



Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence
Center for Resilience & Well-Being
Prevention Science Program
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Like the rest of the nation and world, we are devastated to learn of the loss of 19 children and two teachers to school violence at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas. Each time a tragic attack happens, our research group is asked, “How can we prevent things like this from happening? What should we do when they do happen?” The sad truth is that we know what is needed to prevent violence and support those affected by violence, but we have not consistently put our knowledge into practice. It is time to fully commit to putting what we know works into action. We recommend that federal, state and local efforts invest in the following areas.

1. **Preventing Violence.** Tested, effective violence prevention and intervention programs [are now available](#) that, if implemented in communities, could reduce violence by thirty percent. These programs have also been shown to reduce other problems such as drug use, and increase positive outcomes such as school completion. We should support these efforts in our schools and communities, through action and investment.
2. **Bystander Reporting and Response and Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management.** Research on averted and completed school attacks consistently finds that *people knew something was wrong with the attacker, but they did not know who to tell or how to intervene*. [Bystanders](#) need to know the warning signs and how to report them, as they can provide the life-saving information needed to investigate and thwart an attack. Behavioral Threat Assessment provides a process for evaluating an individual’s risk for violence and monitoring their progress or decline.
3. **Trauma-Informed Support.** When these events do occur, we have [resources to help children, families, educators, and communities](#) acknowledge their feelings, share their concerns, and find ways to cope with the trauma together.

Preventing Violence. In the 23 years since the [Columbine High School massacre](#), researchers and community members have made significant progress in developing violence prevention and intervention programs that work. By addressing the root causes of violent behavior in our families, school and neighborhoods we can improve lives of youth before violence becomes an option being considered. The best violence prevention begins early and continues through childhood and adolescence and we have tested effective programs to prevent violence throughout the life course. We also have a registry of what works in preventing violence, bullying and related problems ([Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development](#)) to help communities make wise choices about what to invest in. These effective programs can substantially reduce the likelihood of serious violence and offer enormous cost savings to society. However, they are not well funded or widely implemented. The vast majority of tax dollars spent goes to policing and incarceration rather than to preventing the problem from happening in the first place.

We encourage schools and communities to use a data-driven approach to determine areas of concern and then implement effective prevention programs to meet the challenges of reducing violence and related behaviors. This involves assessing areas in the family, school and neighborhood in each community where support is needed and providing evidence-based interventions to help youth and their families. We focus especially on assessing the school climate to determine levels of bullying, and other measures of early involvement in aggressive behavior. Additional information about CSPV’s school climate surveys is available on the [Safe Communities, Safe Schools](#) website.

Bystander Reporting and Response and Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management. Research on averted and completed school attacks consistently finds that people knew something was wrong with the attacker, but they did not know who to tell or how to intervene. One [study](#) of 41 school attacks from 2008 to 2017 found that 100% of the attackers engaged in behavior that concerned others prior to their attack, 49% had encounters with law enforcement, and 71% had disciplinary infractions at school. Most attackers (89%) communicated their intent to harm others before their deadly rampage. These behaviors and communications provide opportunities for intervention.

To be an effective bystander, community members need to be informed about: (1) the warning signs for targeted violence and (2) how to report those signs to authorities. The [ten most common concerning behaviors among school attackers](#) include:

- threats to the target or others, and/or an intent to attack
- intense or escalating anger
- interest in weapons
- sadness, depression, or isolation
- changes in behavior or appearance
- suicide and/or self-harm
- interest in violence
- talk of being bullied
- concerns over grades or attendance
- harassing others

Attackers typically exhibit five or more of these concerning behaviors.

In Colorado, for example, bystanders can report their concerns to [Safe2Tell](#), an anonymous reporting system for safety-related concerns, which was developed after the attack at Columbine High School. Tips are reported anonymously to Safe2Tell's toll-free number, website, text or app and through two-way dialogue. In 2020-2021, Safe2Tell received more than 11,000 tips about suicide, drug use, self-harm, threats, and cyberbullying. These tips are disseminated to multidisciplinary safety teams who investigate, triage, and handle them. But not all states have a Safe2Tell system, and not all bystanders know what to report or when to report it. When threats are reported, a 3-5 person team trained in behavioral threat assessment can evaluate the individual's risk for targeted violence and develop a response management plan to monitor their progress or decline. The [Colorado School Safety Resource Center](#) provides training, the [National Threat Assessment Center](#) provides guidelines, and the [National Association of School Psychologists](#) offers best practices in behavioral threat assessment.

Trauma-Informed Support. When traumatic events do happen, children's reactions can interfere considerably with their personal, social and academic development. The Prevention Science Program's [Center for Resilience & Wellbeing](#), in conjunction with [The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#), has developed tools to help children, families, educators and communities navigate what they are seeing and hearing, acknowledge their feelings, and find ways to cope together. These resources include:

- [Talking to Children about the Shooting](#)
- [Helping Youth After a Community Trauma: Tips for Educators \(En Español\)](#)
- [Talking to Children: When Scary Things Happen \(En Español\)](#)
- [Talking to Teens about Violence \(En Español\)](#)
- [Tips for Talking to Students about Violence](#)
- [Coping After Mass Violence: For Adults](#)
- [For Teens: Coping After Mass Violence\(En Español\)](#)
- [Helping School-Age Children with Traumatic Grief: Tips for Caregivers \(En Español\)](#)
- [Helping Teens with Traumatic Grief: Tips for Caregivers\(En Español\)](#)
- [Helping Young Children with Traumatic Grief: Tips for Caregivers \(En Español\)](#)
- [Guiding Adults in Talking to Children about Death and Attending Services](#)
- [After a Crisis: Helping Young Children Heal](#)
- [Age-Related Reactions to a Traumatic Event](#)

- [Once I Was Very Very Scared](#) – children’s book for young children
- [After the Injury](#)—website for families with injured children
- [Health Care Toolbox](#)—website for pediatric health providers working with injured children
- [Pause-Reset-Nourish \(PRN\) to Promote Wellbeing \(En Español\)](#) (*for responders*)

Psychological First Aid

The NCTSN also has resources for responders on [Psychological First Aid](#) (PFA; [En Español](#)). PFA is an early intervention to support children, adolescents, adults, and families impacted by these types of events. [PFA Mobile](#) and the [PFA Wallet Card \(En Español\)](#) provide a quick reminder of the core actions. The [PFA online training](#) course is also available on the NCTSN Learning Center.

Additional PFA resources for schools include:

- [Psychological First Aid for Schools](#) (PFA-S) – Field operations guide
- [Providing PFA-S: For Health-Related Professionals](#) – handout
- [Providing PFA-S: For Principals and Administrators](#) – handout
- [Providing PFA-S: For School Support Staff](#) – handout
- [Providing PFA-S: For Teachers](#) - handout

From the National Mass Violence and Victimization Resource Center

- [Transcend](#) (mobile app to assist with recovery after mass violence)
- [Rebuild your Community: Resources for Community Leaders](#)
- [Media Guidelines for Homicide Family Survivors](#)
- [Timeline of Activities to Promote Mental Health Recovery](#)
- [Self-Help: Resources for Survivors](#)
- [E-learning Courses: Trainings for Clinicians](#)
- [Resources for Victim Assistance Professionals](#)

From the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress at the Uniformed Services University

- [Grief Leadership: Leadership in the Wake of Tragedy](#)
- [Leadership Communication: Anticipating and Responding to Stressful Events](#)
- [Coping with Stress Following a Mass Shooting](#)