



*Safe Communities ~
Safe Schools*

FACT SHEET

FS-SC14

1998

Responding to Violence in the Schools

This CSPV fact sheet provides suggestions for what school administrators and teachers can do when confronted with violence in the school. This fact sheet focuses specifically on low levels of violence such as school fights, classroom conflict, and verbal threats.

School Fights

- Do not physically get in the middle of a fight or try to restrain fighters.
- Disperse student spectators away from the fight.
- Use your best authoritative, loud voice to let the fighters know you are there and you want the fight to end immediately. You may use commands such as: "Break it up. Stop right there. Everyone back off. Move away from each other, now!"
- If you know the names of the fighters, call them by name.
- Take time to analyze the fight. You need to know if the fight just began, is it winding down, who is the aggressor, etc.
- Obtain additional help from other teachers to stop the fight.

Classroom Conflict

- Do not raise your voice.
- Try to remain calm and rational.
- Do not touch an agitated or angry student.
- Try to keep the student seated. In many instances, this is impossible. You can only suggest the student remain seated so that he or she might explain to you what is wrong.
- Be reassuring to the student as well as to the rest of the class. Explain the importance of protecting every student's right to learn. Talk about options for resolving the conflict.
- Send another student for help. The student should be told to go to the nearest office to summon assistance from the administration.

Verbal Threats

- School administrators need to evaluate how serious a threat is to school safety. If determined very serious, then suspension or expulsion may be the best alternative. Contacting police officials may also be appropriate.
- Threats should not be taken lightly or brushed off, however, do not show fear. The threatening individual usually looks at the person they have threatened carefully for traces of fear or shock.
- Steps should be taken to protect themselves, such as isolating the threatening individual or calling in additional staff and security.

- In some instances crisis intervention may be an appropriate response to a student who has made a threat. This intervention can include calling a mandatory meeting with the student and his or her guardians and should be held on the school campus. In addition to the student and parents, meeting attendees should include a school psychologist and a school administrator. During the meeting there should be a review of the threat that was made, the consequences of the threat, and a plan of action that addresses any special needs the at-risk student may have such as tutoring, mentoring, etc.
- After a serious threat is made, an immediate notice should be sent out to all school administrators, school security personnel, teachers, etc. about the specific threat and the school's response to the threat.
- After a student has made a serious threat, special security checks should be required any time the student enters school campus. Friends of the student may also need to under go security checks.
- Publicize to students the penalties of making a threat. Students must understand the seriousness of threat making and the consequences that will be implemented when a threat is made.
- Request additional police presence on the school campus when a serious threat is made.
- Utilize the buddy system which teams potential student/teacher victims with other students/ teachers to prevent assaults on campus.

General Recommendations

- Make sure that the school has a functioning crisis communication system which includes phones, alarms, intercoms, and a public address system so that when an incident does occur necessary communication can be made.
- After any of these incidents, there should be immediate documentation of everything that occurred. This documentation should include time, name(s) of student(s) involved, a brief description of the events that occurred, and any information that pertains to the student(s) or the incident. This report should be submitted to the administration. You should also keep a copy in case of a future conference with parents or school administrators regarding the incident.

References

Glenn, J. (1990, Fall). Training Teachers for Troubled Times. *School Safety*, 20-21.

Pitcher, G.P. (1992). *Crisis Intervention in the Schools*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

National School Safety Center. (1990). *School Safety Check Book*. Malibu, CA: National School Safety Center.

Virginia Department of Education. (1996). *Resource Guide for Crisis Management in Schools*. Richmond, VA: Virginia Department of Education.