

## **WARNING SIGNS OF POSSIBLE VIOLENT STUDENT BEHAVIOR**

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Typically, after a school shooting the media interviews classmates and other persons who knew the suspected shooter. Typically, there are two scenarios: his classmates say things like, "He was a quiet boy...he kept to himself...we never would have suspected him doing something like this." Then there's those who say, "he used to draw scenes showing people with guns and he was quick to get angry." But there are plenty of quiet students who keep to themselves and who would never commit such heinous crimes. The point: it's impossible to predict these horrible acts and it's impossible to identify with certainty those who may do so.

However, educators and parents - and students - can recognize certain early behaviors that may constitute an early warning of possible violent behavior. For some students, different combinations of events, behaviors and emotions lead to aggressive rage or violent behavior.

In many cases, children who are aggressive or violent demonstrate antisocial behavior early in life. If they don't get help early, they continue to become more aggressive, and some become violent.

**Experts have identified some early warning signs that may be indicators of potential violent behavior. As an educator, you are in a unique position to detect these behaviors. The early warning signs include (in no particular order):**

1. **Serious threats of violence.** While occasional idle threats are a common response to frustration, one of the best indicators that a child is likely to commit a dangerous act toward self or others is a detailed and specific threat to use violence. Verbal threats should always be taken seriously. "If you hear it, report it. If you see it, report it."
2. **Withdrawing from other students.** If a student usually plays or hangs out with others but regularly becomes a "loner," a school social worker or counselor should be alerted.
3. **Being a victim of violence.** Children who are victims of violence are sometimes at risk themselves of becoming violent.
4. **Feelings of being picked on, persecuted, left out and/or rejected.** Students who feel constantly picked on, teased, bullied, singled out for ridicule, left out of games and activities, and/or humiliated at home or at school, and who don't get help, may first withdraw from other students, and then may show their feelings in aggressive or violent ways.

5. **Expression of violence in writings and drawings.** Writings and drawings that are violent and directed at specific individuals (family members, peers, other adults) could signal emotional problems and the potential for violence.
6. **Uncontrolled anger.** While anger is natural, frequent, intense anger in response to minor annoyance may signal potential violent behavior.
7. **Patterns and/or history of impulsive, violent and/or aggressive behavior.** Students who engage in bullying, fighting, defiance, cruelty to animals, stealing, vandalism, lying, cheating and fire setting are at risk for more serious behavior.
8. **Intolerance for differences, and prejudicial attitudes.** Intense prejudice toward others based on racial, ethnic, religious, language, gender, sexual orientation, ability and physical appearance—when coupled with other factors—may lead to violent assaults against those who are perceived to be different. Membership in hate groups or picking on individuals with disabilities or health problems are also early warning signs.
9. **Drug and alcohol use.** Apart from being unhealthy, drug and alcohol use reduces self-control and exposes students to violence, either as offender, a victim or both.
10. **Affiliation with gangs.** Students who copy or become affiliated with gangs that support anti-social behavior usually adopt these values and act in violent or aggressive ways. Certain types of attire may be an indicator of gang membership.
11. **Inappropriate access to, possession of and use of firearms.** Children who inappropriately possess or have access to firearms can have an increased risk for violence as well as a higher probability of becoming victims.

If you are concerned that a student is at risk for possible violent behavior, we encourage you to confer with the school administration and/or school social workers, counselors, etc., to alert them. Together, you all may jointly take measures to obtain help for the student and prevent a tragedy.

This list is based on information produced by the U.S. Department of Education in a 1998 report titled “Early warning, timely response: A guide to safe schools.” Although it was published more than 25 years ago, it’s still available on the web (Google “Early warning, timely response: A Guide to safe schools.”)

If you are a member of the Federation, feel free to contact the Federation’s local office or the LFT for assistance.