

STOP VIOLENCE PREVENTION!

WHAT YOU CAN DO

By Brenda Stokes

Violence is something that is prevalent in our society every day. From the TV shows we watch to the language we use to communicate with one another, violence is no stranger to humankind. However, school campuses have become increasingly violent over the past few years, with verbal abuse, threats of violence, and actual acts of violence on the rise. It may seem totally out of your control, but there are many things you, as a student, can do to prevent violence on your campus.

Learning to Take Threats Seriously

"Young people need to know that any threat of physical violence should be taken seriously," says Jean O'Neil, director of research and evaluation, National Crime Preven-

tion Council. This is only logical, as threatening behavior should always be reported. It all comes down to risk. Are you willing to take the risk of brushing off a classmate's threat of violence as empty, when there could be a serious level of danger in doing so? In the school shootings of the past and other campus-related violence, "Many students knew but dismissed the threats as 'just talk,'" says O'Neil. This sort of dismissal can ultimately cost lives.

Behavior to Watch For

Though many students know they should report violent behavior, some are unsure of what constitutes potential warning signs for acts to come. The National Crime Prevention Council offers the following warning

signs to watch for. Should you recognize these behaviors in a fellow classmate, it is a wise idea to notify an adult. Remember: it is better to be safe than sorry.

Bullying: Unwarranted threatening or picking on students is considered bullying. In the past, this behavior has been brushed off as a part of development, but it is more recently considered a possible precursor to more violent crimes.

Fascination with violence: If someone you know is constantly talking about violence or violence-related topics such as video games, movies, or weapons, there may be serious cause for concern.

Isolation: Not all "loner" types are violent; however, if someone is persistently uninterested in social interaction, there is a possibility that an underlying issue needs to be addressed.

Weapons: If you see or hear about someone bringing a weapon to school, report it right away. The possibility of a dangerous weapon on campus is nothing to ignore.

Breaking rules: It has been shown

NOTICE

that students who persistently break the rules and undermine authority are more likely to go on to commit violent crimes. Report behavior that violates your school's rule codes and that could pose a risk for fellow students

O'Neil adds that any behavior that makes you feel uncomfortable should be reported—whether it's in the classroom, on the playground, or even on the Internet.

How to Report Threats of Violence

A great part of encouraging kids to report violence or potential violence to adults falls into the adults' hands. Suggest your school set up anonymous reporting systems to help encourage students to report inappropriate behavior, without the fear of being targeted. "These can involve suggestion boxes that . . . accommodate written reports, e-mail boxes that are frequently reviewed, and local or toll-free phone numbers the students can call," says O'Neil.

Don't forget the many adults in your life who can handle the situation, such as a parent, faculty mem-

ber, or counselor. These people are there to help and to listen to your problems and ensure they are dealt with and reported to the appropriate authorities.

You're Not a "Snitch"

When it comes to instances of crime and violent activity, the notion of the "tattletale" goes out the window. If people's lives could be in harm's way or you feel as though your safety is being threatened, telling an adult about it is in no way, shape, or form tattling. Your school faculty and parents will distinguish between reporting crime and snitching so as to ensure that students

know the difference and can make the right choices should they ever be put in such a situation.

Unsure if telling an authority figure about something someone has done will be tattling or not? This simple guideline will help you sort it out: "Snitching behavior . . . usually involves 'telling' to get another kid in trouble," says O'Neil. Telling on somebody just because you dislike them or want to get them into trouble is not an appropriate means of dealing with peer issues. However, if a fellow student personally threatens you, a friend, or a faculty member, or you overhear a student making threats, or you are bullied, you should report such incidents to an adult. In the simple act of telling, you might actually save lives.

