

Mass Shooting - Warning Signs

A behavior that appears to be a warning sign does not guarantee that an attack will happen. A student may make a direct threat with no intention of actually carrying it out. A single warning sign by itself usually does not warrant overt action by a threat assessment specialist. It should, however, attract the attention of an assessor who has been sensitized to look for other possible warning signs. If additional warning signs are present then more fact-finding measure is warranted to determine if there is a likelihood of danger.

The information in this poster tells of the danger signals that may require a follow-up investigation. Rampage school shooters typically reveal their violent intentions with peers, in school assignments, online behavior, and/or interactions with their parents. A person who possesses firearms, is a loner, shows an interest in past shooting situations, exhibits aberrant behavior, has talked about retribution against others, and refuses counseling would obviously be considered a significant risk of becoming a danger to himself or others. The following are warning signs to be aware of:

WHAT WE KNOW

- Shooters know that their names and faces will bounce around Facebook, Twitter, and other social media applications. They make their way to the 6 o'clock news on network news outlets, the front pages of news sites and blogs around the world. A shooter who was known by no one is now known by everyone. Their acts result in notoriety, a sick celebrity status, and that's a powerful allure for young people who, in some cases, haven't really found a place to belong in the real world. Historically, one of the central motivations in cases, although not the only one, is a desire for notoriety and a desire for infamy, and now we have a setting, a cultural and social setting, where multiple homicides will draw media attention internationally within moments. There is a twisted incentive that didn't exist a generation ago. (PUT AN END TO NEWS MEDIA COVERAGE?)
- Shooters may inspire others to be shooters. The more people you kill, the more you're in the limelight. It seems that the more shootings there are, the more it becomes normal in the minds of other shooters and it is easier to cross that line.
- Some shooters target specific people they feel have wronged them, while others want to inflict as much harm as possible on random victims.
- There is no single profile and some of the stereotypes that surround school shooters are not accurate. Not all are white, and not all are mentally ill.
- Shooters are typically failing in academics, failing in the world of work, failing in the world of friendship, in romance, or sexuality. Nothing really is going right in any major domain for them.

HISTORY OF SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS

Shooters almost always "show signs" before they enact their "big and memorable event" and usually horrific actions. May use Alcohol/drugs to reduce inhibitions so that aggressive behaviors are more easily expressed

VIOLENT ACTS

Shooters usually don't perform their first "big act" like the massacre in Colorado out of the blue. They tend to do little things along the way—whether it was hurting the family dog or other acts of violence to build up their violence muscle.

WARNING SIGNS OF A SHOOTER:

- Socially inept.
- Lacking in emotional intelligence.
- Not "fitting in" with their peer group.
- Isolated and socially withdrawn.
- Reclusive (Prefer to be by themselves rather than the company of others).
- Obsession with weapons, violence, and lack of a conscience .
- May show signs of being depressed and expresses hopelessness and despair and reveal suicidal preparatory behavior.
- Expresses contempt for other(s).
- Makes comments and/or gestures indicating violent aggression.
- Makes comment "gonna come to school and start shooting people", "You are all going to die", "I got a lot of killing to do."
- A history of using violence to solve problems (fighting, hitting, etc).
- Abusing weaker individuals or killing a family or neighbors pet (dog/cat).
- Enjoying cruel behavior and/or being able to view cruelty without being disturbed.
- Drawing graphic images or completing school assignments where student writes about death, destruction and hate.
- Diagramming the school as part of planning the attack, writing down plans. Leaking these plans to others.
- Warning a friend to stay away from school on a certain day.

STALKING

Shooters may follow, harass, surveil, or attempts to contact a potential victim regardless of the victim's expressed annoyance and demands to cease and desist.

POLICE CONTACT

- A shooter may have a history of contact with police for anger, stalking, or disorderly conduct.
- A past temporary restraining orders (or similar court orders), jail/prison record for aggressive behavior or crimes.
- A shooter may have a history of referral or commitments to mental health facilities for aggressive/destructive behavior, suicide.

} May not have any history.

OBSESSION WITH WEAPONS

- Shooters tend to study how to build explosives, learn how to acquire guns from high powered assault rifles to handguns, and knives.
- Unusual Interest in police, military, terrorist activities, and materials.
- Vehicles resembling police cars, military vehicles, surveillance equipment, handcuffs, weapons, clothing (camouflage, ski masks, etc.).
- Practicing shooting, bragging. Attempts to recruit others to join him/her.
- Stockpiling weapons.

ANGER PROBLEMS

- Difficulty controlling anger, loss of temper, impulsivity, making threats.
- Disciplinary Problems Refusal to abide by written and/or verbal rules.
- Has a history of mental illness.

VIOLENT FANTASY CONTENT

- Writings (Stories, essays, compositions about homicide and suicide)
- Drawings (Artwork depicting violence)
- Reading and viewing materials (Preference for books, magazines, television, videotapes and discs, movies, music, websites, and chat rooms with violent themes and degrading subject matter), and role-playing acts of violence and degradation.
- A belief that he is being singled out for unfair treatment and/or abuse; feeling persecuted (bullied).

IMITATION OF OTHER MURDERERS

- Appearance, dress, grooming, possessions like those of violent shooters in past episodes (e.g. long black trench coats, pressure cooker bombs).
- Drawn toward media, books, entertainment, conversations dealing with past murders praising the murderous actions of others.
- A fantasy that someday he will represent the oppressed and wreak vengeance on the oppressors.
- Actions and words that cause people around him to become fearful and suspicious (rage).

LACK OF ETHICS

Shooters can be resistant to learning and displaying ethical decision making.

HIGH FAMILY DYSFUNCTION

Many of us come from a "somewhat" dysfunctional family, but the shooter's family usually has a high degree of dysfunction. There is a biological basis for a young man (or woman) to become a shooter. The lack of healthy brain development, environments that support positive emotional health and being separated from ideal social role models. Dysfunctional families may include physical, mental, or sexual abuse.

HOW DO WE PREVENT VIOLENCE FROM HAPPENING

IT IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY TO STAY ALERT FOR THE SIGNS OF A SHOOTER. IF YOU "SEE SOMEONE" WHO DISPLAYS SOME OF THE SIGNS & SYMPTOMS ON THIS POSTER, SAY SOMETHING TO SOMEONE WHO MAY BE ABLE TO HELP (TEACHER, POLICE OFFICER, PARENT OR OTHER ADULT).

WHAT CAN I DO

- FORWARD THIS POSTER TO EVERYONE YOU KNOW. Display it in every classroom. It can also be downloaded for free at www.streetdrugs.org Follow www.streetdrugs.org on Twitter for updates.
- Identify a shooter before they act. Know the signs & symptoms of a shooter.
- Redesign/Restrict entry points to the school, bolt locked doors so they can only be opened by someone with a key (teacher). Have one entry to the school that is locked and monitored by school staff and/or school resource officers.
- Have a school threat assessment team that upon learning about a threat will be in a position to take immediate action including:
 1. Talking to the student and developing a treatment plan with conditions for remaining in school.
 2. Have parents/guardian check students room for weapons. Remove access by student to all weapons.
 3. Have police make records check for weapon/ammunition purchases by student. Review students credit card purchases.
 4. Request permission to receive medical and educational records.
 5. Check with law enforcement to ascertain whether there have been any interactions with police.
 6. Interview parents, guardians, other family members, relatives roommates, friends, and faculty.
 7. Suspending the student until the student has been treated and doctors indicate the student is not a danger to himself/herself or others.

WHILE YOU WERE READING THIS, IT IS LIKELY THAT ANOTHER STUDENT IS PLANNING TO SHOOT

Obvious warning signs often are ignored because people simply do not take them seriously. In one instance the police interviewed a student who had posted disturbing messages. The student convinced the investigating officers that he was not going to hurt anyone and the officers let him keep his guns. The student went on a murderous rampage the next day.