

Violence at school



Despite the recent surge of catastrophes in our nation, violence is not a new issue. Violent occurrences such as shootings, bombings, and other terroristic events are things that have been happening for hundreds, or maybe even thousands of years. One aspect of these tragedies that seems to be the most terrible of all is violence in the school setting. Even this type of violence is not a new occurrence. School shootings and other violent acts of that nature have been occurring in the school setting for decades. However, it wasn't until recently that these issues have been such a front-runner in the public spotlight.

The three most well-known acts of school violence to date are the Columbine shooting, the Virginia Tech Massacre, and the recent shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. These tragedies, among countless others that are not as well-known, have resulted in the loss of entirely too many lives. Most people are under the impression that school settings are some of the best protected. However, this is not necessarily the case. It is almost impossible to monitor every student every minute of the day.

After events such as those that happened just last December occur, ending the lives of 26 completely innocent students and teachers, the public begins to ask why nothing was done to stop tragedies such as these, and whether or not anything will be done in the future to prevent these types of pointless, catastrophic events from occurring again in the future. After a significant amount of research on the topic, it has become abundantly clear that new rules, regulations, and protocols have been implemented to prevent such useless violence in the future.

Ceremonial Violence: Understanding Columbine and Other School Rampage Shootings: While the book *Ceremonial Violence* focuses mainly on the discussion of various school shootings (Columbine, in particular), it also gives a very in depth description of how local, state, and national government are attempting to end this type of violence in the future. According to Jonathon Fast, Ph. D (2008), the types of shootings that take place in a school setting should actually be labeled as “ school rampage shootings. By definition, a school rampage shooting is an act of terrorism without an ideological core. According to Fast (2008), this specific type of violence is especially devastating because they “ throw people’s lives out of kilter and convince them that the world is a menacing place. They crush the spirit of the community and generate waves of despair across the nation. ” Fortunately, due to the recent upsurge of school rampage shootings, as well as other forms of school violence in recent years, an overabundance of importance has been placed on putting an end to this issue.

Fast (2008) describes the steps of interfering in and managing these acts as three individual steps: prevention, intervention, and postvention. Obviously, prevention is the step that is most questioned by the public. What exactly is being done to keep school violence at bay? Intervention deals with minimizing the effects of violence when a violent act is already transpiring. Postvention has to do with how to assist the survivors of violence, when and if they are able to occur. Dr. Fast speaks extensively about the benefits of the prevention step.

This step revolves completely around putting a stop to school rampage shootings before they ever begin. The book discusses how educators and

administrators in the school environment sometimes receive a very specific training, known as “ threat assessment protocol,” that can help them identify students who present a potential danger to themselves or others. Clearly, this would be the most positive scenario when it comes to school violence. Unfortunately, this isn’t always how the situation plays out.

On multiple occasions in our nation’s recent history, shooters haven’t been able to be identified and stopped before the situation develops. It is when that happens that the other two steps must be utilized. Educators also have received certain training and materials to prepare them for exactly this type of situation, including disaster training and various disaster kits in the classroom. Fast (2008) clearly believes that violence can most easily be obstructed in the prevention phase, before it actually begins. Police at School: A Brief History and Current Status of School Resource Officers

This article is one that discusses much more obvious and much less theoretical approach for handling violence in schools. Police at School discusses the option of school systems hiring School Resource Officers (SROs) to help manage the behavior of students while at school. Like the aforementioned book, this article discusses a fairly newly implemented resource whose main purpose is to keep violence out of the school system in the first place. Weiler and Cray (2010) mention that School Resource Officers have been in elementary, middle, and high schools since the mid- 1950’s.

However, they did not truly gain the popularity that they have now until the mid- 1990’s after a series of school shootings. Because of these acts of violence, students, parents, and even staff at schools nationwide began to feel unsafe. Weiler and Cray (2010) report that after the implementation of

this program nearly two decades ago, people finally feel safe once more. The article defines School Resource Officers as certified peace officers employed by the government and assigned to schools. While in the school setting, their first duty is to be police officers.

Basically, this just means that they have all the rights and responsibilities inside the school building that they do when they step out of it. Weiler and Cray discuss why exactly police officers have been added to the school environment instead of simply providing training to administrative professionals that were already in the building. According to recent research, school crime and violence is an issue that continues to threaten the safety of our nation. Furthermore, nearly eighty percent of surveyed SROs reported confiscating a weapon from a student within a year prior to being asked.

These issues are simply more than teachers, principals, and secretaries in a school building are able to handle on their own. Fortunately, this program is increasingly popular (especially due to recent events), and students, faculty members, and staff in schools nationwide are just a little safer at school than they were previously. *Columbine a Decade Later: The Prevention of Homicidal Violence in Schools* According to Cornell and Scheithauer (2011), another type of technology is becoming increasingly critical in the fight to prevent violence in schools.

Almost immediately after the Columbine Massacre in 1999, the governor of Colorado created a committee responsible solely for “ identifying the lessons that the shooting taught. ” One major creation that developed from this committee was a reporting system known as “ Safe2Tell. ” Cornell and Scheithauer (2011) state that the ultimate goal of this system is to provide a

place where everyone is safely able to report any form of misconduct that they have knowledge of. This system is available to all students, parents, teachers, and community members in Colorado. This is clearly a hugely beneficial system.

It is believed that numerous violent acts could be prevented if only people were not afraid to report the information that they know (Cornell and Scheithauer 2011). Another benefit is that trained professionals are in charge of reacting to whatever tips they may receive. If more states were to implement this system, the issue of school violence potentially be completely dissolved. A School Shooting Plot Foiled Unlike previous resources, A School Shooting Plot Foiled tells the story of how sixteen year old Nicholas Elliott massacred a small Christian school in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

While other articles have detailed the prevention process of the subject, this one documents how the intervention phase can be utilized. According to Swezey and Thorp (2010), this shooting occurred on December 16, 1988. The shooter claimed that his motivation for his actions was to scare a fellow student who had harassed him, and to “take care” of various teachers who “did not like him.” Unfortunately, Nicholas was able to carry through with at least part of his original plan, killing one teacher and wounding another.

Since this shooting occurred almost a decade before the Columbine massacre, which was the event that really opened the eyes of political leaders worldwide to catastrophes such as this, it was completely shocking to have such an event occur. The school was also not as prepared for this type of event as schools are in today’s society. Although disaster protocol

was not nearly as detailed and well planned out in this era, staff, students, and faculty at Atlantic Shores Christian School were able to put an end to Nicholas Elliott's deadly agenda before it was able to go as far as he had originally planned.

Swezey and Thorp (2010) detail the events leading up to Nicholas' shooting spree. According to reports, several of Nicholas' friends at the school were aware of his impending plans. It all began when Nicholas started researching and documenting his plot on a school computer. He revealed the full spectrum of this scheme to his friends when they saw what he was doing. While they didn't reveal what he was doing to school officials (or anyone else) at that time, due to loyalty to the young man, it was eventually their knowledge that helped put an end to his massacre.

The year before the shooting occurred, one of Nicholas' teachers sent a letter home documenting worrying behavior including violence and inappropriate use of school technology. On the day of the shooting, Nicholas came to school with a semiautomatic pistol and around 200 rounds of ammunition. Thankfully, due partly to Nicholas' peers coming forward with what he intended to do on that horrendous day, and largely due to school officials and local police officers, only a small part of the plan was carried forward.

While this was a truly tragic and pointless loss of life for one teacher, it could have been much worse. This article displays a terrific example of just exactly how these terrible events can be ended, even while in process. Echoes of Columbine: The Emotion Work of Leaders in School Shooting Sites Echoes of Columbine is an article describing how the phase of postvention operates

after a crisis situation in schools. Authors Fein and Isaacson (2009) define the word “ crisis” as a major disruption of normal routines. In the case of school violence, this is exactly what the aftermath entails.

Where there was once security and a sense of safety, all that is left behind is turmoil, distress, and a sense of danger. While it would seem that the first two phases, prevention and intervention, hold a greater importance than this last piece of the puzzle, postvention is just as significant as the first two. In this case, Fein and Isaacson (2009) discuss a very specific type of postvention, known as emotion work. This theory, while not very well known to the public, is extremely important. It is especially imperative to educators who have worked in the school setting during a period of violence.

This type of therapy is one that does not include the students, but is used only on professionals who were forced to take an authoritative, and potentially dangerous, role during the violent act. Commonly, adults who have been placed in this horrific position have emotional damage because of the situation they were thrown in to. When these types of traumatic events occur, the adults involved have a difficult time determining how they should react. Fein and Isaacson (2009) cite this as feeling completely out of control, and having a “ physical storm of reactions. This can cause a very deeply rooted upheaval in the everyday life of people who have lived through it. Despite the educator’s supposed job of taking charge and being calm and collected, it is completely normal for even adults to feel lost, scared, and alone during disaster situations, especially when there are other lives on the line. This emotion work is the most vital type of postvention available to those who have suffered a trauma. It not only teaches them that it is

completely understandable to have had the feelings they experienced, but it also teaches them how to move past any regrets and doubts that they may hold on to

Conclusion:

After completing such a great deal of research on the matter of school shooting prevention, intervention, and postvention, it is extraordinarily obvious that both school and government officials have done everything in their power in recent years to prevent these types of tragedies from occurring in the future. Although it would be nearly impossible to put an absolute end to all traumatic and violent occurrences in school settings, it is clear that everything that can possibly be done to end these events are being done.

From the most basic step, being on the watch for students displaying dangerous or potentially harmful behavior, to the most complex step, handling the after effects of these disasters, schools are getting more and more affective at handling violence. Anyone who takes the time to educate themselves about what all is being done in schools nationwide should be able to say without a shadow of a doubt that catastrophes such as Columbine and Sandy Hook have very much so affected the way security is handled in schools.