

A SILENT NATIONAL CRISIS: Violence Against Teachers

ALL EDUCATORS ARE AT RISK

HOW BIG IS THE PROBLEM?

80% of teachers in a nationwide survey reported being victimized at least once within the current or past school year.

- According to the U.S. Department of Education (2015), from 2011 to 2012 approximately 20% of public school teachers reported being verbally abused, 10% reported being physically threatened, and 5% reported being physically attacked in schools.
- According to the 2013 Indicators of School Crime and Safety Report, during the 2009–2010 school year, 23% of public schools reported that bullying occurred among students on a daily or weekly basis, 9% reported student acts of disrespect for teachers other than verbal abuse on a daily or weekly basis, and 5% reported that student verbal abuse of teachers occurred on a daily or weekly basis. Sixteen percent reported gang activities during the school year.
- Approximately 6% of K–12 teachers were physically attacked in schools.
- The National Center for Education Statistics reported that 1.3 million nonfatal crimes (including 473,000 violent crimes) were committed against America's teachers from 1997 through 2001.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF TEACHER VICTIMIZATION?

There is a cascade of both obvious and hidden costs including:

- Lost wages
- Lost days of work (927,000 days/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 exceed \$2 billion annually. These costs do not include those incurred by individuals who commit violence against teachers, such as costs related to substantially higher dropout rates, government assistance, medical care, and social services throughout their lifespan.

WE KNOW A LOT ABOUT SCHOOL VIOLENCE— HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO TEACHER VICTIMIZATION?

We know a lot about the phenomenon of school violence and how to recognize, mitigate, and prevent it. The following information 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.

What Can I Do to Create a Positive, Safe Environment That Fosters Learning in My Classroom?

Implement classroom-based, schoolwide violence prevention programs so teachers and students learn effective strategies for solving problems peacefully.

Use available resources for classroom management

For information about empirically supported programs and resources see:

- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
- The IRIS Center
- What Works Clearinghouse
- National Education Association Healthy Future

Excellent resources for classroom management are also found on the [APA Center for Psychology in Schools and Education \(CPSE\)](#) website.

Use effective classroom management practices

- Clearly state rules
- Be consistent
- Model and reward positive behavior (e.g., [Positive Behavioral Interventions & Support \[PBIS\]](#))
- Pick your battles judiciously
- Show students you care about each of them, and be sure to verbalize that you care about them as individual learners (e.g., “Pat, I’m really concerned and care about how you did on your math test”)
- Minimize transition times (e.g., use advance organizers, reduce uncertainties about what is expected, and be flexible)
- Provide students with opportunities to make meaningful choices
- Do not let rigid rule interpretation trump common sense
- Notice any variances in student mood or behavior
- Avoid confrontation in front of other students (instead, say “Let’s talk after class”)
- Teach, model, and elicit problem solving, empathy, conflict resolution, impulse control, anger management
- Validate students’ perspectives and avoid blaming
- Don’t make assumptions about causes of problems; consider underlying issues

Promote academic engagement

- Link daily lessons on life and needs of students
- Create expectations of success for all students
- Give students specific feedback about what they did right
- Make learning tasks interesting to students
- Maintain privacy of student assessments, including grades
- Engage students in cooperative learning
- Maximize instructional time and keep students on task
- Build on students' strengths

What Are Possible* Precursors to Violence?

Circumstances or situations can trigger disruption and rage—for example:

- A breakup with boy/girl friend
- Death/suicide of family member, friend, classmate, or community member
- Arrest of a parent or caregiver
- Parent separation and/or divorce
- Public/peer humiliation
- Family member fighting in war
- Prejudice (homophobia, racism, bigotry)
- Physical factors (hunger, allergies, gastrointestinal issues, sleep deprivation)
- Exposure to violence, aggression, bullying, and/or gang conflict
- Abuse (physical, sexual, and emotional)

*Currently there is little empirical research on possible precursors.

- Natural disasters
- Economic stress
- Strained relationship between teacher and students
- Academic stress
- Peer isolation or ostracizing

How Might I Respond to Warning Signs?

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

What If I'm Threatened by a Student in the Classroom?

- Implement the school safety plan
- 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?

- Take a few slow, deep breaths
- Use self-talk to calm yourself down

- Recognize this is a big deal—you have been through a traumatic event, and it's normal to be upset
- Do not blame yourself
- Seek social support from colleagues, friends, and family
- Seek social support from school administrators and/or union representative
- Monitor signs of personal distress that may occur afterward (e.g., trouble sleeping, concentrating, anxiety, irritability, tearfulness, lack of appetite)
- Consult a mental health professional if needed
- 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.

This document is based on *Understanding and Preventing Violence Directed Against Teachers: Recommendations for a National Research, Practice and Policy Agenda—A Report by the American Psychological Association Board of Educational Affairs Task Force on Classroom Violence Directed Against Teachers*. We are grateful to Dorothy Espelage, PhD, and Linda Reddy, PhD, for their work in developing the content of this document.

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For more information, please see:
www.apa.org/ed/schools/cpse/activities/violence-against.aspx