

FYI: SCHOOL SAFETY AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Characteristics of a Safe School

- Focus on academic achievement.
- Involve families in meaningful ways.
- Develop links to the community.
- Emphasize positive relationships among students and staff.
- Discuss safety issues openly.
- Treat students with equal respect.
- Create ways for students to share their concerns.
- Help children feel safe expressing their feelings.
- Have in place a system for referring children who are suspected of being abused or neglected.
- Offer extended day programs for children.
- Promote good citizenship and character.
- Identify problems and assess progress toward solutions.
- Support students in making the transition to adult life and the workplace.

Tips for Parents

Parents can help create safe schools. Here are some ideas that parents in other communities have tried:

- Discuss the school's discipline policy with your child. Show your support for the rules, and help your child understand the reasons for them.
- Involve your child in setting rules for appropriate behavior at home.
- Talk with your child about the violence he or she sees--on television, in video games, and possibly in the neighborhood. Help your child understand the consequences of violence.
- Teach your child how to solve problems. Praise your child when he or she follows through.
- Help your child find ways to show anger that do not involve verbally or physically hurting others. When you get angry, use it as an opportunity to model these appropriate responses for your child--and talk about it.
- Help your child understand the value of accepting individual differences.
- Note any disturbing behaviors in your child. For example, frequent angry outbursts, excessive fighting and bullying of other children, cruelty to animals, fire setting, frequent behavior problems at school and in the neighborhood, lack of friends, and alcohol or drug use can be signs of

serious problems. Get help for your child. Talk with a trusted professional in your child's school or in the community.

- Keep lines of communication open with your child--even when it is tough. Encourage your child always to let you know where and with whom he or she will be. Get to know your child's friends.
- Listen to your child if he or she shares concerns about friends who may be exhibiting troubling behaviors. Share this information with a trusted professional, such as the school psychologist, principal, or teacher.
- Be involved in your child's school life by supporting and reviewing homework, talking with his or her teacher(s) , and attending school functions such as parent conferences, class programs, open houses, and PTA meetings.
- Work with your child's school to make it more responsive to all students and to all families. Share your ideas about how the school can encourage family involvement, welcome all families, and include them in meaningful ways in their children's education.
- Encourage your school to offer before-and after-school programs.
- Volunteer to work with school-based groups concerned with violence prevention. If none exist, offer to form one.
- Find out if there is a violence prevention group in your community. Offer to participate in the group's activities.
- Talk with the parents of your child's friends. Discuss how you can form a team to ensure your children's safety.
- Find out if your employer offers provisions for parents to participate in school activities.

Action Steps for Students

There is much students can do to help create safe schools. Talk to your teachers, parents, and counselor to find out how you can get involved and do your part to make your school safe. Here are some ideas that students in other schools have tried:

- Listen to your friends if they share troubling feelings or thoughts. Encourage them to get help from a trusted adult--such as a school psychologist, counselor, social worker, leader from the faith community, or other professional. If you are very concerned, seek help for them. Share your concerns with your parents.
- Create, join, or support student organizations that combat violence, such as "Students Against Destructive Decisions" and "Young Heroes Program."
- Work with local businesses and community groups to organize youth-oriented activities that help young people think of ways to prevent school and community violence. Share your ideas for how these community groups and businesses can support your efforts.

- Organize an assembly and invite your school psychologist, school social worker, and counselor-in addition to student panelists-to share ideas about how to deal with violence, intimidation, and bullying.
- Get involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating your school's violence prevention and response plan.
- Participate in violence prevention programs such as peer mediation and conflict resolution. Employ your new skills in other settings, such as the home, neighborhood, and community.
- Work with your teachers and administrators to create a safe process for reporting threats, intimidation, weapon possession, drug selling, gang activity, graffiti, and vandalism. Use the process.
- Ask for permission to invite a law enforcement officer to your school to conduct a safety audit and share safety tips, such as traveling in groups and avoiding areas known to be unsafe. Share your ideas with the officer.
- Help to develop and participate in activities that promote student understanding of differences and that respect the rights of all.
- Volunteer to be a mentor for younger students and/or provide tutoring to your peers.
- Know your school's code of conduct and model responsible behavior. Avoid being part of a crowd when fights break out. Refrain from teasing, bullying, and intimidating peers.
- Be a role model-take personal responsibility by reacting to anger without physically or verbally harming others.
- Seek help from your parents or a trusted adult-such as a school psychologist, social worker, counselor, teacher-if you are experiencing intense feelings of anger, fear, anxiety, or depression.

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