School Safety

What is the problem?

Children spend a majority of their time in schools. Ten to 25 percent of all injuries to children occur on school property, either unintentionally or through violence.\(^1\) Each year, one out of every 14 American students suffers a school injury serious enough to require medical attention.\(^2\) In a two-year period, 80 percent of elementary school children see a school nurse for an injury-related complaint.\(^3\) Thus, schools present an appropriate venue to address and alleviate injury and violence problems.

Unintentional injuries at school

- Unintentional injuries account for more than 90 percent of injuries occurring at school.\(^4\)
- The majority of injuries among younger students occur on playgrounds.\(^4\)
- Older students run the greatest risk of injury during athletic events and practices.\(^4\)
- School bus-related crashes killed 164 people and injured an estimated 18,000 people nationwide in 1999.\(^5\) School bus occupants (drivers and students) accounted for 53 percent of the injuries and six percent of the deaths. Students were most in danger while they were boarding or disembarking school buses, as compared to while riding.\(^4\)
- While most documented school injuries are related to sports, recreation, or transportation, many other kinds of unintentional injuries also occur in schools. Some examples include burns from science laboratory experiments, amputations due to the use of shop equipment with dismantled safety guards, or falls on slippery floors.\(^4\)

Intentional injuries at school

- About 8 percent of high school students are threatened or injured with a weapon while on school property each year.\(^6\)
- Approximately 30 percent of students report involvement in bullying at school, either as a bully (13 percent), one who is bullied (11 percent), or both (6 percent). Bullying behaviors include taunting, teasing, threats, physical violence, spreading rumors, or shunning/exclusion.\(^7\)
- Each year about 12 percent of elementary and secondary school teachers are threatened by students.\(^4\)
- One-half of boys and one-quarter of girls report being physically assaulted by someone at school.\(^8\)
How can these injuries be prevented?

Preventing injury and violence at school requires the following:

- Comprehensive school-wide injury and violence prevention plans that are based on sound data and input from all relevant constituencies.  
  *Schools should assign a broadly inclusive committee (including professional and support staff, parents, and students) to examine injury reports, current policies and procedures, school building conditions, and current curricula, as well as perceptions of professional and administrative staff, students, and parents.*

- Policies that ensure student safety in classrooms, job placements, sports, and other extracurricular activities.  
  *School safety policies should address:* safety in science labs and vocational education classes; safety training as a part of school-to-career programs; required use and availability of protective athletic equipment and trainers; and required use and supervision of playgrounds that meet or exceed Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) guidelines and are accessible to disabled children.

- Policies and resources that ensure safety in transportation to and from school.  
  *Transportation safety policies should address:* pedestrian safety; bus and motor vehicle occupant protection; transport of children with special health care needs; protective gear for recreational wheeled devices while on school property; resources for parents regarding age and size appropriate occupant protection for motor vehicles and buses; licensing, education and training requirements for drivers and crossing guards; use of proper, well-maintained and insured vehicles that meet Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards and specifications.

- Strong policies against harassment.  
  *School discipline policies should prohibit harassment based on gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, or religion. These policies should establish procedures for students to report harassment, a process for investigating claims, and specific consequences for those found guilty.*

- Well-maintained school facilities.  
  *School campuses should have security lighting for safe access in the dark; sports facilities and playing fields that comply with building codes and are free from defects or hazards; safe equipment and appropriate supervision in laboratories and vocational education classrooms; safe hallways, stairs, and bleachers designed to prevent falls; and well-defined parking areas, driveways, and entrances that are safe for pedestrians and bicyclists.*

- A comprehensive conflict resolution program.  
  *Conflict resolution programs may include peer groups, school counselors, community representatives, and others.*
• Staff trained to recognize injury and violence hazards and how to reduce them.

• Curricula that teach young people strategies for preventing injury (including education in playground, traffic, pedestrian, sports, and classroom safety).

• A well-developed emergency plan to respond to injuries, violence, and dangerous situations when they occur.
  
  *Schools should establish a committee to oversee the development and implementation of the emergency plan, and ensure that CPR and first aid training for school staff and students are included.*

What role can MCH professionals do to prevent school injuries?

• Take a collaborative, comprehensive approach.
  
  *Partner with other state agencies and organizations such as the Departments of Education, Transportation, and the Parent Teacher Association to develop and implement a coordinated plan to address school-related injury and violence.*

• Assist with injury data collection and analysis.
  
  *Participate in the development of a statewide school injury data system that will identify key injury and violence issues and will be used to develop and assess priority interventions.*

• Provide information on effective injury and violence prevention strategies.
  
  *Share gathered data with Department of Education and school personnel through written and electronic means, training forums, etc.*

• Advocate for safety legislation and policies.
  
  *Assist state and local health and education officials to develop policies that promote safe schools.*

How can CSN help you?

The Children’s Safety Network works with Maternal and Child Health (MCH) and other public health professionals to prevent injury and violence in schools through the following strategies:

• Participating in the development of national policies to reduce school injury and violence, including the Health, Mental Health and Safety in Schools Project, the American School Health Association Injury and Violence Prevention Council, and CDC’s School Health Policies and Programs Study 2000.
• Providing technical assistance and training to state and local MCH and other public health professionals on all aspects of school injury and violence prevention.

• Facilitating the acquisition and use of data on injuries occurring in school.

• Translating research on school injury and violence prevention into practical, accessible guidelines for practitioners.

CSN School Safety Resource

• Injuries in the School Environment (PDF document) is a guide for public health and school professionals developed to raise awareness about school injuries and stimulate dialogue about prevention measures. Presents school injury data, discusses injury prevention strategies, and describes several state and local surveillance and prevention programs. Includes three sample data collection forms and an annotated bibliography.

Additional School Safety Resources


References


When crime, drugs and violence spill over from the streets into the schools, providing a safe learning environment becomes increasingly difficult. More students carry weapons. Gunfights replace fistfights.

Many students must travel through drug-dealer or gang turf. Violence becomes an acceptable way to settle conflicts. When this happens, children cannot learn and teachers cannot teach.

Creating a safe place where children can learn and grow depends on a partnership among students, parents, teachers, as well as other community institutions.

To help prevent school violence:
- Find out how crime threatens schools in your community.
- Take action to protect children.
- Promote nonviolent ways to manage conflict.

How do these ideas translate into action? Here are some practical suggestions for young people, parents, school staff & others in the community.

### Students

- Settle arguments with words, not fists or weapons.
- Report crimes or suspicious activities to the police, school authorities, or parents.
- Take safe routes to and from school and know good places to seek help.
- Don’t use alcohol or other drugs and stay away from places and people associated with them.
- Get involved in your school’s anti-violence activities—have poster contests against violence, hold anti-drug rallies, volunteer to counsel peers. If there are no programs, help start one.

### Parents

- Sharpen your parenting skills. Work with your children to emphasize and build their positive strengths.
- Teach your children how to reduce their risk of being victims of crime.
- Know where your kids are, what they are doing, and whom they are with—at all times!
- Help your children learn nonviolent ways to handle frustration, anger & conflict.
- Become involved in your child’s school activities—PTA, field trips, and helping out in class or lunchroom.
- Work with other parents in your neighborhood to start a McGruff House or other block parent program.

A McGruff House is a reliable source of help for children in emergency or frightening situations. Volunteers must meet specific standards, including a law-enforcement record check. Programs are established locally, as a partnership among law enforcement, schools, and community organizations. For information, call 801-486-8768.

### School staff

- Evaluate your school’s safety objectively. Set targets for improvement.
- Develop consistent disciplinary policies, good security procedures, and a response plan for emergencies.

### Community partners

- Law enforcement can report on the type of crimes in the surrounding community and suggest ways to make schools safer.
- Law enforcement officers in many areas participate in school activities and talk with students about crime prevention, drug abuse and other problems.
- Community-based groups, church organizations, and other service groups can provide counseling, extended learning programs, before- and after-school activities, school watches, and other community crime-prevention programs.
- State and local governments can develop model school safety plans, and provide funding for schools to implement the programs.
- Local businesses can provide apprenticeship programs, participate in adopt-a-school programs, or serve as mentors to area students.
- Colleges and universities can offer conflict-management courses to teachers or assist school officials in developing violence-prevention curricula.
United Against Crime

This crime prevention brochure is brought to you by RadioShack, working together with the National Crime Prevention Council (which manages the National Citizens’ Crime Prevention Campaign) and the National Sheriffs’ Association.

RadioShack has formed a special partnership with these leading organizations to provide you with answers for security that can help make your life safer.

Join RadioShack, the National Crime Prevention Council and the National Sheriffs’ Association—United Against Crime.

For more information

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“Can I help make my children’s school safer?”