

School Violence: You Can Help Prevent It!

LESSON GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

According to a recent report from the National Center for Educational Statistics violence, including student violence against teachers is on the rise in America's schools. Statistics show that nearly 7% of high schoolers have stayed home because they felt unsafe at or on their way to school. The increase of violent school threats is breeding fear, anxiety and frustration for educators, children and parents.

The good news in all of this is that in many cases the school community can in fact do something to help prevent school violence. That's what this program is all about—ways we can prevent school violence and help to keep our schools safe.

Violence is anything that hurts a person physically or emotionally. School violence refers to any act of violence that occurs within a school community. Both “threats of violence” and physical “acts of violence” create an unsettling and unsafe environment for everyone in a school. Why does it happen? How can school violence be prevented? This program explores answers to those questions and seeks to help students understand the important role they play in preventing school violence.

Through live-action, true-to-life scenarios viewers will learn to identify potential problem behaviors and warning signs that can typically lead to violence. Viewers will recognize that an important way they can prevent school violence has to do with simply being aware of the people around you and being able to spot something that isn't quite right before it escalates.

Students will come to understand the difference between a direct and indirect threat and how context of the threat determines how threats should be handled. In addition, students will learn to identify behaviors that may be warning signs to potential violent actions and that whenever they feel threatened or unsafe that they have an obligation to report the incident to trusted adult within the school community.

Using this program in the classroom will encourage student discussion on violence. It will stimulate thought provoking questions and provide insights into creating a safe learning environment. Preventing school violence isn't something that should be left to just the police and the government when there is so much that a school community can do together. Students will realize there is a link between violence and a person's need to feel connected to someone in the school community. Learn what you can do as an educator and teach your students what they can do and start making your school safer today.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students play an important role in helping to prevent school violence
- Violence is any behavior that hurts a person physically or emotionally
- Awareness of both “threats” of violence and “acts” of violence
- Identify behaviors that may be warning signs to potential violence
- Understand the difference between direct and indirect threats
- Realize the importance of feeling “connected” to someone in the school community
- Report behaviors or incidents that make you feel threatened or unsafe

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Chapter One. Threats: Emotional and Physical

As students begin entering the school for the start of the day, Mike comes in ignoring his friends Kevin and Amy. He walks deliberately to his English teachers classroom. Amy informs Kevin that Mike had made threats on line the night before to get even with his teacher. Amy and Kevin decide to follow Mike. When they arrive at the classroom Mike is in his teacher's face making threats and trashing his desk. Amy questions whether she should have told someone about the online threats.

Chapter Two. Indirect Threats

When Sarah becomes angry and frustrated with her boyfriend Sam, she forces him to choose between spending more time with her and playing football. Sarah didn't like his answer and as she walks away, she says, "you'll be sorry". Soon Sarah's anger and threats are posted on social media. Are the threats merely an emotional reaction, or are they something people should take seriously?

Chapter Three. Direct Threats

Ava and others on the cheerleading team are tired of Haily, the team's captain of constantly saying mean things to them. While studying in the library, Ava reveals her plan to get even with Haily to her friend Samantha. Knowing that Haily has severe peanut allergies, Ava plans to mix peanut butter cookies with other snacks in the hopes that the peanuts will cause an allergic reaction. Samantha attempts to reason with the girls and takes a stand on making sure the plan is not followed out.

Chapter Four. Warning Signs

Alyssa and her friends identify a former classmate, Andrew, who had left the school several years before. However, Andrew looks and acts differently. When Alyssa attempts to have a discussion with him, she finds him aloof and distant. She also becomes aware of several of Andrew's disturbing and violent drawings. Concerned about Andrew's behavior and fearing for her safety, Alyssa reaches out to her school guidance counselor Mrs. Daley. Alyssa discusses her concerns. Mrs. Daley praises Alyssa's courage to come forward and explains that when people perceive a possibility of violence they should report it.

GUIDELINES FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Group discussion is an invaluable way to explore ideas and issues, foster creativity, and build communication and social skills in young students. The following guidelines can help you maintain a “discussion-friendly” classroom:

- Create a climate of openness and acceptance. Encourage students to show respect for the opinions of others and model this behavior yourself.

- Establish ground rules. Students can participate in formulating the rules for discussion. Rules will vary, but should include some of these general principles:
 - No putdowns, ridicule or sarcasm.
 - Everyone may speak without interruption.
 - Everyone has the right to pass.

- Guard against inappropriate self-disclosure. An intense discussion may lead students to reveal inappropriate information about themselves or others. Sensitivity and vigilance can help you head off such revelations.

- Probe behind the neat and tidy answers. Students are good at telling adults what they think adults want to hear. To find out what students really think, it is often helpful to prolong discussion time and encourage greater depth. Offer a “What if...?”; bring out issues such as fairness, justice, intent or lack of it, and so on. Students have a remarkable capacity to discern complexities and subtleties, and their discussions can be very rich.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Chapter 1. Discussion Questions

If you saw someone post a threat online, would you report it?
Do you have a responsibility to report it?
Should Amy have reported the threat to an adult in the school?

Chapter 2. Discussion Questions

Should Sam talk to Sarah about the threat?
Should someone from the school report her threat to the school administration?
Would you take Sarah's threat seriously?
What would you do?

Chapter 3. Discussion Questions

Did Samantha do the right thing in standing up to her friends?
Should Samantha report Ava's plan to an adult at the school?
Would you be able to identify a direct threat? What would you do about it?

Chapter 4. Discussion Questions

Did you think that Andrew's drawings were a threat of violence?
Was it a direct or indirect threat?
Do you think Alyssa should have told her counselor?
What would you do? Are you a bystander or an up stander?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Distribute Handout #1 to the class before showing the program. Tally their answers below. After viewing the program, distribute another copy of Handout #1 and have the students fill in their answers again. Tally the responses. Compare the answers to see how the students' views changed. Lead a discussion with the class about how and why their opinions changed and what they learned from the program.

Handout #1

Read each statement below and decide if you agree or disagree. Circle your answer in the left hand column. After viewing the program, read the statements again and circle your answers in the right hand column. Did your answer change? Talk about it.

Before Viewing	Statement	After Viewing
Agree Disagree	School violence is something we can all help to prevent.	Agree Disagree
Agree Disagree	Violence is anything that hurts a person physically or emotionally.	Agree Disagree
Agree Disagree	You can identify warning signs to potential violence.	Agree Disagree
Agree Disagree	Threats are potential acts of violence.	Agree Disagree
Agree Disagree	I know the difference between a direct threat and an indirect threat.	Agree Disagree

Handout #2

TRUE OR FALSE

Check true if you think the statement is true. Check false if you think the statement is false.

TRUE FALSE

- _____ _____ 1. Being teased or made to feel excluded is a form of emotional violence.
- _____ _____ 2. An indirect threat includes very specific details of how the threat will be carried out.
- _____ _____ 3. Direct threats need to be taken seriously and should be reported to authorities.
- _____ _____ 4. It's important to report behavior that makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe.
- _____ _____ 5. Reaching out to all students and making connections helps to promote school safety.
- _____ _____ 6. Students who don't feel connected to school are more likely to engage in violent or harmful behaviors

