Youth Violence Prevention & Intervention

EDS 246b
Preventive Psychological Intervention
Stephen E. Brock, Ph.D., NCSP

Required Readings

Fein et al. (2002)

Vossekui et al. (2002)

School Shootings Worldwide (w/fatalities, 1996 to 2010)

- Feb. 5, 1998; Moses Lake, Wash
- March 12, 1999; Dunblane, Scotland
- Jan. 13, 2000; Eindhoven, Netherlands
- March 8, 2000; Kiel, Germany
- Oct. 12, 2000; Lockport, N.Y.
- Nov. 15, 2000; Pikeville, Ky.
- Nov. 14, 2004; Suzhou, China
- Sep. 18, 2005; Killeen, Texas
- Jan. 19, 2007; Verbois, France

Source: http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0777958.html
Schools Are Safe Places

Indicators of School Crime & Safety: 2010

Homicides

Suicides

"At school" includes on school property, on the way to or from regular sessions at school, and while attending or traveling to or from a school-sponsored event.

School Associated Violent Deaths

Indicators of School Crime & Safety: 2010

School Associated Violent Acts

Indicators of School Crime & Safety: 2010

Serious Violent Crimes Against Students

Ages 12 to 18

2008

36% are school associated

Serious violent crimes include rape, sexual assault, robbery, & aggravated assault.
Preventing Violence:
Creating a Climate of School Safety

- Assess the school’s emotional climate
  - Do people in the school community feel safe?
- Respect and Listen
  - All students (and staff) must feel that they are respected (schools as “a shame free zone”) & listened to.
- Break the “Code of Silence”
  - Unwritten, but powerful (e.g., my middle school experience)
  - Encourage communication and change norms (i.e., make it “heroic” to break the code).

Preventing Violence:
Creating a Climate of School Safety

- Stop bullying
- Empower students by involving them
  - Especially important for adolescents.
- Ensure caring adult connections
  - Relationships are a powerful protective factor
  - Connections can easily be assessed
    1. Alpha List
    2. All staff check on list students they feel “connected” to
    3. Emphasize relationships with those who are not checked.
Preventing Violence: Creating a Climate of School Safety

For further guidance on creating safe school environments refer to...


Preventing Violence: The Importance of a Climate of School Safety

Perceived Safety at School by API Quintile

Percent of students who reported perceived safety at school was very positively correlated with API scores (California Healthy Kids Survey, 1999-2000)

Preventing Violence: The Importance of a Climate of School Safety

Change in SAT (NRT)

Percent in school reporting feeling safe or very safe

Source: California Healthy Kids Survey
Preventing Violence: The Importance of Caring Relationships

Preventing Violence: Specific Prevention Programs

- Selection requires assessment of unique school needs.
  - Which problems are we likely to face in OUR school?
  - What are the primary short-term and long-term objectives of OUR school violence prevention efforts?
  - Who are the targets of the violence-prevention efforts?
  - Are these prevention efforts organized primarily at the school or district levels?
  - How are the prevention efforts linked to broader, community-level violence initiatives?

Adapted from Furlong et al. (2002)

Preventing Violence: Specific Prevention Programs

- While prepackaged programs may work for specific schools with specific needs...
  - They cannot be randomly selected off the prevention program shelf and be expected to be beneficial.
  - Knowing who you want violence prevention efforts to target and what aspect (or aspects) of school violence you are most interested in preventing will be a first step in program selection.

- Furlong et al. (2002, pp. 142-149) classifies “Promising School Violence Primary Prevention Programs” according to program targets and domains.
Preventing Violence: Specific Prevention Programs

- Examples of Violence Prevention Programs:
  - Primary Intervention Project
  - Second Step
  - I Can Problem Solve (Brock et al., 2002, Chapter 6)
  - Peer Mediation (Brock et al., 2002, Chapter 10)
  - Aggression Replacement Training (Brock et al., 2002, Chapter 12)
  - Social Skills Training (Brock et al., 2002, Chapter 8)

School Violence Prevention: School wide or Curricular Approaches

- Second Step
  - The goal of this structured and systematic curriculum is to foster socio-emotional development and school adjustment of children through the development of empathy, impulse control, and anger management. Curricula are available for preschool through eighth grade.

- The Primary Mental Health Project
  - By identifying, and intervening with, students at risk for developing school adjustment difficulties, this 44-year-old project aims at preventing young children from becoming “troubled.”
  - By making use of a specially trained paraprofessional, it provides special adult attention (via child-centered play) to young students judged by teachers as being at risk for school adjustment difficulties.
  - This special attention gives students an unequivocally positive experience with an adult at school.
  - Several state legislatures have provided funding for the systematic implementation of this program. For example, in California, a Primary Intervention Program is made available by State Department of Mental Health grants (through its Early Mental Health Initiative).
Targeted Violence vs. General Violence

- Targeted violence has been conceptualized as violence in which the perpetrator and the target(s) are identified or identifiable prior to an incident.
- The U.S. Secret Service uses this term when referring to individuals who make planned attacks against others.
- It has been suggested that students at risk for targeted violence may or may not possess many of the traditional risk factors associated with delinquency and general violence.

Juveniles who committed targeted homicide were...
- less likely to have had problems with school adjustment,
- less likely to have prior mental health difficulties,
- less likely to have prior arrests or placement in juvenile detention facilities, and
- less likely to have histories of prior violent behavior than were those youths convicted of assault.
- In addition, those youths who were perpetrators of targeted school shootings may differ from individuals who commit different types of homicide as well as from those who engage in nonviolent delinquency.

U. S. Secret Service Report
Ten Key Findings
May, 2002

For hard copies of this report
www.secretservice.gov
edpubs@inet.ed.gov
ntac@secretservice.gov
Fax requests to: 1-301-470-1244
Key Finding #1: There’s no accurate profile

- There is no accurate or useful “profile” of students who engaged in targeted school violence.
  1. Attackers came from a variety of family situations.
  2. Attackers differed from one another in academic achievement.
  3. Attackers varied in the types of social relationships they had created.
  4. Histories of disciplinary problems at school varied.
  5. Most attackers showed no marked change prior to attack.
  6. Over half of the attackers demonstrated some interest in violence.
  7. Most attackers had no history of prior violent or criminal behavior.

Implications for Schools

- Profiles are not effective
  - Criticisms
    - Unjustly stigmatizes students
    - Information may result in discrimination, invasion of privacy, punishment, isolation, and exclusion from school and activities without due process (rather than as a tool for identifying youths in need of intervention).
  - Focus on behavior and communications (not appearances)
    - Appearances may direct our attention, but should not direct our action.
    - Profiling focuses on appearances.
    - Risk assessment focuses on behaviors/communications.

Key Finding #2: Many attackers felt bullied

- Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted or injured by others prior to the attack.

Implications for Schools

- Take bullying seriously. Ensure students are not bullied in school. Empower students to let adults know when they are bullied.
Key Finding #3: Losses and suicidal attempts

- Most attackers had difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures. Many had considered or attempted suicide.

**Implications for Schools**
- Listen for feelings of desperation or hopelessness. Consider the changes in a student’s life.
- Monitor students who have displayed suicidal ideation.

Key Finding #4: Incidents of targeted violence at school rarely are sudden, impulsive acts.

- Revenge was a motive for more than half of the attackers.

**Implications for Schools**
- Students do not “just snap.” Attacks are a result of a process of thinking & behavior. However, the time span may be short.
- Students whose primary motivation is revenge should be carefully monitored.
- Teach kids to cope with being upset.

Key Finding #5: Prior to the attack, others knew about the attacker’s idea and/or plan to attack.

**Implications for Schools**
- Students are an important part of prevention efforts. Schools must have an effective system for dealing with information brought forward.
- Positive relationships among students and staff increases the potential for reporting incidents of concern.
Key Finding #6:
Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to the attack.

Implications for Schools
- Do not wait for threats, but begin inquiry if behaviors are evident. Respond to ALL threats.

Key Finding #7:
Previous behaviors caused others concern

- Most attackers engaged in some behavior, prior to the incident, that caused others concern or indicated a need for help.

Implications for Schools
- Train staff & students to watch for Early Warning Signs, behavior, or comments, and to REPORT concerns.
- Have a reporting system in place & evaluate the process periodically.

Key Finding #8:
In many cases, other students were involved in the attack in some capacity.

Implications for Schools
- Pay attention to the role of friends & others and the impact of peer pressure.
- Evaluate the climate of the school.
Key Finding #9:
Most attackers had access to and had used weapons prior to the attack.

Implications for Schools
- Pay attention to weapons access, use, or communications about weapons.

Key Finding #10:
Most attacks were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention

Implications for Schools
- Have protocols & procedures for managing threats and other behaviors of concern. We must act quickly.
- Practice and evaluate crisis procedures routinely.

Youth Violence Intervention

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Preface

- When a student is a danger to self or others there is a duty to warn.
  - Tarasoff v. Regents of the University of California

Risk Assessment

- Principles to avoid misuse of risk assessment for violence.
  - Do no harm (keep information confidential and use signs to identify the need for interventions, rather than as a punishment tool).
  - Understand that many students show multiple signs and it is important not to overreact.
  - Avoid stereotypes and labeling.
    - Appearances should direct attention not action
    - View student behavior within a developmental context.
      - Developmentally typical behavior should not be misinterpreted

Adapted from Dwyer, Osher, & Wager (1998)

Youth Violence: The River Analogy

- Risk factors that lead to youth violence
- Warning signs of youth with the potential for violence
- Consequences of violence

Adapted from Ramsey, Tannen, Tierney & Lang (1996)
Risk Assessment:
Factors that MAY INDICATE youth violence.

- **Stressors** (risk factors)
  - Significant losses
  - Significant disappointments
  - Having been bullied
  - Associated coping failure

- **Symptoms** (warning signs)
  - Suicidal ideation and behaviors
  - Gun use
  - Interest in violence
  - Hopelessness and despair
  - A need for revenge

- These factors MAY signal that a youth has thoughts of violence

Risk Assessment:
Warning signs that suggest high risk.

- Serious physical fighting with peers or family members
- Severe destruction of property
- Severe rage for seemingly minor reasons
- Detailed threats of lethal violence
- Possession and/or use of firearms and other weapons
- Other self-injurious behaviors or threats of suicide

Risk Assessment:
Factors that PREDICT youth violence.

- How close is the student to the brink of the fall?
  - Current Plan (the greater the planning the greater the concern)
    - How?
    - How Soon?
    - How Prepared?
  - Prior Behavior (breaks down social norms against violence)
    - The best predictor of prior behavior is future behavior.
    - A personal history of act of aggressive violence
    - Personal identification with others who are violent

- Resources
  - Lack of connectedness to pro-social role models (especially adults)
Referral

- In addition to training staff and students about risk factors, warning signs, and predictors of violence, a procedure should be developed for students, staff, and parents to refer troubled individuals.
- Once referred, the procedure must include provisions for risk assessment to determine the degree of risk.
  - The procedure should designate a team to conduct risk assessments.
  - A collaborative effort between site administration and school mental health professionals is recommended.
  - If a moderate to serious risk of other-directed violence is suspected, law enforcement should be included in the evaluation and subsequent investigation.

Risk Assessment: Consequences of violence.

- Death and/or Injury
  - May signal the need for school crisis intervention

Secret Service Threat-Assessment Model

- This approach focuses on the facts of a specific case, examines the progression of ideas and planning behavior over time, & corroborates information through multiple sources.
- It is based on three guiding principles.
  1. There is no single type of perpetrator.
     - Instead, targeted violence is perceived as the interaction of perpetrator, setting, situation, and the target.
  2. There is a distinction between posing a threat and making a threat.
     - Many individuals who pose a threat will not make a threat before the attack.
     - Conversely, many individuals who make a threat may pose no harm.
  3. Targeted violence is often a product of an understandable and often discernable pattern of behavior and thinking.
     - It is not random or spontaneous.
Incidents of targeted violence at school are rarely impulsive or the result of someone “snapping.” The attacks are typically the result of a pattern of organized thinking and behavior.

Before most incidents, the attacker told someone, usually a peer, about the idea and/or plan.

There is no accurate or useful profile of “the school shooter.” Characteristics of these individuals varied greatly. Violence is viewed as the interaction among the attacker, situation, target, and the setting.

Most attackers had previously used guns, although most did not necessarily demonstrate a “fascination” with weapons or explosives.

Most shooting incidents were not resolved by law enforcement intervention.
- More than half of the attacks ended before law enforcement arrival on scene.
  - In these cases, staff or students stopped the attacker, the attacker stopped on his own, or he committed suicide.
  - Half of the incidents lasted 20 minutes or less.
  - Therefore, schools may make best use of their resources by focusing on prevention.

In most cases, other students were involved in some capacity, such as influencing or providing encouragement.

In 75% of the cases, other students knew about the attack before it occurred in the form of either a vague idea something big was going to happen, and often the date and time or exact details.

In more than two-thirds of the cases, the perpetrator’s history of having been bullied, harassed, threatened, or injured played a key role in the attack.

Most attackers engaged in some behavior before the incident that caused others to be concerned or indicated a need for help.
Questions to ask during a student interview
- Identify possible stressors.
- Identify thoughts of revenge.
- Identify experiences with/attitudes toward weapons.
- Explore history of/attitudes toward violence.

Questions to ask during a student interview
- Identify signs of depression, helplessness, and/or hopelessness.
- Identify suicidal ideation.
- Identify homicidal ideation.

Questions to ask during a student interview
- Explore motivations for violence.
- Identify additional psychiatric disorders.
- Identify possible helping resources.
Secret Service Threat-Assessment Model

Questions for Others
- For family and/or friends:
  • Has the student at risk told you of any ideas or plan to commit a violent act against the school? Against any specific person(s)? If so, describe these ideas/plans. Has he or she taken any steps to act on these ideas/plans?
- For school staff, family and/or friends:
  • How organized is the student at risk? How capable do you think he/she is of acting on his/her ideas? How concerned do you think staff and family should be about the safety of the target(s)?

Secret Service Threat-Assessment Model

Questions for Others
- For identified target:
  • How well do you know the student at risk of violence? How well does this person know your work and personal lifestyle patterns? What changes could make an attack less likely? How seriously do you take this threat of potential attack? How concerned are you about your safety?

It is infrequent (less than 25% of cases) for direct threats to be made to the intended victims.

Secret Service Threat-Assessment Model

Other Assessment Procedures
- Review the following student data for at-risk students:
  • group achievement test scores,
  • test scores from local district assessment measures,
  • attendance records,
  • discipline records,
  • language proficiency status, and
  • school history.
- Analyze the academic instruction across subject areas and suggest modifications if needed.
- Develop a behavior contract if needed.
- Develop a plan to improve attendance if needed.
  • Documentation of poor school attendance following prescribed district procedures.
Responding to At-Risk Youth

- Teach appropriate behavior and social problem-solving skills in the classroom or in a small group setting.
- Additional problems or risk factors are addressed through determining student and family needs.
  - Referrals made to appropriate support systems.
- Protective factors for student are analyzed and provisions made to continue or to add to these factors, which provide support for the at-risk student.
  - For example, provide an adult mentor who meets periodically with the student.

Responding to High Risk Youth

- Determine if there are any imminent warning signs. If there are, then refer student to the Risk Assessment Team for an immediate suicide and/or homicide risk assessment.
- If imminent warning signs are not present, then give the student a high priority for a Student Support Meeting. Assign a Student Support Team member (e.g., principal, mental health specialist, or master teacher) to provide informal consultation until a formal meeting may be scheduled.
- At the formal meeting, develop recommendations for responding to high-risk youth and consider the need for a referral for Special Education services.
- Consider a referral to school site mental health and community-based mental health services.

Responding to High Risk Youth

- Consider the need to revise student's behavior contract and/or to conduct a more in-depth behavioral analysis.
- Obtain parental permission to exchange information with the appropriate community agencies to determine if student is eligible for additional services. If available, call a meeting with other agency personnel to focus on provisions for wrap-around intervention and support for the student and family.
- Develop an action plan for immediate interventions that includes provisions for increased supervision.
Are Schools Really Safe?

- The Daily Show reports on bullet proof books.

Required Resources


Final Examination

- Questions
Next Meeting

Crisis Preparedness and Response

- Read
  - Brock et al. (2009), Chapters 1-5
  - Lockyer & Eastin (2000)

- Obtain

- Turn in
  - Field Observation/Interview