

Teen Talk: A survival guide for parents of teenagers

I'M SCARED, WHAT IF THE NEXT SHOOTING IS AT MY SCHOOL?

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How big is this problem?

Even though the news has been filled with reports of school shootings lately, murders in schools are actually lower than in previous years. It is more likely that your child will get killed by lightning than murdered at school.

What do we know about the teens who are committing these crimes?

- ❖ Inability to recognize their own anger and redirect it so it does not lead to violent behavior.
- ❖ Difficulty recognizing others' feelings.
- ❖ Feeling no remorse.
- ❖ See the only solution is to take matters into their own hands.
- ❖ No positive role models.
- ❖ Feeling unloved at home and unaccepted at school.
- ❖ Experienced either physical or psychological abuse, or neglect.
- ❖ Inability to see their future.

How can I talk to my teen about such a serious issue?

It is important to talk to your teenager about school violence and to listen to his thoughts and concerns on this issue.

- ❖ It is okay to express fear at what has been happening and compassion for the students and families who have survived these horrors.
- ❖ Explain the difference between being different from other students and having severe problems that lead to extreme violence.

- ❖ Express to your teen how important it is to let you or another adult know if they hear another child threatening violence towards himself or others.
- ❖ Talk about what it might feel like to be an outcast at school, and find out if your teen is having trouble fitting in.
- ❖ Teens are aware of social issues, so talk with them about bigger issues like gun control and what they can do to help keep their school safe.
- ❖ Talk with your kids about solving problems constructively; help them to find appropriate solutions to problems without using violence.

How can schools help keep kids safe?

Decreasing violence in schools requires a joint commitment from the school, the students, the parents, and the community. Here are some of the practices that other schools have found to be effective:

- ❖ Increased supervision by administrators and security guards.
- ❖ Checking visitors' id.
- ❖ Tracking all incidents of violence in full detail.
- ❖ Keep track of students who have been in trouble in the past either in school or in the community.
- ❖ Increase mental health services for students.
- ❖ Telephones in classrooms.
- ❖ Peer counseling.
- ❖ Teach conflict resolution or anger management.
- ❖ Eliminate backpacks or restrict their use.

Be aware of these additional warning signs in teens:

- ❖ Name calling, abusive language, and threats of violence
- ❖ Preoccupied with weapons or violence
- ❖ Cruelty to animals
- ❖ Problems with drugs or alcohol
- ❖ Discipline problems at school such as truancy or expulsion
- ❖ Few or no close friends, feeling like an outcast at school
- ❖ Is being bullied or bullies others
- ❖ Prefers movies, TV, music, *video games*, reading, or clothes with violent themes
- ❖ Expresses anger, frustration, or violence in writing or drawings
- ❖ Depression or mood swings- there is a difference between feeling down one day and being depressed, and it is *not* normal for teenagers to be severely depressed or extremely moody!
- ❖ Has threatened or attempted suicide

Where you can go for more information...

National Crime Prevention Council
<http://www.weprevent.org>

National School Safety Center
<http://www.nsscl.org>

Teens, Crime, and the Community
<http://www.nationaltcc.org>

National PTA
<http://www.pta.org>

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Garbarino, J. (1999). Lost boys: Why our sons turn violent and how we can save them. New York: Free Press.

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Schaefer, C. E., & DiGeronimo, T. F. (1999). How to talk to teens about really important things. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

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