

VIOLENCE AGAINST TEACHERS: A SILENT NATIONAL CRISIS

DISRESPECT BULLYING/INTIMIDATION VERBAL THREATS
THREATENING OR RUDE GESTURES THEFT
PROPERTY DAMAGE PHYSICAL ASSAULT

ALL EDUCATORS ARE AT RISK!

Despite the cost and size of this problem, very little is known about factors that lead to teacher victimization. More research is needed to better understand the causes and correlates of teacher victimization.

HOW BIG IS THE PROBLEM?

Each year, 253,100 (7%) teachers are threatened with injury. Looking at these 7%:

by locale

- 109,800 (43%) in cities
- 78,100 (31%) in suburbs
- 27,500 (11%) in towns
- 37,700 (15%) in rural areas

by school level

- 139,400 (55%) in secondary schools
- 113,700 (45%) in elementary schools

by gender

- 78,500 (31%) male teachers
- 174,500 (69%) female teachers

Each year, 127,500 (3%) of teachers are physically attacked by students (National Survey in 2003-2004).

WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF TEACHER VICTIMIZATION?

There is a cascade of costs, both obvious and hidden due to:

- Lost wages
- Lost days of work (927,000 per year)
- Need for training and replacement of teachers leaving the school or profession prematurely
- Lost instructional time
- Medical and psychological care resulting from threats and assaults
- Student disciplinary proceedings involving school, police, judicial systems, social services, and parents
- Increased workers' compensation claims and premiums
- Incarceration of perpetrators

The nationwide costs of teacher victimization to teachers, parents, and taxpayers are calculated to exceed \$2 billion annually.

These costs do not include costs to and incurred by those who commit violence against teachers, such as substantially higher dropout rates, government assistance, medical care, and social services throughout their life span.

WE KNOW ABOUT SCHOOL VIOLENCE, WHICH MAY BE RELATED TO TEACHER VICTIMIZATION.

We do know a lot about the phenomenon of school violence and how to recognize, mitigate, and prevent it. The following is based on the assumption that school violence may be related to teacher victimization. We frame this knowledge in the form of questions that reflect different levels of prevention and intervention of school violence.

WHAT CAN I DO TO CREATE A POSITIVE, SAFE ENVIRONMENT THAT FOSTERS LEARNING IN MY CLASSROOM?

Implement classroom-based, school-wide violence prevention programs so that teachers and students learn effective strategies for solving problems peacefully. See www.casel.org; <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/>; www.ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc and <http://www.neahin.org/crisisguide/before/index.html> for information about empirically supported programs and resources.

Use available resources for classroom management.

An excellent resource for classroom management is www.apa.org/ed/schools/cpse

Use effective classroom management practices.

1. Clearly state rules
2. Be consistent
3. Model and reward positive behavior, e.g., Positive Behavior Supports (PBS)
4. Pick your battles judiciously
5. Show students you care about each of them and be sure to verbalize your caring about students as individual learners. ("Pat, I am really concerned and care about how you did on your math test.")
6. Minimize transition times
 - a. Use advance organizers
 - b. Reduce uncertainties about what is expected
 - c. Be flexible
7. Provide students with opportunities to make meaningful choices
8. Do not let rigid rule interpretation trump common sense
9. Notice any variances in student mood, behavior
10. Avoid confrontation in front of other students. (Instead, say "let's talk after class.")
11. Teach, model, and cue problem solving, empathy, conflict resolution, impulse control, anger management
12. Validate students' perspectives and avoid blaming
13. Don't make assumptions about causes of problems; consider underlying issues

Promote academic engagement

1. Link daily lessons to life and needs of students; demonstrate relevancy
2. Create expectations of success for all students
3. Give students specific feedback about what they did right
4. Structure a learning task in a way that sustains engagement (i.e., make it interesting!)
5. Maintain privacy of student assessments, including grades
6. Engage students in cooperative learning
7. Maximize instructional time and keep students on task
8. Build on students' strengths

WHAT ARE POSSIBLE PRECURSORS TO VIOLENCE?

Circumstances or situations can trigger disruption and rage:

1. A break-up with boy/girl friend
2. Death/suicide of family member, friend, classmate, or community member
3. Arrest of a parent or caregiver
4. Parent separation and/or divorce
5. Public/peer humiliation
6. Family member fighting in war
7. Prejudice (homophobia, racism, bigotry)
8. Physical factors (hunger, allergies, gastrointestinal issues, sleep deprivation)
9. Exposure to violence, aggression, bullying, and/or gang conflict
10. Abuse (physical, sexual, and emotional)
11. Natural disasters
12. Economic stress
13. Strained relationship between teacher and students
14. Academic stress
15. Peer isolation or ostracization

Note. Currently there is little empirical research on possible precursors.

HOW MIGHT I RESPOND TO WARNING SIGNS?

1. Acknowledge the student (e.g., “It seems like you are upset,” “What can I do to help you?”) and offer help and support
2. Consult with school personnel
3. Redirect student to an alternative task
4. Use a calm, positive tone of voice when redirecting student conflicts; avoid confrontational language
5. Give students two or three choices of academic tasks to manage behavior and increase success
6. Show encouragement when students struggle with social and/or academic issues
7. Use verbal praise intermittently in class and when students become reengaged
8. Restate expectations and classroom rules
9. Make certain that you are reinforcing the targeted behavior you desire in your classroom
10. Use humor, but not sarcasm, to defuse conflicts
11. Redirect the class into positive new activities and take structured breaks
12. Move close enough to student to engage or redirect behavior (3-5 feet), yet respect student’s personal space and property

WHAT IF I AM THREATENED BY A STUDENT IN THE CLASSROOM?

1. Implement the school safety plan
2. If the school safety plan does not provide immediate support or assistance
 - Isolate the student
 - Remove other students from the area if you cannot isolate the student
 - Allow cool-down time
 - Document the incident
 - Resume your regular schedule

HOW CAN I TAKE CARE OF MYSELF AFTER THE INCIDENT?

1. Take a few slow, deep breaths
2. Use self-talk to calm yourself down
3. Recognize this is a big deal—you have been through a traumatic event, and it’s normal to be upset
4. Do not blame yourself
5. Seek social support from colleagues, friends, and family
6. Seek social support from school administrators and/or union representative
7. Monitor signs of personal distress that may occur afterwards (e.g., trouble sleeping, concentrating, anxiety, irritability, tearfulness, lack of appetite)
8. Access a mental health professional if needed
9. Talk to your principal about having a plan in place to deal with similar issues proactively in the future

REMEMBER THESE TIPS

- Note any change in students’ emotional and/or behavioral functioning.
- Always consider social, cultural, and linguistic factors when judging student and adult behavior.
- Remember you are not alone! Talk with a trusted colleague, mentor, administrator, or union representative and get outside assistance when needed.