



11 Tips To Help Parents Create Safer Schools

Help prevent school violence and make your child's school safer with this starter list of ideas. Some require only individual action; some require multiple actions by many people. Some address immediate crises; others address the basic problems that cause violence. Consider this list a launching pad — there's lots more that can be done. Check out www.ncpc.org/besafe to learn more about what you can do to make schools safer and to stop school violence.

Here are 11 specific options for parents:

1

Take an active role in your child's school.

Talk regularly with teachers, staff, and other parents. Volunteer in the classroom or library or for afterschool activities. Work with parent-teacher and student organizations.

Getting involved will help you better understand the school's safety strengths and weaknesses as well as how you can help change occur.

"Studies have shown that schools where parents are involved in decision making and advocacy have higher levels of student achievement and greater public support."

National PTA, National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement — School Decision Making and Advocacy

2

Find out what is already being done at your child's school.

Try to learn more about the school's overall approach to safety and security. Does the school address ways to *prevent* as well as respond to violence and other crimes? How is safety addressed throughout the school — in the cafeteria, hallways, playground, locker rooms, classrooms? If you are

not sure about the answers to these questions, make an appointment with your child's teacher or school principal to learn more.

3

Get organized. Does your child's school already have a safety committee? Is it concerned with preventing as well as responding to crimes? If so, join. If your school doesn't have such a group, ask the principal how you can work together to organize one. Visit www.ncpc.org/besafe for tools to help you organize a school safety and security initiative.

4

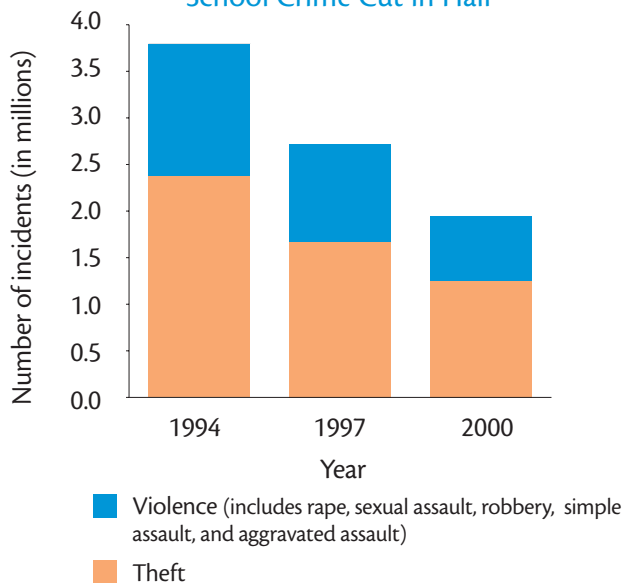
Make it clear that you support school policies and rules that help create and sustain a safe place for all students to learn.

If your child feels a rule is wrong, discuss his or her reasons and what approach might work better. As you discuss this approach, help your son or daughter understand the importance of rules when it comes to protecting student safety and why they need to follow these important rules.

Crime and Violence in Schools — Fast Facts

- Schools are among the safest places for our children to be, with more incidents occurring away from school than at school.
- Most school crime is theft, not violent crime.
- Middle school students are more likely to be victimized than elementary or high school students, particularly by bullying.
- At least one third of all students report being targeted by hate-related words.
- Aggressive behavior among elementary students is on the rise, according to school resource officers.

School Crime Cut in Half



Sources: Bullets 1-4 from "Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2003," a publication of the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, 2003; online at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2004/2004004.pdf>; Bullet 5 from "NASRO 2003 National School-Based Law Enforcement Survey;" online at www.schoolsecurity.org/resources/2003NASROSurvey.pdf.

5

Listen to and talk with your children regularly.

Bullying, fist-fights, and shoving are the most common safety and

security issues kids face at school; theft is the most common school crime. Ask your child what problems and concerns he or she has. Your son or daughter may bring up small problems you can help solve without involving school officials. Find time for two-way conversations with your child — lots of listening, no lecturing. Try to make this kind of communication a daily habit, not a reaction to crisis.

Early Warning Signs

6

Help your child learn how to identify and solve problems.

Children who know how to approach a problem and resolve it effectively are less likely to be angry, frustrated, or violent. Take advantage of “teachable moments” to help your child understand why talking about tough issues is better than resorting to violence. Act as adult role models. Settle your own conflicts peaceably and manage anger without violence.

7

Communicate your standards clearly.

Explain that you won't tolerate violent behavior. Discuss what violence is and is not. Discourage name-calling and teasing. These behaviors often escalate into fistfights (or worse). Whether the teaser is violent or not, the victim may see violence as the only way to stop it.

If your child or his or her friends demonstrate a combination of the symptoms listed below, contact your school's guidance counselor.

- Social withdrawal
- Excessive feelings of isolation and being alone
- Excessive feelings of rejection
- Being a victim of violence, including abuse
- Feelings of being picked on and persecuted
- Low school interest and poor academic performance
- Expression of violence in writings and drawings
- Uncontrolled anger
- Patterns of impulsive and chronic hitting, intimidating, and bullying behaviors
- History of discipline problems
- Past history of violent and aggressive behaviors
- Intolerance for differences and prejudicial attitudes
- Drug use and alcohol use
- Affiliation with gangs
- Inappropriate access to, possession of, and use of firearms
- Serious threats of violence

From “Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools,” a publication of the U.S. Department of Justice and Department of Education, 1998; online at www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osep/gtss.html?exp=0.

8

Insist on knowing your child's friends, whereabouts, and activities.

It's your right. Make your home an inviting and pleasant place for your child and his or her friends; it's easier to know what children are up to when they're around. Know how to spot signs of troubling behavior in children — yours and others. See above for details on the type of behavior to watch for.

9

Work with other parents to develop standards for school-related events, acceptable out-of-school activities, and places, and require

adult supervision. Support each other in enforcing these standards. Talk with each other about safety-related problems in your school and community, sources of help to strengthen and sharpen parenting skills, and similar issues.

10

Play it safe. Recognize that keeping guns in your home may put you at legal risk as well as expose you and your family to physical harm. In many states, parents can be held liable for

their children's actions, including inappropriate use of firearms. If you do choose to keep guns at home, ensure that they are securely locked, that ammunition is locked and stored separately, and that children know weapons are never to be touched without your express permission and supervision.

11

Know your rights. The federal No Child Left Behind law allows students who are in “persistently dangerous” schools to transfer. States can set their own definitions, and as of 2004 very few schools have been defined this way. But it’s worth checking with your local school officials. And if

you want to have a say in what qualifies as “persistently dangerous,” the law lets you participate on your state’s advisory team. For details, check out www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/unsafeschoolchoice.doc.

KSA-Plus Communications is a national firm that specializes in communicating with parents, educators, policymakers, and others about school-related issues. The firm offers communications advice, technical assistance, and workshops, plus print and Web publications for parents and parent leaders. This guide is one in a series of parent leadership tools available on its Web site, at www.ksaplus.com.

The National Crime Prevention Council’s Be Safe and Sound initiative is a national campaign to get parents and caregivers involved in efforts to improve school safety and security. By working with school principals and concerned community members, parents can create positive, lasting change in and around their children’s schools. Be Safe and Sound is an initiative of the National Crime Prevention Council conducted in collaboration with National PTA and NCPC partners, The Allstate Foundation, ASSA ABLOY Group, Nextel Communications, and the Security Industry Association. To learn more about Be Safe and Sound, visit www.ncpc.org/besafe.