

CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND
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KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE IN SCHOOL:
A Resource for States

Children's Defense Fund
25 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
202-628-8787
<http://www.childrensdefense.org>
cdinfo@childrensdefense.org

KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE IN SCHOOL: A Resource for States



Children's Defense Fund

Students cannot learn if they feel unsafe. While the vast majority of U.S. schools are indeed secure, even one episode of violence raises concerns for our school-aged children. Recent tragedies across the country have created doubt about the safety of our nation's schools. The Children's Defense Fund supports positive school policies that promote healthy learning environments. We believe that lawmakers, schools, and communities can work together to create schools where students and teachers alike are ready to learn and ready to succeed.

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For more information, or to make suggestions for additional information, contact the Children's Defense Fund at 202/628-8787.

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FACTS ABOUT SCHOOL VIOLENCE

9 OUT OF 10 SCHOOLS EXPERIENCE NO SERIOUS OR VIOLENT CRIME ON THEIR CAMPUSES

- 10% of all public schools experienced one or more serious violent crimes (defined as murder, rape, or other type of sexual battery, suicide, physical attack or fight with a weapon, or robbery) during the 1996-1997 school year that were reported to law enforcement. (Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools: 1996-1997, National Center for Education Statistics, 1998)
- Physical attacks or fights without a weapon led the list of reported crimes in public schools with about 190,000 such incidents reported for 1996-1997. (Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools: 1996-1997, National Center for Education Statistics, 1998)

ALTHOUGH INCIDENTS OF GUN VIOLENCE ARE FEW, CHILDREN TOO OFTEN BRING GUNS TO SCHOOL

- The National School Boards Association estimates that more than 135,000 guns are brought into U.S. schools each day. ("Violence in the Schools," National School Boards Association, 1993).
- The Center to Prevent Handgun Violence estimates that, of all school weapon incidents, 18% are drug- or gang-related, 15% concern long-standing disputes, 13% involve playing with or cleaning guns, 12% are over romantic disagreements, and 10% are over fights and material belongings. ("Weapons in Schools," National School Safety Center Resource Paper, 1993)
- The most recent Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 10% of high school students had carried a weapon (e.g., gun, knife, or club) on school property in the month preceding the survey. (Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1997 Update on Violence, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1997)
- Some 6,093 students were expelled during the 1996-1997 academic school year for bringing firearms or explosives to school. (Report on State Implementation of the Gun-Free Schools Act-School Year: 1996-1997, Department of Education, 1998).

FEAR OF VIOLENCE --NOT JUST VIOLENCE ITSELF-- HAS CONSEQUENCES FOR OUR SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN.

- Fear of school-related violence kept 5% of high school students home at least once in the month prior to the most recent Youth Risk Behavior Survey. (Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1997 Update on Violence, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1997)
- Between 1989 and 1995, the percentage of students ages 12 through 19 who avoided one or more places at school for fear of their own safety increased from 5 percent to 9 percent. In 1995, this percentage represented 2.1 million students. (1998 Indicators of School Crime and Safety, U.S. Depts. of Education and Justice).

IDEAS TO MAKE OUR SCHOOLS SAFER

Current trends in juvenile justice legislation have been directed towards punitive, rather than preventive or rehabilitative, measures. In the 105th Congress, for example, Senate Bill 10 attempted to place children in adult jails and prisons and expel children who brought tobacco, alcohol, drug paraphernalia, or drugs to school. Rhetoric around imposing the death penalty on children has also made its way into the national dialogue regarding juvenile crime.

The Children's Defense Fund believes that the best way to combat violence is to stop it before it begins. Prevention strategies and programs have proven time and time again to lower incidents of violence at schools. The following suggestions are elements of comprehensive school safety plans that emphasize youth responsibility and rehabilitation. Working together, schools, young people, families, and law enforcement can make our schools safer places of learning.

Family Involvement

- **What is this?** Parents need to show that school safety matters. Students whose parents are involved in their academic, emotional, and spiritual growth are more likely to be balanced and successful. Schools can encourage this relationship by sponsoring parental involvement activities that welcome family members into the school system and address obstacles to their participation.

WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON SCHOOL SAFETY

On Thursday, October 15, 1998 President Clinton, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Vice President Al Gore brought together numerous local, state, and national figures to discuss the issue of school violence. During the conference, President Clinton announced a plan to overhaul the \$600 million Safe and Drug-Free Schools program. The overhaul would attempt to provide "more effective prevention programs for the reduction of drugs and violence in schools, more accountability for results, and better targeting to those schools that need the most assistance."

Source: White House Bulletin. Oct. 15, 1998

- **Does this work?** At the White House Conference on School Safety in October 1998, Vice President Al Gore showcased an example of a successful parental involvement program called "Security Dads." Based in Beech Grove City, Indiana, "Security Dads" was created by parents concerned about their children's safety and well-being at school. The program recruits volunteer fathers to monitor events like school games, dances, and skating parties. As a result, school crime has reduced and children feel cared for and protected (<http://www.oeri.edu.gov/PFIE/safewho.html>). This program is just one example of how parents can make a difference in their children's

school lives.

- **Where can I learn more?** The Departments of Education and Justice produced "Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools" in 1998. This publication gives schools and parents tips on how families can become more actively involved in their children's schools and lives. For more information about this publication, contact <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/earlywrrn.html>.

Guidance Counselors

- **What is this?** Guidance counselors are vital to a well-functioning school. Students need adults who can constructively talk with them about their problems and who can refer them

to local resources. More importantly, students need adults who can listen. Guidance counselors can detect the early warning signs of potential troublemakers, noting characteristics like withdrawal, feelings of isolation and rejection, low school interest, uncontrollable anger, use of illegal substances, and violent, impulsive behavior. These warning signs are crucial to identifying a student who may soon hurt themselves and/or others. A guidance counselor can save a troubled student before it becomes too late.

- **Does this work?** The national average ratio of counselors to students is 1 to 750 students. This figure falls short of the National Association of School Psychologists' recommendation of 1 counselor for every 300 students. (NASP, August 1998). Guidance counselors cannot do their job if they are burdened with heavy caseloads. Mayor James Torrey of Eugene, Oregon, the site of a recent school violence tragedy, has deep concerns about the lack of school guidance counselors. He believes that troubled youth can "fall through the cracks" if we fail to address the lack of trained counselors. (Associated Press, 8/24/98). Legislators can give schools financial and institutional support so that guidance counselors can do their jobs effectively.
- **Where can I learn more?** Contact the National Association of School Psychologists at their website, <http://naspweb.org/center.html>, or at 301-657-0270.

NAAG and NSBA UNITE AGAINST SCHOOL CRIME

The National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG) and the National School Boards Association (NSBA) announced that they were joining forces to help reduce the amount of school violence in U.S. public schools. Their new website, "Keep Schools Safe" (www.keepschoolssafe.org) has information for concerned educators, parents, and students.

Source: NAAG News Release. 8/2/98.

Youth Leadership

- **What is this?** Students need to feel they are part of the solution, and not just the problem, of school safety issues. The National School Safety Center recommends that student volunteers help create policies regarding crime reporting and school violence prevention. Student participation promotes youth development, maturity, and an active student body.
- **Does this work?** During the 1994-95 school year, the National Institute of Justice sponsored a research project studying the effects of student problem solving in a North Carolina high school. This "School Safety Program" had a three-tiered approach: a student problem-solving curriculum, regular meetings with school and local officials, and identification of problem students. The results showed improvements in campus life. Studies showed a 50% reduction in assault-related behaviors, a 23% reduction in disciplinary action, and an overall decrease in fear levels. (NIJ, "Crime in Schools: A Problem-Solving Approach," August 1998). When youths become involved in settling disputes, they begin to take ownership of the school violence issue. They become agents of their own change, schools, and safety.
- **Where can I learn more?** Contact the National Institute of Justice at <http://www.usdoj.gov> for a copy of the report entitled "Crime in Schools: A Problem-Solving Approach" (NCJ 167882). Also, the National School Safety Center, a non-profit organization based in Los

Angeles, has several publications that show how students can be civically active within their school community. They can be reached at 805-373-9977 or at <http://www.nssc1.org>.

After-school Opportunities

- **What is this?** A good after-school program offers caring adults, positive activities, and a safe haven.
- **Does this work?** After-school programs can result in students less prone to violence and/or victimization by developing social skills, improving academic achievement, offering peer support, and providing adult supervision. When considering that juvenile crime peaks between 3:00 to 8:00 pm, it makes sense to support programs that keep kids on track and out of trouble. A Northeastern University poll documented that 92 percent of police chiefs nationwide agreed that “America could sharply reduce crime if government invested more in programs to help children and youth get a good start by...providing after-school programs and mentoring.”
- **Where can I learn more?** Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a national non-profit organization which represents police, prosecutors, and victims committed to reducing crime through prevention, can be reached at 202-638-0690 or at <http://www.fightcrime.org>. They have information and resources about successful after-school crime prevention programs. Also, the United States Conference of Mayors has a book entitled “Preventing School Violence: Best Practices of Mayors in Collaboration with the Police, Schools, and the Community,” which gives detailed abstracts of what cities around the country are doing to reduce crime. Contact them at <http://www.usmayors.org/uscm> or at 202-293-7330.

FLORIDA LEGISLATURE FUNDS VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMS

The Florida Legislature doubled its funding of the Youth Crime Watch of America Program (YCWA) for the 98-99 school year. YCWA supports mentoring, conflict resolution training, and teaching. It uses anonymous tips to seize guns, prevent fights, and stop drug deals before they occur on school grounds. Currently, 400 Florida schools have YCW programs in effect. This additional funding will help begin more programs throughout the state.

Source: YCWA “Crime Watchin’ News.” Summer 1998

Job Opportunities

- **What is this?** Schools and communities can work together to provide better paying work opportunities for our nation’s youth. Special classes during the school day can offer technical training and life management skills courses to prepare students for the working world. Local businesses and community organizations can bolster these acquired skills by providing good jobs where students can gain practical experience.
- **Does this work?** Jeffrey Grogger, author of the study “Market Wages and Youth Crime,” believes that there is a strong relationship between work earnings and crime. Grogger examined the 1980 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and estimated that a 20% drop in wages could lead to a 12 to 18% increase in juvenile crime. The National Youth Employment Coalition agrees. In its 1994 report, it stated “if we hope to bring the most at-risk youth into the mainstream of American economic life, we need to craft and implement a national youth training, education, employment, and development strategy that is coherent and long-term.” Programs like the Job Training and Partnership Act (JTPA) and the Summer Youth Employment and Training Program (SYETP), sponsored by the

Department of Labor, can stem the tide of problems associated with the lack of good work. Both programs target at-risk youth and provide classroom instruction, on-the-job training, and job search help. Communities must be cautious, however, that students are not over-extended with activities to the point that their school performance suffers. Legislators can do their part in supporting this idea by increasing funding and encouraging local agencies and businesses to offer good-paying, safe jobs for youth.

- **Where can I learn more?** Contact the Department of Labor for more information about JTPA or the SYETP in your community. Also, The National Youth Employment Coalition, based in Washington DC, can provide information and resources on how to create youth opportunities in your area (202-659-1064).

Conflict Resolution Education

- **What is this?** Conflict resolution education gives youth the tools to solve problems through interaction and compromise, not violence. Teaching students how to manage their anger and frustration in constructive ways can save them from getting into trouble in the first place.
- **Does this work?** One 1995 study examined the effects of a conflict management curriculum implemented in U.S. and Canadian inner-city and suburban schools. The results showed that teacher intervention in conflicts decreased by 80%, principal referrals for fights were reduced to zero, and overall fear of violence decreased. The study also found that students who did not undergo conflict management programs were focused on winning arguments, while their trained counterparts were interested in maximizing joint outcomes (OJJDP, "Conflict Resolution Education," 1996).
- **Where can I learn more?** The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program has published "Conflict Resolution Education: A Guide to Implementing Programs in Schools, Youth-Serving Organizations, and Community and Juvenile Justice Settings." This program report was designed as a resource for educators and has examples and contacts to conflict management projects that have produced results. It can be ordered through the Justice Statistics Bureau at puborder@ncjrs.org. The NCJ number is 160935.

Clear Disciplinary Codes

- **What is this?** The most common form of clear disciplinary codes are known as "zero tolerance" policies, defined as school or district policies that set predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses. (Zero tolerance policies, however, should not mean mandatory expulsion.) Codes address proper language, dress, and behavior, and stress that no weapons will be tolerated on or near school grounds. The National Education Association recommends six ideas to keep in mind when creating a school disciplinary code (see *table*). Support and enforcement of rules can also be assured if both adults and children contribute in writing the code.

<p>NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION Recommendations for a Good Disciplinary Code</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Be short and easy to understand2. Have student input3. Contain enforceable rules4. Be enforced fairly and consistently5. Be reviewed and updated periodically6. Be sent to students, parents, and staff at the beginning of each year <p><i>Source: NEA "Safe Schools Manual," 1996</i></p>

- **Does this work?** The “Indicators of School Crime and Safety 1998,” a joint publication by the Departments of Justice and Education, revealed that 94% of all schools had zero tolerance policies towards firearms and other weapons. 87% of campuses had policies for alcohol and 88% had codes for drugs. This strategy is popular because administrators, teachers, and students understand their roles better when schools mandate what will and will not be tolerated on school grounds.
- **Where can I learn more?** The National Education Association is a professional association-union that advocates for safe schools and communities. For a copy of their “Safe Schools Manual,” write them at 1201 16th Street, N.W., Washington D.C. 20036-3290.

Anti-discrimination Education

- **What is this?** Anti-discrimination education is crucial in a growing and pluralistic society. Students should discuss and be made aware about the racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, religious, and class diversity of their school. More understanding means less violence.
- **Does this work?** The American Psychological Association (APA) promotes cultural awareness as an effective way to reduce violence. In a policy recommendation to schools nationwide, the APA called for “a variety of efforts aimed at increasing sensitivity to cultural differences and reducing discrimination and prejudice that create a climate conducive to violence. Such efforts should begin in the earliest school years...and be continued throughout the school years.”
- **Where can I learn more?** To order the APA’s handbook “Violence & Youth: Psychology’s Response,” you can write to the American Psychological Association, Public Interest Directorate, 750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002-4242 or call them at 202-336-5500.

Alternative Schools

- **What are these?** School administrators can provide alternative schools for children facing expulsion or suspension because of disruption or violence. If a troubled child is left alone to the streets, schools have only succeeded in moving the violent problem and not addressing the violence.
- **Do these work?** Students who have been sent to outside facilities need screenings, services, and treatment, along with firm discipline, so that they can

MICHIGAN’S SCHOOL SAFETY LEGISLATION

In the fall of 1997, Michigan State Representative Sharon Gire (D-31) appointed a House Education Subcommittee on School Violence. Members were responsible for researching and developing legislative strategies to curb public school violence. After holding various town meetings across the state with concerned school administrators, law-enforcement officials, community organizations, parents, and students, committee members proposed ten policy recommendations. Here are some good examples from Michigan’s model of what legislators can do to promote school safety in their states:

- require participation in disciplinary education programs for all expelled youth
- expand prevention programs including anger management and conflict resolution, peer mediation education, student assistance programs, and “Safe Havens” after-school programs
- mandate an early intervention with troubled students and their families including mental health referral and substance abuse treatment
- develop a statewide clearinghouse to share successful models of prevention programs, alternative disciplinary programs, etc.

Source: State Representative Mark Schauer (MI-62). “Safe Schools, Safe Streets, Strong Communities: A Report on School Violence.” 1998

eventually become reintegrated into the regular student body. States can follow the Michigan state legislature proposal (see *table*), for ideas on how to rehabilitate expelled youth.

- **Where can I learn more?** Alternative schools can work only if they have a rehabilitative curriculum geared towards returning the child to mainstream education. Contact the National Center on Institutions and Alternatives at <http://www.igc.org/ncia> or at 703-684-0373 for examples of alternative ideas being implemented across the country.

RESOURCE GUIDE

American Psychological Association

750 First Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4242
Phone: 202-336-5500
<http://www.apa.org>

Center for the Prevention of School Violence

20 Enterprise Street
Suite 2
Raleigh, NC 27607
Phone: 1-800-299-6054
Fax: 919-515-9561
<http://www.ncsu.edu/cpsv/>

Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence

Institute of Behavioral Science
University of Colorado at Boulder
Campus Box 442
Boulder, CO 80309
Phone: 303-492-8465
Fax: 303-443-3297
E-mail: cspv@colorado.edu

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids

1334 G Street, NW, Suite B
Washington, DC 20005-3107
Phone: 202-638-0690
<http://www.fightcrime.org>

Handgun Control

1225 Eye Street, NW, Suite 1100
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202-898-0792
Fax: 202-371-9615
<http://www.handguncontrol.org/>

Keep Schools Safe

<http://www.keepschoolssafe.org>

National Alliance for Safe Schools

P.O. Box 1068
College Park, MD 20741
Phone: 301-935-6063

Fax: 301-935-6069

E-mail: nass@erols.com
<http://www.safeschools.org>

National Association of Attorneys General

750 First Street, NE
Suite 1100
Washington, DC 20002
Phone: 202-326-6000
Fax: 202-408-7014
<http://www.naag.org>

National Association of School Psychologists

4340 East-West Highway, Suite 402
Bethesda, MD 20814
Phone: 301-657-0270
Fax: 301-657-0275
<http://naspweb.org/center.html>

National Center for Education Statistics

Education Publications
P.O. Box 1398
Jessup, MD 20794-1398
Phone: 877-4-ED-PUBS
Fax: 301-470-1244
<http://nces.ed.gov>

National Center on Institutions and Alternatives

3125 Mount Vernon Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22305
Phone: 703-684-0373
Fax: 703-684-6037
<http://www.ncianet.org/ncia>

National Consortium on Violence Research

Heinz School, Hamburg Hall
Carnegie-Mellon University
5000 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213-3890
Phone: 412-268-7106
<http://www.ncovr.heinz.cmu.edu>

National Crime Prevention Council

1700 K Street, NW, Second Floor
Washington, DC 20006-3817
Phone: 202-466-6272
Fax: 202-296-1356
<http://www.ncpc.org/>

**The National Education Association
Safe, Secure, and Healthy Schools**

1201 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036-3290
Phone: 202-833-4000
<http://www.nea.org/resource/safe.html>

**The National Parent-Teacher Association
(PTA)**

330 Wabash Avenue, Suite 2100
Chicago, IL 60611-3690
Phone: 312-670-6782
Fax: 312-670-6783
<http://www.pta.org>

National School Boards Association

1680 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone: 703-838-6722
Fax: 703-683-7590
<http://www.nsba.org>

The National School Safety Center

4165 Thousand Oaks Boulevard, Suite 290
Westlake Village, CA 91362
Phone: 805-373-9977
Fax: 805-373-9277
<http://www.nssc1.org>

The National Youth Employment Coalition

1836 Jefferson Place, NW
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202-659-1064
Fax: 202-659-0399

**National Youth Development Information
Center**

1319 F Street, NW, Suite 601
Washington, DC 20004
Phone: 202-347-2080
Fax: 202-393-4517
<http://www.nydic.org/>

**New York University, Metropolitan Center for
Urban Education**

Safe Schools for the Twenty-First Century

82 Washington Square East, Suite 72
New York, New York 10003
Phone: 800-4NYU-224
212-998-5100
Fax: 212-995-4199

<http://www.nyu.edu/education/metrocenter/violence/SSRP.htm>

**Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency
Prevention (OJJDP)**

810 Seventh Street, NW
Washington, DC 20531
Phone: 202-307-5911
<http://www.ncjrs.org/ojjdp>

OJJDP Clearinghouse

Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse/NCJRS
PO Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849-6000
Phone: (800) 638-8736
<http://www.ncjrs.org/ojjdp>

Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program

600 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20202
Phone: 202-260-3954
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS/index.html>

The United States Conference of Mayors

620 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006
Phone: 202-293-7330
Fax: 202-293-2352
<http://www.usmayors.org/uscm>

United States Department of Education

400 Independence Avenue
Washington, DC 20202
Phone: 1-800-USA-LEARN
1-800-437-0833
Fax: 202-401-0689
<http://www.ed.gov>

United States Department of Justice

950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001
<http://www.usdoj.gov>

YMCA of the USA

101 N. Wacker Drive
Chicago, IL 60606

Phone: 312-977-0031
Fax: 312-977-9073
<http://www.ymcanet.org>