
September 2019

Prepared by:
Office of Student Support Services
Division of Field Services
New Jersey Department of Education

**Introduction**

Youth violence can have lasting harmful effects on victims, their families, friends and the community. Efforts to prevent youth violence should focus on reducing factors that place youth at risk for carrying out violence and promote factors that protect youth at risk for violence. There are many prevention tools that have been developed over the years for schools to utilize. Such evidence-based programs have been shown to have positive effects in schools. Some of the most effective components to high quality violence prevention programs include strong school climate teams, effective community engagement and implementation of proven prevention strategies such as those found on the CDC resource [Striving To Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/index.html).

In January 2002, New Jersey passed a law (N.J.S.A. 18A:36-5.1) designating the third week of October each year as "School Violence Awareness Week." Regulations (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-5.2) in support of "School Violence Awareness Week" were adopted in August 2005.

**Requirements of School Violence Awareness Week pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:36-5.1**

- All public school districts, charter schools, Renaissance school projects and approved private schools for students with disabilities (APSSDs) are required to annually designate the third week in October (10/21/19-10/25/19) as School Violence Awareness Week.
- During this week, schools are required to provide students, parents, school district staff and law enforcement opportunities to discuss methods for keeping schools safe from violence, to consider school safety and security plans; and to learn how to recognize students in need of help. Activities should address preventing school violence, including, but not limited to, age-appropriate opportunities for student discussion about conflict resolution, bullying prevention and issues of student diversity and tolerance.
- Law enforcement personnel must be invited to join members of the teaching staff in the discussion of methods to keep schools safe from violence.
- Programs also must be provided for school employees that are designed to help them recognize warning signs of school violence and instruct them on recommended conduct during an incident of school violence.

**Student Activities**

In planning activities with students, consider the following tips:

- Organize small-group activities, as opposed to large-group presentations
- Conduct student-centered, rather than adult-centered activities
- Plan activities that are age-appropriate
- Encourage students to take responsibility for their part in maintaining a safe school environment
- Implement activities that build skills for non-violent responses to conflict
- Provide follow-up opportunities for processing information learned, asking questions, reinforcing information or skills learned, and to ensure understanding
Listed below you will find some suggested topics you may want to consider when planning for Violence Awareness Week. This is not an exhaustive list but may offer you some ideas to consider.

**Staff Training on Recognizing Warning Signs**

Schools are **required** to provide programming for school employees that is designed to help them recognize warning signs for school violence and to instruct them on policies, procedures and recommended conduct during an incident of school violence. A few web resources you may consider utilizing to design your program are:

- Safe, Supportive and Successful Schools Step by Step
- American Psychological Association Warning Signs of Youth Violence
- National School Safety and Security Services Warning Signs of Youth Violence
- A Comprehensive Technical Package for the Prevention of Youth Violence and Associated Risk Behaviors

**Promoting School Safety**

The National Center for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments defines school safety as “schools and school-related activities where students are safe from violence, bullying, harassment, and substance abuse. Safe schools promote the protection of students from violence, exposure to weapons and threats, theft, bullying, and the sale or use of illegal substances on school grounds.” Listed below are some activities for promoting school safety in your building:

- Discuss school policies and procedures for addressing violence and school crises
  - provide appropriate professional development for staff
  - conduct age appropriate discussions with students regarding safety and policies;
  - share clear expectations with parents
  - review the Ed Law Memorandum of Agreement to ensure all staff are aware of the requirements
- Identify and assess at-risk youth
- Provide adequate access to mental health supports and services
- Invite law enforcement in to facilitate discussions regarding student safety (i.e., child safety, juvenile justice practices and policies)
- Ensure policies and procedures are in line with guidance from the Office of School Preparedness and Emergency Planning (OSPEP)
- Disseminate letters to parents regarding safe school procedures (i.e., visitor policies, required drills for the year, and surveillance information)
- Regularly practice New Jersey’s required drills as well as **safety and security plans**;
- Begin a Peer Mediation program
- Conduct an evidence based school climate survey such as the **New Jersey School Climate Survey**; and
- Establish a Positive Behavior Support System, consider reviewing **NJPBSIS** for resources you can utilize when establishing a quality PBSIS system

**Preventing Violence in Your School**

Research has found that a positive school climate plays a major role in preventing violence in school buildings. Schools may want to consider the following research-based suggestions that support positive school climates and recognizing vulnerabilities to school safety:

- Enhance or create a safe and supportive school climate using a research-based school climate improvement process
  1. Identify and develop a strong school climate team
  2. Administer a research-based school climate survey such as the **New Jersey School Climate Survey**. This is free validated school climate survey for schools to use.
  3. Identify and Prioritize Needs
  4. Design a school climate improvement plan
5. Implement the plan
6. Monitor your progress and modify the plan as needed
   • Remind students of the importance of resisting peer pressure to act irresponsibly. You may consider having students develop and implement service learning projects in their community.
   • Create anonymous reporting systems (e.g., online reporting system, hot line or “tell an adult” system)
   • Make certain administrators, teacher and support staff are visible and have a welcoming presence when greeting students and parents
   • Develop a threat assessment team and protocol
   • Utilize a security system to closely monitor common areas, entrances and building security

Preparedness in the Event of a Violent Incident
Preventing school violence is the most desirable situation, but it is also important to have plans for responding to incidents of violence in the school building. The following suggestions should be considered when assessing your school’s safety:
   • Ensure you have a crisis management plan in place
   • Ensure your crisis management team is well versed on the plan and you update it often
   • Ensure communication systems within the district and community address how parents will be informed
   • Provide crisis training and professional development for staff

After an Incident of Violence
The actions taken after an act of violence can have major effects on students and the community. Ensuring that your school has an established detailed plan is important to a timely and appropriate response. The following procedures should be considered when planning for preparedness to respond to an incident of violence in your building:
   • Disseminate accurate information to students and the community to dispel rumors
   • Arrange for additional qualified counselors and offer short term and long term counseling as needed
   • Keep open communication with staff and parents to provide them with information regarding the crisis
   • Provide additional time for teachers to work with students who may need additional academic support because of stress, difficulty concentrating, and anxiety
   • Provide space and meeting times for students and teachers to meet to discuss feelings and cope as necessary
   • Compile a list of suggested readings related to the subject for teachers, parents, and students
   • Maintain close cooperation with authorities
Resources

Provided below is a table of resources that may be helpful in planning activities for School Violence Awareness Week, as well as for improving school safety. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of violence-related resources, but a diverse collection of supportive resources that school staff could review while considering their School Violence Awareness Week activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>For Educators</th>
<th>For Parents</th>
<th>For Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry</td>
<td>Resources dedicated to child and adolescent psychiatry.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Counseling Association</td>
<td>Resources dedicated to the social emotional development of children.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Psychological Association</td>
<td>Resources dedicated to psychology.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American School Counselor Association</td>
<td>Additional links to resources.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development</td>
<td>A variety of materials, training, research and additional resources.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence</td>
<td>Prevention programs for parents and youth on risks associated with guns.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)</td>
<td>Variety of fact sheets on violence prevention.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning</td>
<td>Research and publications on Social Emotional Learning.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyberbullying Research Center (CRC)</td>
<td>Up-to-date information about the nature, extent, causes, and consequences of cyberbullying among adolescents.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keys to Safer Schools</td>
<td>Provides tools, training and materials.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Association of Elementary School Principals</td>
<td>Additional links to resources.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Association of School Psychologists</td>
<td>Resources related to violence prevention for parents and educators.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Association of School Resource Officers</td>
<td>Additional links to resources.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Center for School Engagement (NCSE)</td>
<td>NCSE provides training and technical assistance, research and evaluation to school districts, law enforcement agencies and courts, as well as state and federal agencies, on student attendance, attachment and achievement.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Crime Prevention Council- Be Safe and Sound in School</td>
<td>Be Safe and Sound is a public education campaign that seeks to raise awareness of school safety and security issues and to provide concrete measures that parents, community members and educators can take to make schools safer and more secure.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention</td>
<td>Provides extensive information on youth violence prevention.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Institute of Mental Health</td>
<td>Contains in-depth links on trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Parent Teachers Association (PTA)</td>
<td>Provides various resources, activities and additional links for educators, parents and youth.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National School Safety Center (NSSC)</td>
<td>The NSSC provides school communities and their school safety partners with quality information, resources, consultation and training services.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention Institute</td>
<td>Provides information on creating safe environments, violence prevention strategies and programs.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy Hook Promise</td>
<td>An organization committed to driving and sustaining positive change in protecting children from gun violence in schools.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References

Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Guide for Preventing and Responding to School Violence (International Association of Chiefs of Police)

National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments

Talking to Children about violence: Tips for parents and teach