



Supports in Response to Community Violence

Why is this important?

Community violence is an issue that students face on a regular basis. It impacts their mental health, physical health, and overall life outcomes. Although it may feel impossible, preventing community violence is possible when we focus our efforts to improve outcomes for our students, families, and communities. With this guidance, Continua aims to support educators in their effort to implement tiered supports for the prevention of community violence, identify the warning signs that could indicate the potential for violence, and provide resources for how to respond after violence has occurred in the community.

Overview of Recommendations:

- Implement Tier 1, 2 and 3 strategies [outlined below](#) as prevention and response.
- Learn [warning signs](#) gathered from commonalities across public mass shootings and investigate signs utilizing strategies [outlined below in Tier 3](#).
- Engage students in conversations about community violence to mitigate mental health impacts and further efforts in violence prevention. Read more guidance for educators on how to facilitate those difficult conversations [here](#).
- Focus on the topic of [healthy masculinity](#) and particularly employ male educators in conversations on vulnerability, connection, and compassion amongst students, families and communities.

Key Context/ Considerations:

Continua Disclaimer: Students and staff in our schools need and deserve trained and dedicated Mental Health Professional staff (counselors, psychologists, social workers, etc.) at higher staffing ratios than currently are guaranteed. The guidance below assumes adequate mental health staffing and can best be grown with higher ratios of staff than are currently provided.

The National Association of School Psychologists' School Safety Recommendation calls for a minimum requirement of at least one counselor for every 250 students, one social worker for every 400 students and one school psychologist for every 500-700 students respectively. Nonetheless, 90 percent of public schools fail to meet these standards for supporting students. 14 million students are in schools with police but no counselor, nurse, school psychologist, or social worker (National Survey of Children's Health 2019-2020).

Prevention Strategies

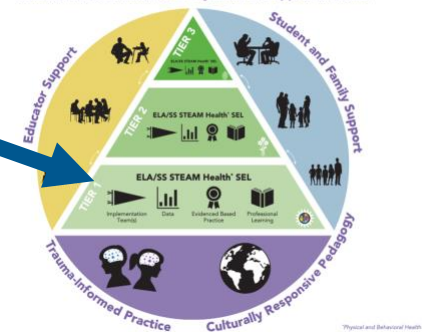
Preventative measures to reduce the impact of community violence are characterized by their level of support, whether they are intended to meet the needs of students school-wide (Universal, Tier 1), smaller targeted groups of students (Specialized, Tier 2), or individually (Individual, Tier 3). Prevention strategies include implementing universal and tiered supports for behavior, Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Restorative Practices, as well as mental health supports at all 3 Tiers.

Universal screening for externalizing and internalizing behaviors, sense of belonging, and suicidal ideation, with specific supports and tactics provided based on screening data, is critical. Externalizing behaviors include aggression and disruption, and internalizing behaviors include anxiety and withdrawal. Withdrawal can be indicative of social isolation and a lack of a sense of belonging. Sense of belonging facilitates success across multiple domains and can be screened with traditional screening methods (measures) and alternative methods. Tools for screening for sense of belonging include the Psychological Sense of School Membership scale. Additional screening resources and tools can be found [here](#).

Tier 1 / Universal Strategies

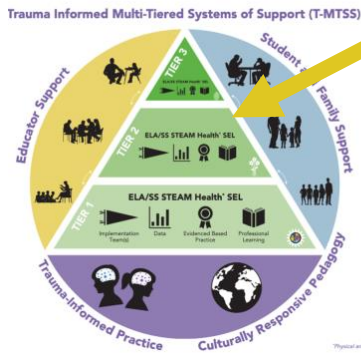
- Develop schoolwide behavioral expectations with input from students, staff, and families to ensure expectations are culturally relevant and have clear criteria for success. Positively reinforce and re-teach expectations.
- Provide Evidence Based SEL curriculum to all students in Tier 1 with focused professional development and collaboration for adults to learn and grow their practice.
- Provide Tier 1 relational and restorative practices, like class meetings or circles, to develop positive peer to peer and student to adult conversational and problem-solving skills. 80% of such practices should be proactive (positive, community building, dialogue) and 20% should be reactive (processing of a shared conflict, issue, concern, loss, etc.) according to International Institute for Restorative Practices ([IIRP](#)). Practicing relational and repair skills at Tier 1 ensures that all students and adults have skills for addressing conflict at Tier 2 when necessary.
- Middle and High Schools, annually, implement [Signs of Suicide](#) (SOS) or other universal education for suicidal ideation including exit screeners. Exit screeners identify students expressing suicidal thoughts or plans and implement follow up sessions with school counselors and/or psychologists to provide support and identify students in need of mental health intervention.
- Data show that many individuals who engage in mass shootings study past mass shooters — one in five (21.6%) studied other mass shooters, and many are radicalized online. Media literacy education may help students critically consume information and counter extremist propaganda that facilitates violence. [Here](#) is an example critical media literacy curriculum that incorporates activities from [Newseum Ed](#).

Trauma Informed Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (T-MTSS)



Prevention Strategies (Continued)

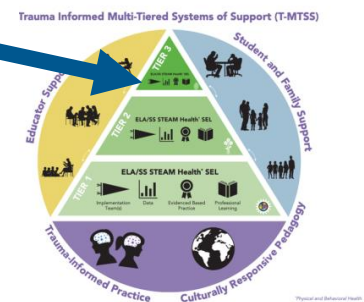
Tier 2 / Specialized Strategies



- Monitor which students receive praise, rewards, and social recognition in greater frequency than others. Research demonstrates that students who lack social recognition and observe others receive positive social recognition can experience low sense of belonging and self-efficacy. Identify groups of students not being recognized and provide youth/culturally responsive opportunities for recognition (i.e., clubs focused on areas of interest; leadership opportunities; mixed grade mentorship and relational opportunities; positive peer to peer relationships)
- Provide targeted SEL skills to identified students via screening who demonstrate needs for additional practice and learning of social and emotional regulation skills. Counselors and other staff trained in SEL and mental health should lead these interventions and, if provided in groups, students should be grouped heterogeneously to ensure positive modelling.
 - For students identified with trauma, the Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools ([CBITS](#)) evidence-based program can be used in small groups to support student learning of coping skills including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy strategies.
- Support student mediation and adult mediated restorative practices to react to incidents of conflict or requiring repair. Use the [IIRP responsive questions](#) and structure restorative practices so that all parties understand their role and agree to the practice
- Support students with adult mentorship practices. Identify students with 1 or fewer healthy and trusted adult relationships in the school and connect them with an adult mentor.

Tier 3 / Individualized Strategies

- Use screener, referral, attendance, grades, discipline and other data to identify the few students in need of highly individualized mental health or behavioral support. Partner with internal or external trained mental health professionals to offer evidence-based interventions.
- Identify young men without trusted adults who have experienced exclusionary discipline, demonstrate suicidal and/or homicidal ideation, and report low sense of belonging. Provide supports specific to student needs, including critical media literacy and mentorship from healthy males.
- Implement an evidence-based threat assessment process, such as the Behavior Threat Assessment and Management ([BTAM](#)), to identify, assess, and manage potentially violent and threatening situations across the system and in response to identification of individuals in need.



Warning Signs

Data is limited on perpetrators of mass school shootings and the conditions that lead to shooting crises (see resources below). While some indicators seem clear, they also span millions of children in the United States school system. We can generalize a little from data on [public mass shootings](#). Schools would be best to observe the following commonalities and investigate them. These commonalities of mass shootings include:

- Perpetrator demonstrated suicidal and/or homicidal ideation leading up to the incident (about 30% of mass shooters were suicidal prior to shooting and 92% of school shooting specifically, according to the Violence Project database)
- Perpetrator communicates intent among friends and social media.
- A grievance of a sustained injustice—perceived or real.
- Experienced social isolation

All documented mass shootings were perpetrated by males who have a connection to the school.

- Early childhood trauma and exposure to violence
- An identifiable grievance or crisis point.
- Validation of beliefs — finding inspiration in past shootings by others
- The means to carry out an attack.

Schools will benefit from observing and responding to warning signs specifically for school violence threats. Reporting systems for peers include:

- [Say Something – Anonymous Reporting System](#)
- [Vector Solutions](#)

Washington State Red Flag Law

Washington State Red Flag Law (RCW 7.94.010)

Chapter 3, Laws of 2017 is designed to temporarily prevent individuals who are at high risk of harming themselves or others from accessing firearms by allowing family, household members, and police to obtain a court order when there is demonstrated evidence that the person poses a significant danger, including danger as a result of threatening or violent behavior.

- (1) Every year, over one hundred thousand people are victims of gunshot wounds and more than thirty thousand of those victims lose their lives. Over the last five years for which data is available, one hundred sixty-four thousand eight hundred twenty-one people in America were killed with firearms—an average of ninety-one deaths each day.
- (2) Studies show that individuals who engage in certain dangerous behaviors are significantly more likely to commit violence toward themselves or others in the near future. These behaviors, which can include other acts or threats of violence, self-harm, or the abuse of drugs or alcohol, are warning signs that the person may soon commit an act of violence.
- (3) Individuals who pose a danger to themselves or others often exhibit signs that alert family, household members, or law enforcement to the threat. Many mass shooters displayed warning signs prior to their killings, but federal and state laws provided no clear legal process to suspend the shooters' access to guns, even temporarily.
- (4) In enacting chapter 3, Laws of 2017, it is the purpose and intent of the people to reduce gun deaths and injuries, while respecting constitutional rights, by providing a court procedure for family, household members, and law enforcement to obtain an order temporarily restricting a person's access to firearms. Court orders are intended to be limited to situations in which the person poses a significant danger of harming themselves or others by possessing a firearm and include standards and safeguards to protect the rights of respondents and due process of law.

Community Violence Response Glossary

Collective Trauma: “The psychological reactions to a traumatic event that affect an entire society; it does not merely reflect an historical fact, the recollection of a terrible event that happened to a group of people. It suggests that the tragedy is represented in the collective memory of the group, and like all forms of memory it comprises not only a reproduction of the events, but also an ongoing reconstruction of the trauma in an attempt to make sense of it.” – Gilad Hirschberger (Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning, 2018)

Colt ArmaLite Rifle-15 (AR-15): A rifle which has similar core design to military rifles such as the M-16 and M4 Carbine. Most versions of the AR-15 were banned under the Public Safety and Recreational Firearms Use Protection Act of 1994. The act expired in 2004. Since 2016 the AR-15 has been used in at least 6 mass shootings resulting in at least 120 deaths.

Healthy Masculinity: “Healthy masculinities develop through experiences in fostering relationships of empathy, mutuality, and empowerment can help boys and men reject hegemonic relational dynamics and promote human capacities for vulnerability, connection, and compassion into healthy and flexible ways of being men in the world. We view these relational experiences as critical to prevention, health promotion, and social change efforts at the social, community, and systems levels.” ([Michael Di Bianca & James R. Mahalik](#)) Resources for further information and support around healthy masculinity can be found here:

- [University of Minnesota Aurora Center – Healthy Masculinity](#)
- [Engaging Boys in Eradicating Gender-Based Violence](#)

Mass School Shooting: An incident in which 4 or more people are killed during a school shooting.

Red Flag Laws: Rely on an individualized assessment of risk. Details vary, but red flag laws typically empower family or law enforcement to petition a court for a gun removal order (often referred to as an extreme risk protection order). An immediate, ex parte order must be supported by a showing of imminent danger of bodily harm. A lower risk can justify a longer-lasting order issued after a hearing. The effect of the order is the removal of current firearms and often placement in the FBI’s background check system to prevent firearm purchase. – American Bar Association

School Shooting: Any incident in which a gun is fired on or near a school campus. Casualties of 3 or less killed by the shooting.

Survivor’s Guilt: Remorse or guilt for having survived a catastrophic event when others did not or for not suffering the ills that others had to endure. It is a common reaction stemming in part from a feeling of having failed to do enough to prevent the event or to save those who did not survive. Survivor guilt is also experienced by family members who are found not to carry deleterious genetic mutations that have led to disease and, often, death in other family members, or by family or friends who feel that they did not do enough to succor their loved ones prior to death. – APA Dictionary of Psychology

Toxic Masculinity: Currently there isn’t a collectively agreed upon definition for Toxic Masculinity. The American Psychological Association suggests that toxic masculinity is the extreme forms of certain “traditional” masculine traits which are linked to aggression, misogyny, and negative health outcomes. Toxic Masculinity does not suggest that masculinity is bad, rather unchecked overt masculine behaviors which have developed in a patriarchal society.

Additional Resources

Prevention and Response to Gun Violence

- [Center for Homeland Defense and Security K-12 School Shooting Database](#)
- [Mitigating Psychological Effects of Lockdowns](#)
- [Washington Post School Shooting Database](#)
- [Should Schools Be Conducting Lockdown Drills?](#)
- [NPR interview with John Woodrow Cox](#)
- [Reconsider Active Shooter Drills](#)
- [NPR Interview with Salem-Keizer Public Schools](#)
- [How The NRA Worked to Stifle Gun Violence Research](#)
- [1993 CDC Study identifying Gun Ownership in Home as a Driver of Homicide](#)
- [Last Week Tonight with John Oliver: School Police](#)

School Mental Health Needs

- [How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff is Harming Students](#)
- [Surgeon General Mental Health Guidance](#)

Curricular & Intervention Resources

- [Mindwise SOS Suicide Prevention Program for Students](#)
- [Post-Incident Exercises](#)
- [Emergency Management Virtual Training Top Exercise](#)
- [Digital Literacy & Citizenship for Students by Newseum Ed](#)
- [Newseum Ed Media Literacy Education](#)
- [Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools \(CBITS\) Program](#)
- [IIRP Restorative Questions](#)
- [Behavior Threat Assessment and Management \(BTAM\)](#)
- [Say Something – Anonymous Reporting System](#)
- [K-12 Anonymous Tip Reporting & Safety Communications](#)

Universal Screening Resources

- [Journal: Universal Health Screening in Schools](#)
- [Mental Health Screening Tools for Grades K–12](#)