

Developing a Prevention and Response Plan

Effective schools create a violence prevention and response plan and form a team that can ensure it is implemented. They use approaches and strategies based on research about what works.

Creating the Violence Prevention and Response Plan

A sound violence prevention and response plan reflects the common and the unique needs of educators, students, families, and the greater community. The plan outlines how all individuals in the school community--administrators, teachers, parents, students, bus drivers, support staff--will be prepared to spot the behavioral and emotional signs that indicate a child is troubled, and what they will need to do. The plan also details how school and community resources can be used to create safe environments and to manage responses to acute threats and incidents of violence.

An effective written plan includes:

- Descriptions of the early warning signs of potentially violent behavior and procedures for identifying children who exhibit these signs.
- Descriptions of effective prevention practices the school community has undertaken to build a foundation that is responsive to all children and enhances the effectiveness of interventions.
- Descriptions of intervention strategies the school community can use to help troubled children. These include early interventions for students who are at risk of behavioral problems, and more intensive, individualized interventions and resources for students with severe behavioral problems or mental health needs.
- A crisis intervention plan that includes immediate responses for imminent warning signs and violent behavior, as well as a contingency plan to be used in the aftermath of a tragedy.

The plan must be consistent with federal, state, and local laws. It also should have the support of families and the local school board.

Recommendations in this guide will prove most meaningful when the entire school community is involved in developing and implementing the plan. In addition, everyone should be provided with relevant training and support on a regular basis. Finally, there should be a clearly delineated mechanism for monitoring and assessing violence prevention efforts.

Forming the Prevention and Response Team

It can be helpful to establish a school-based team to oversee the preparation and implementation of the prevention and response plan. This does not need to be a new team; however, a designated core group should be entrusted with this important responsibility.

The core team should ensure that every member of the greater school community accepts and adopts the violence prevention and response plan. This buy-in is essential if all members of the school community are expected to feel comfortable sharing concerns about children who appear troubled. Too often, caring individuals remain silent because they have no way to express their concerns.

Typically, the core team includes the building administrator, general and special education teachers, parent(s), and a pupil support services representative (a school psychologist, social worker, or counselor), school resource officer, and a safe and drug-free schools program coordinator. If no school psychologist or mental health professional is available to the staff, involve someone from an outside mental health agency. Other individuals may be added to the team depending on the task. For example, when undertaking schoolwide prevention planning, the team might be expanded to include students, representatives of community agencies and organizations, the school nurse, school board members, and support staff (secretaries, bus drivers, and custodians).

Similarly, crisis response planning can be enhanced with the presence of a central office administrator, security officer, and youth officer or community police team member.

The core team also should coordinate with any school advisory boards already in place. For example, most effective schools have developed an advisory board of parents and community leaders that meets regularly with school administrators. While these advisory groups generally offer advice and support, that role can be expanded to bringing resources related to violence prevention and intervention into the school.

Consider involving a variety of community leaders and parents when building the violence prevention and response team:

- Parent group leaders, such as PTA officers.
- Law enforcement personnel.
- Attorneys, judges, and probation officers.
- Clergy and other representatives of the faith community.
- Media representatives.
- Violence prevention group representatives.
- Mental health and child welfare personnel.

- Physicians and nurses.
- Family agency and family resource center staff.
- Business leaders.
- Recreation, cultural, and arts organizations staff.
- Youth workers and volunteers.
- Local officials, including school board members and representatives from special commissions.
- Interest group representatives and grass roots community organization members.
- College or university faculty.
- Members of local advisory boards.
- Other influential community members.

The school board should authorize and support the formation of and the tasks undertaken by the violence prevention and response team.

While we cannot prevent all violence from occurring, we can do much to reduce the likelihood of its occurrence. Through thoughtful planning and the establishment of a school violence prevention and response team, we can avert many crises and be prepared when they do happen.