academic Performance and Lack of Interest:

Failure to achieve in the classroom may be caused by a number of different reasons.

Attention should be paid to drastic performance changes in the student.

It doesn't take much effort to realize and observe when your child is exhibiting less than capable school results.

Know what's taking place with your child and seek to find out what the underlining cause is of this declining performance.

Victim of Violence:

Students who have been victims of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse are at-risk of becoming violent or abusive towards themselves or others.

Intolerance and Prejudicial Attitudes:

Students who demonstrate an intense prejudice and intolerance toward other students based on race, ethnic, religious, gender, sexual orientation, physical appearance, disability, athletic or academic ability, may act upon these feelings through aggressive assaults on those they perceive to be different.

Affiliation with Gangs or Cults:

Students who participate in gangs and cults may be strongly influenced by the associated pressures to act out certain aggressive behaviors towards non-gang/cult members.

Musical tastes, frequenting of hate-based websites, the wearing of "gang colors", and the display of gang signs or other graffiti may signal a need for intervention.

Early responses to these warning signs are often the most effective actions in preventing situations from escalating.

Students demonstrating radical or abnormal behavior often require professional help.

Any of these warning signs does not necessarily mean that a violent act will occur, rather they should alert you to pay greater attention to their behaviors and actions.

Many adolescent behaviors will come and pass without incident.

However, it is important to be sensitive and to be in touch with what is going on in your child's life.

You must take the necessary actions should you observe behaviors and actions that raise alarm.

Sometimes this is as simple as following your gut instincts.