## SCHOOL VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND PREPAREDNESS
## A PLANNING GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS

Historically, the violence occurring at schools was limited to shouting matches and occasional fistfights.  School was considered a safe haven for children where they could learn in a structured environment and socially interact with their peers.

Unfortunately, violence with fatal results has increased in schools in the last several years.  This is evidenced by the numerous school shootings in places such as Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas; Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado; and Buell Elementary School in Mt. Morris Township, Michigan.  Given the vast attention paid to these tragedies, every night on television, every day in the paper, every day in the conversations of parents and school staff, the very essence of what it means to a child to "go to school" is shaken.  These tragedies can occur anywhere.  No school is immune to the potential impact of violence.

All Schools should develop a Violence Prevention and Preparedness Plan.  This plan should be designed to suit the school and community's specific needs.  The plan should be an ongoing, systematic, and comprehensive process that addresses both short and long-term safety measures to eliminate violent attitudes and behaviors in the school.  The following guidelines are provided for your school to use in developing a School Violence Prevention and Preparedness Plan.  This information can be used as a model for constructing a plan that meets the needs of each individual facility and your community.

### The Role of Administrators

In conjunction with assisting in the development, implementation and continued management of the plan, the role of Administrators is to provide leadership and direction to the school community.  Failure of school authorities to implement a school safety plan could lead to legal liability for harm that comes to their students.  In some cases, liability may extend to students who are off-campus or who are participating in school-sponsored after school activities.

### Establishing Crisis/Threat Management Teams

Before developing the plan, Crisis-Threat Management Teams should be established.  These teams should consist of teams of individuals with specific duties utilizing their skills to prepare for, perform and respond to any given violent situation.  Administration may appoint a team responsible for development of procedures and protocols as a framework for action and a foundation on which to build an effective plan.

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# Prevention

## Lighting

Care should be given to provide adequate lighting throughout the facility and grounds. Well-lighted facilities deter suspicious activities for fear of being seen. Remember to take into account the effects of glare, shadows, and blind spots. "Pedestrian friendly" lighting will allow faces of individuals to be seen within 25 yards. Consideration should be given to the line of vision between the location of fixtures and objects that cast a shadow. All exterior doorways and windows should be well lit in the evening hours to prevent easy access into the building by unwanted individuals.

## Physical Security

Care should be taken to ensure that trees or bushes do not block sight of the school. Bushes near the building should be such as to not provide a hiding place or unseen access through the windows.

Any objects that could damage the school such as large rocks, bricks, etc. should be removed from the property. Also, care should be taken to ensure that access into the building cannot be gained through skylights or roof access ladders.

## Monitored Entrance into the Building

All secondary entrance doors into the building should be kept locked during school hours. One door should be designated as the main entrance for all students and visitors. An individual who can keep track of anyone entering the building should monitor this door. Due to the layout of certain school buildings, additional entrance doors may be needed. If this is the case at your school, these doors need to be continuously monitored by a responsible individual such as a teacher or security guard. Signs should be installed on all doors indicating that visitors should check in with the office.

It is not recommended to allow secondary exit doors to be propped open for ventilation purposes or to allow entry unless the doors are properly monitored. Be aware of any rugs, chairs, or other movable objects located near the exit doors that could be used to prop them open and allow access into the building.

Some schools have gone to the extreme of installing metal detectors at the entrance to their buildings. This is a good security measure for those schools in high crime areas.

Visitors should be required to sign-in at the office and be given an identification tag prior to being allowed to walk through the building. This identification tag will allow all personnel to recognize any unwanted individuals that have "slipped through" the monitoring process. Visitors should also be required to sign-out when leaving the building.

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Depending on your particular facility, the installation of surveillance cameras is a good safeguard to ensure the safety of your school. These cameras should be monitored from a remote location to watch for any conduct that is considered improper.

Schools should implement a "closed campus" policy, which would not allow students to leave the school for lunch or during open periods. If "open campus" is practiced at your school, all students should be required to enter/exit through the main doors or a monitored secondary door.

The school should have a "key" policy ensuring that all keys to the building are accounted for and documented.

## Classrooms

Classroom doors should be equipped with locks that automatically lock from the outside of the room, but can be immediately opened from inside the classroom for immediate aggress. This would prevent an unwanted individual from randomly entering a classroom.

All classrooms should also have at least one window to allow a secondary emergency exit if needed.

Classrooms should also be equipped with some type of communication service, such as a cellular telephone, intercom or 2-way radio. Emergency numbers should be posted in an area where it would be immediately accessible in case of an emergency. A PA system should be installed throughout the school so that the office could efficiently warn all personnel if a problem was occurring within the school and relay what action should be taken.

## Restrooms/Locker Rooms

Student restrooms and locker rooms present opportunities for victimization and other conduct violations. They also allow a place for intruders to conceal themselves.

All restrooms and locker rooms should have a well-lighted entry that allows quick ingress and egress for students and good supervision by staff. Toilet stalls should allow staff to see below and above the partitions. We recommend avoiding the use of acoustical tiles in the ceiling of these areas.

In locker rooms, the gym instructor's office should be located near the main entrance/exit with windows to monitor the locker area.

## Additional Security Features

Some administrators feel additional security is needed for their schools.  Hiring security guards can provide additional security for the building.  These guards should be trained in how to deal with potential problems and situations.  They also can provide a sense of security for the students in the school.

The most common school security measure used to prevent violence or other disruptive acts requires school staff, in particular teachers and security staff, to monitor students' movements in and around the school.  Thus, staff should be required to monitor hallways, doorways, restrooms, cafeteria or lunchrooms, and the areas of the school where students tend to congregate.

Schools should consider conducting periodic locker searches to ensure that weapons or drugs are not brought onto school property.  Parents and teachers should be informed prior to the start of the school year that these searches will be conducted to ensure the safety of the students in their school.

Many schools have started a confidential "hot-line" for the reporting of any suspicious activities or problems within the school.  These tips have led to the confiscation of weapons brought onto school property as well as the intervention of potential violent and criminal activities.

## Staff Awareness

While there is no foolproof system for identifying potentially dangerous students who may hurt themselves and/or others, staff should be made aware of the early warning signs.  These signs include:

- -Social withdrawal
- -Excessive feelings of rejection
- -Feeling bullied or persecuted
- -Lack of interest/low performance
- -Uncontrolled anger
- -Intolerance or prejudice
- -Gang affiliation
- -Threats of violence
- -Pattern of impulsive or aggressive behaviors

- -Excessive feelings of isolation
- -Being a victim of violence
- -Low self-esteem
- -Violent writings or drawings
- -History of discipline problems
- -Substance use
- -Access to firearms
- -History of violent behavior

## School Safety Planning Survey

Attached is a School Planning Survey.  This survey can be used as a guide to assist you in assessing the potential of violence at your school.

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# Postvention

If, and when an incident has occurred and the safety of the school has been restored, follow-up measures to effectively measure the aftermath of a violent situation and its impact on future operations of the school should be implemented.

## The Day After

Administrators should meet with the Crisis/Threat Management Teams and Faculty/Staff members to update them with any additional information and procedures:

- Discuss successes and problems;
- Discuss things to do differently next time;
- Allow staff the opportunity to discuss feelings and reactions.

In case of death, provide funeral information.  Often people will want to find ways to memorialize the student or staff member.  Carefully think through the kind of tribute paid to a person who has died.  Parents and loved ones especially want to know people miss the person, that there was a great sadness at the loss, and that assistance was given to the grieving friends.

Identify vulnerable students/families in need of follow-up support and assign staff members to monitor and assist them.

- Coordinate counseling opportunities;
- Call Student Assembly to announce support and offer post-trauma counseling for those in need;
- Provide parents/families with a list of community resources available to them.

## Long-Term Follow-up and Evaluation

- Provide a list of suggested readings to teachers, parents and students;
- Review your preventive and preparedness policies with the Crisis/Threat Teams for improvement amending management protocols, if needed;
- Be alert to anniversaries and holidays  Often students will experience an "anniversary" grief reaction the following month or year on the date of the emergency, or when similar crises occur;
- Be aware of common reactions, which may be displayed following a traumatic event. Teachers can assist students by:
  - Coping with their own feelings of helplessness, fear, and anger in order to effectively help the students;
  - Learn to recognize the signs and symptoms of distress and post traumatic stress reactions;
  - Put the situation in context providing a perspective.  Communicate a positive attitude;

       o   Start the healing process by helping students feel relieved and soothed. Help them "talk it out".

Continued violence prevention in the schools will depend upon the involvement of administration in

- Developing a school discipline code of student behavior and conduct;
- Developing extended day programs, extracurricular activities and recreation plans that provide positive alternatives to juvenile crime and violence;
- Developing a referral system for the abused;
- Developing specific plans directed at eliminating gang influence in schools;
- Preventing school drug trafficking;
- Communicating to the community a clear directive of zero-tolerance for school violence;
- Continued inspection and maintenance of security and preventative measures including the physical plant.

The faculty and staff must daily continue to

- Focus on academic achievement;
- Continue to involve families in meaningful ways;
- Develop links to the community;
- Support student/staff relationships treating students with equal respect;
- Discuss safety issues openly with their peers and students;
- Emphasize safe expression of student feelings;
- Promote stewardship, citizenship and character;
- Be aware of imminent warning signs for violent situations;
- See problems and assess progress in reducing the potential for violent behavior; keep open lines of communication among the school and local community.

The goal is to maintain a positive, safe and welcoming environment, which promotes well being and growth of all students, and in which all members take pride (free of drugs, gangs, violence, intimidation, fear, and shaming). At the same time, the school should continue to provide firm, consistent rules and guidelines for appropriate behavior.

Before finalizing your plan, Catholic Mutual recommends consulting with your Arch/Diocese, local law enforcement, firefighting, civil defense and mental health authorities to assure the plan is individualized to fit your school and community's needs.

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# ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL SAFETY PLANNING

| Section One:  Assessment of Risk Factors for School Safety and Violence | Rating | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Indicate the extent to which these factors exist in your school and neighborhood:* | *Not At All* | *Minimally* | *Moderately* | *Extensively* | *Don't Know* |
| 1.   Illegal weapons | | | | | |
| 2.   Vandalism | | | | | |
| 3.   Student transiency (i.e., changes in school enrollment) | | | | | |
| 4.   Graffiti | | | | | |
| 5.   Gang activity | | | | | |
| 6.   Truancy | | | | | |
| 7.   Student suspensions and expulsions | | | | | |
| 8.   Students on adjudicated by the court | | | | | |
| 9.   Parents withdrawing students from school because of safety concerns | | | | | |
| 10.  Child abuse in the home | | | | | |
| 11.  Trespassing on school grounds | | | | | |
| 12.  Acceptance of diversity | | | | | |
| 13.  Property | | | | | |
| 14.  Crimes (e.g., theft, extortion, hazing) | | | | | |
| 15.  Illegal drug and alcohol use | | | | | |
| 16.  Fights, conflict and assault | | | | | |
| 17.  Incident of bullying, intimidation, and harassment | | | | | |
| **Section Two:  Assessment of Response Plans for School Safety and Violence** | **Rating** | | | | |
| *Indicate the extent to which these factors exist in your school and neighborhood* | *Not At All* | *Minimally* | *Moderately* | *Extensively* | *Don't Know* |
| 1.   Opportunity for extracurricular programs and sports activities | | | | | |
| 2.   Professional development and staff training | | | | | |
| 3.   Crisis and emergency response plans | | | | | |
| 4.   Consistently implemented school-side discipline plans | | | | | |
| 5.   Student support services in school (e.g., counseling, monitoring, support team systems) | | | | | |
| 6.   Parent involvement in our school (e.g., efforts to enhance school safety, student support) | | | | | |
| 7.   Student preparation for crises and emergencies | | | | | |
| 8.   Supervision of students across all settings | | | | | |
| 9.   Suicide prevention/response plans | | | | | |
| 10.  Student participation and involvement in academic activities | | | | | |
| 11.  Positive school climate for learning | | | | | |
| 12.  Response to conflict and problem solving | | | | | |
| 13.  Collaboration with community resources | | | | | |
| 14.  High expectations for student learning and productivity | | | | | |
| 15.  Effective student-teacher relationships | | | | | |

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