

Characteristics of Youth Who Have Caused School-Associated Violent Deaths

The National School Safety Center offers the following checklist derived from tracking school-associated violent deaths in the United States from July 1992 to the present. After studying common characteristics of youngsters who have caused such deaths, NSSC has identified the following behaviors, which could indicate a youth's potential for harming him/herself or others.

Accounts of these tragic incidents repeatedly indicate that in most cases, a troubled youth has demonstrated or has talked to others about problems with bullying and feelings of isolation, anger, depression and frustration. While there is no foolproof system for identifying potentially dangerous students who may harm themselves and/or others, this checklist provides a starting point.

These characteristics should serve to alert school administrators, teachers and support staff to address needs of troubled students through meetings with parents, provision of school counseling, guidance and mentoring services, as well as referrals to appropriate community health/social services and law enforcement personnel. Further, such behavior should also provide an early warning signal that safe school plans and crisis prevention/intervention procedures must be in place to protect the health and safety of all school students and staff members so that schools remain safe havens for learning.

- _____ Has a history of tantrums and uncontrollable angry outbursts.
- _____ Characteristically resorts to name calling, cursing or abusive language.
- _____ Habitually makes violent threats when angry.
- _____ Has previously brought a weapon to school.
- _____ Has a background of serious disciplinary problems at school and in the community.
- _____ Has a background of drug, alcohol or other substance abuse or dependency.
- _____ Is on the fringe of his/her peer group with few or no close friends.
- _____ Is preoccupied with weapons, explosives or other incendiary devices.
- _____ Has previously been truant, suspended or expelled from school.
- _____ Displays cruelty to animals.
- _____ Has little or no supervision and support from parents or a caring adult.
- _____ Has witnessed or been a victim of abuse or neglect in the home.
- _____ Has been bullied and/or bullies or intimidates peers or younger children.
- _____ Tends to blame others for difficulties and problems s/he causes her/himself.
- _____ Consistently prefers TV shows, movies or music expressing violent themes and acts.
- _____ Prefers reading materials dealing with violent themes, rituals and abuse.
- _____ Reflects anger, frustration and the dark side of life in school essays or writing projects.
- _____ Is involved with a gang or an antisocial group on the fringe of peer acceptance.
- _____ Is often depressed and/or has significant mood swings.
- _____ Has threatened or attempted suicide.

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