

Addressing School Violence

Risk Control from Liberty Mutual Insurance



Highlights:

- Areas where school violence is likely to occur
- Student/community engagement
- Emergency management crisis plans
- Conducting a threat assessment

This reference discusses some of the strategies a school can review to address violence.

While it is important to prepare and plan for violent incidences, it is just as important to keep them in context with other life threatening exposures that can occur at schools and not let them overshadow your overall safety efforts. Other exposures can include weather-related incidents, heart stoppages, choking, motor vehicle incidents, allergic reactions, etc. School shootings are still a statistically rare event.

Inspecting and Retrofitting School Facilities Where Violence is Likely to Occur

Review and analyze where violence has occurred on your school campus. A review of incident reports and a discussion with facility personnel and school resource officers can point to an area or areas where violence has occurred in the past and may be likely to occur in the future.

Commonly, violence in schools frequently occurs in the following areas:

- Parking lots and adjacent sites off of school grounds
- Points of entry
- Stairs and stairwells
- Restrooms
- Cafeteria

Consider ways to make the facility safer. In general it is important for school facilities to have the following safety elements:

- Clear signage
- Clear sight lines for adequate visual surveillance
- Minimum number of points of entry into a building
- Appropriate supervision
- Adequate entry and visitor control process
- Adequate lighting
- Enclosed area under stairwells (both internal and external stairways)

Student/Community Engagement to Address Violence in Schools

Despite best efforts, a school may lack information to properly address a threat before it results in violence occurring. Students, parents or community members may have knowledge of a potential or alleged threat but may not report to law enforcement or school authorities prior to a violent act occurring.

In order to address this communication issue, it is important for schools to:

- Have a climate in which students and others feel comfortable sharing information they have regarding a potentially threatening situation.
- Incorporate a mechanism to report potential or alleged threats in school policy.
- Have on-going training for school staff in how to properly respond once presented with information concerning an alleged or potential threat.

School Emergency Management Crisis Plan

Schools should have well thought out and practiced emergency management crisis plans. There should be a building level plan as well as a district wide plan. These plans require regular review and practice. It is imperative that school personnel know how to respond in an emergency situation.

Some common elements in a school emergency management crisis plan concerning violence include:

- Plans to respond to specific emergencies
- Prevention and intervention strategies
- Procedures to coordinate use of district resources
- Early detection of potentially violent behaviors
- Communication protocols
- Involvement of law enforcement and other outside agencies during a violent event

Identifying Threats and Conducting Threat Assessments

Students who commit violent acts at schools may have exhibited signs or behaviors prior to committing the violent event. It is important for school personnel to be properly trained in recognizing early warning signs and be able to respond in a timely manner. Once a threat or a concern is reported, it is imperative that a school have a threat assessment protocol in place to properly address and handle the situation before it escalates into a violent act.

In Dr. Dewey Cornell's "Virginia Model for Student Threat Assessment," there are 7 key steps in threat assessment process.

Once the concern or threat is reported to the principal, it is important that:

1. The threat is evaluated.
2. A decision is made whether the threat is transient or substantive.
3. If transient, it needs to be addressed.
4. If substantive, determine if the threat is serious or very serious in nature.
5. If serious, respond to threat.
6. If very serious, conduct safety evaluation.
7. Implement safety plan.

For more information on this threat assessment guide: <http://www.apa.org/about/gr/issues/violence/virginia-model.pdf>

Additional Resources

Liberty Mutual Insurance References:

- Crisis Management Planning for Schools, RC 5403
- Emergency Evacuation Preplanning for Schools, RC 5402

Outside Resources:

- Florida Department of Education: Florida Safe School Design Guidelines
- U.S. Secret Service: Prior Knowledge of Potential School-Based Violence: Information Students Learn May Prevent A Targeted Attack

libertymutualgroup.com/riskcontrolservices   @LibertyB2B



The illustrations, instructions and principles contained in the material are general in scope and, to the best of our knowledge, current at the time of publication. No attempt has been made to interpret any referenced codes, standards or regulations. Please refer to the appropriate code-, standard-, or regulation-making authority for interpretation or clarification. Provided that you always reproduce our copyright notice and any other notice of rights, disclaimers, and limitations, and provided that no copy in whole or in part is transferred, sold, lent, or leased to any third party, you may make and distribute copies of this publication for your internal use.