

A Dozen Things Principals Can Do to Stop School Violence

- Reward good behavior. Acknowledging students who do the right thing, whether it's settling an argument without violence or helping another student or apologizing for bumping into someone helps set the tone for the whole school.
- Establish "zero tolerance" policies for weapons and violence. Spell out penalties in advance. Adopt the motto "If it's illegal outside school, it's illegal inside." Educate students, parents, and staff on policies and penalties. Include a way for students to report anonymously crime-related information that does not expose them to retaliation.
- Establish a faculty-student-staff committee to develop a Safe School Plan. Invite law enforcement officers to be part of your team. Policies and procedures for both day-to-day operations and crisis handling should cover such subjects as identifying who belongs in the building, avoiding accidents and incidents in corridors and on school grounds, reporting weapons or concerns about them, working in partnership with police, and following up to ensure that troubled students get help.
- Work with juvenile justice authorities and law enforcement officers on how violence, threats, potentially violent situations, and other crimes will be handled. Meet regularly to review problems and concerns. Develop a memorandum of understanding with law enforcement on access to the school building, reporting of crimes, arrests, and other key issues.
- Offer training in anger management, stress relief, mediation, and related violence prevention skills to staff and teachers. Help them identify ways to pass these skills along to students. Make sure students are getting training.
- Involve every group within the school community — faculty, professional staff, custodial staff, students, and others — in setting up solutions to violence. Keep lines of communication open to all kinds of student groups and cliques.
- Develop ways to make it easier for parents to be involved in the lives of their students. Provide lists of volunteer opportunities; ask parents to organize phone trees; hold events on weekends as well as week nights. Offer child care for younger children.
- Work with community groups and law enforcement to create safe corridors for travel to and from school; even older students will stay home rather than face a bully or some other threat of violence. Help with efforts to identify and eliminate neighborhood trouble spots.
- Insist that your faculty and staff treat each other and students the way they want to be treated — with respect, courtesy, and thoughtfulness. Be the chief role model.
- Develop and sustain a network with health care, mental health, counseling, and social work resources in your community. Make sure that teachers, counselors, coaches, and other adults in the school know how to connect a needy student with available resources.
- Ensure that students learn violence prevention techniques throughout their school experience. Don't make it a one-time thing. Infuse the training into an array of subjects. Draw from established, tested curricula whenever possible.
- Consider establishing such policies as mandatory storage of outerwear in lockers (to reduce chances of weapons concealment), mesh or clear backpacks and duffle bags (to increase visibility of contraband); and limited entry access to the building (to reduce the number of inappropriate visitors).