

Response to **Mass Violence in Schools**

DISCUSSION



Although school shootings are certainly tragic events, they are rare and schools remain safe institutions for our children and families. However, they often grab national headlines and can lead to some ill-considered policy decisions. Extreme measures like zero-tolerance policies that

result in students being suspended for minor misbehaviors can foster isolation and resentment that can lead to more serious, problematic behaviors.

Excessive security measures can also generate unexpected consequences. Bulletproof building entrances, electronic door locks, metal detectors and panic rooms with video monitors can create a prison-like atmosphere. And unannounced school-shooter drills may lead students and staff to believe that an active shooting is occurring and can be psychologically traumatizing.

Schools need to adopt a more proactive approach to preventing violence. With proper training, multidisciplinary school threat assessment teams can resolve threats before they escalate into violence while avoiding the excessive and disproportionate use of exclusionary school discipline.

RECOMMENDATIONS



- Adopt evidence-based school threat assessment practices to identify, assess and assist individuals who engage in threatening behavior.

- Eliminate ineffective and harmful zero-tolerance policies.
- Avoid a correctional facility-like atmosphere with bulletproof glass, armed guards and metal detectors.
- Use effective common-sense measures like limited entry points into the school.
- Refrain from traumatizing high-stress security drills.
- Train staff in supportive prevention measures like Youth Mental Health First Aid.
- Implement social-emotional learning and add mental health to the school health curriculum.

EXPERT PANEL



An expert panel appointed by the National Council for Behavioral Health Medical Director Institute examined the issue from multiple perspectives and found the solutions are as complex as the problem.

The insightful and evidence-based response, “Mass Violence in America: Causes, Impacts and Solutions,” provides a call to action to respond to this complex issue.

Membership of Expert Panel

- Medical Directors of mental health and addiction treatment provider organizations
- CEOs of mental health and addiction treatment provider organizations
- Members from the American Psychiatric Association
- Members from the American Psychological Association
- Member from the American Association of Emergency Psychiatrists
- Members representing law enforcement/courts
- Members from National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
- Content experts on mass violence and trauma
- Mental health consumer/patient representatives/parents of a mass shooter