



## **National Threat Assessment Center Secret Service Safe School Initiative**

**In 2002, the U.S. Secret Service completed the Safe School Initiative, a study of school shootings and other school-based attacks that were conducted in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education.**

- The study examined school shootings in the United States as far back as 1974, through the end of the school year in 2000, analyzing a total of 37 incidents involving 41 student attackers.
- The study involved extensive review of police records, school records, court documents, and other source materials, and included interviews with 10 school shooters.
- The study found that school shootings are rarely impulsive acts. Rather, they are typically thought out and planned out in advance.
- In addition, prior to most shootings other kids knew the shooting was to occur - but did not alert an adult. Very few of the attackers, however, ever directed threats to their targets before the attack.
- The study findings also revealed that there is no "profile" of a school shooter, instead, the students who carried out the attacks differed from one another in numerous ways.
- However, almost every attacker had engaged in behavior before the shooting that seriously concerned at least one adult - and for many had concerned three or more different adults.
- Most attackers had difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures. Moreover, many had considered or attempted suicide.
- Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted or injured by others prior to the attack.
- Most attackers had access to and had used weapons prior to the attack.
- In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.

**The findings from the study suggest that some school attacks may be preventable, and that students can play an important role in prevention efforts.**

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# Creating a Safe and Connected School Climate

1. Assess the school's emotional climate.
2. Emphasize the importance of listening in schools.
3. Take a strong, but caring stance against the code of silence.
4. Work actively to change the perception that talking to an adult about a student contemplating violence is considered "snitching."
5. Find ways to stop bullying.
6. Empower students by involving them in planning, creating, and sustaining a school culture of safety and respect.
7. Ensure that every student feels that he or she has a trusting relationship with at least one adult at school.
8. Create mechanisms for developing and sustaining safe school climates.
9. Be aware of physical environments and their effects on creating comfort zones.
10. Emphasize an integrated systems model.

Stakeholders include: students, teachers, administrators, school board members, parents, law enforcement personnel, after-school and community-based groups, and others.

Stakeholders must struggle with questions such as the definition of "fairness," "threat," "consequence," and "change" as these concepts fit into the unique context of each school, school system, and the surrounding community.

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