

Prevention of School and Mass Shootings through Children's Resilience Formation Training and Parental Involvement

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Abstract

There is an urgent need to understand and remediate children's sense of resilience given the national and global growth in mental health issues facing young people today. Rates of depression and anxiety have increased steadily over the past two decades [1]. The COVID-19 pandemic - with all the isolation, disruptions, and anxieties associated with it - only served to exacerbate the problem [2]. Recent data indicate that 1 out of every 6 adolescents struggles with significant depression, and nearly 1 in 3 have an anxiety disorder. These rates increase to 50% when we include individuals reporting lower levels of generalized distress [1]. Importantly, these mental health challenges are associated with substantial problems in school and a decline in general well-being [3]. This review is a summary of the best data available at this time to prevent shootings before they occur.

Keywords: *Resilience; Mass shootings; Depression; Children*

1. Review of Studies

The most alarming outcome associated with our youth's mental health crisis is suicide. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported a 25% increase in rates of suicide in the past decade. In fact, suicide accounts for more deaths among youths than all natural causes combined. It is the second leading cause of death, following accidents, for adolescents. The availability of guns, whether through friends' or parents' legal purchase or lack of safety is an even more widespread concern. The lack of parental support specifically fathers [4] who fail to provide emotional training for their children are more likely to enhance likelihood of shooting as a strategy for conflict resolution.

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With the widespread availability of technology and over 90% of teenagers 13-17 years-old reporting social media use, any discussion about the mental health crisis affecting youths must acknowledge the role of social media [5,6]. There is strong evidence showing an association between time spent on social media and increased rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide-related outcomes among adolescents. Social media use has been linked to poor sleep quality, body image issues, and lowered self-esteem for youths [7].

Current school shooters used social media to reveal their plans and in one case, joint commission of horrific killing in Columbine H.S. in Colorado. Paolini [8] determined that many school shooters were male (99 percent), with a high percentage having experienced school bullying, isolation because of not getting along with others, and noncompliance in the use of psychiatric medication and problems with the side effects of such medication. Most school shooters have no previous record of criminal justice activities, have access to guns at home, and may have dealt with a recent significant loss in their lives [8]. Exposure to gun violence in the media such as violent video games and films helps to increase youth aggression [8]. According to Paolini's [8] review, most attacks are premeditated, with 61 percent of school shooters carrying out attacks to "get revenge, and 81% of attackers held a grievance against another person at the time of the attack" (p. 3).

However, during COVID-19 social media and digital technology became a tool for continued social interaction and development of resilience skills. Therefore, we need to look at the digital technology employed.

Troy Closson and Shailia Dewan (NY Times. 9/27/24) cite specific statistics which clearly conclude that social media posts are rampant in children as young as 10 years of age which expose the commonality of their publicizing their thoughts and threats on social media. Since the shooting in the Apalachee, Georgia school yielding two dead students and two dead teachers, some copycat threats occurred in numbers never seen before reported Theresa Campbell the CEO of Safer Schools Together. These were social media threats which specified schools and encouraged children to stay at home. In one week in September in Arizona, 156% more threats were received than the same week in 2023. Children in Orlando, Florida were charged with second degree felonies for making threats. A company which tracks school threats using school, police and local newspapers, (TDTechnology Solutions, 2024) showed an increase averaging 785 per month compared to 29 five years prior to this. Perhaps the lasting effects of the pandemic promoted isolation, proliferation of social media and pervasiveness of high-profile school shootings and political assassination attempts are scaring parents and children alike. How can we build trust within the young person's communities when kids are being sent to jail and publicly condemned?

We need to utilize the internet outlets including Zoom, Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram to catch up with further tools we can develop. Each of these platforms should utilize the ideas shared by knowledgeable scientists to monitor <https://theconversation.com/5-ways-to-reduce-school-shootings-183965>. Banning apps is not the way as children will find ways to access other sources.

Anxiety is also related to aggression. Research has shown that children who have a high level of social anxiety misinterpret ambiguous situation in a negative fashion [9].

2. Results

The Baker Institute team [10] has developed a scientifically based, fun and interactive program for young people in 7th and 8th grades - LIFE HACS (Life Hacks with Acceptance Commitment Skills).

LIFE HACS consists of five, 45-minute sessions that are interactive and engaging. It is strength-based, flexible, and applied to universal human challenges. The overall goals are 1) encourage youths to do things that are meaningful and important even when it may be hard or uncomfortable, 2) teach them how to manage difficult thoughts and emotions by growing their strengths, and 3) help them live out their full potential.

Overall Goals of LIFE HACS

1. Accepting: How to manage strong and difficult thoughts and emotions.
2. Clarifying: Who and what is most important?
3. Taking Actions: Behave in ways that are consistent with what matters most.
4. Focusing on how to behave when confronted by a friend using guns for fun, shooting birds, competing on targets.

Social media lets teens create online identities, chat with others and build social networks. These networks can provide teens with support from other people who have hobbies or experiences in common. This type of support especially may help teens who:

- Lack of social support offline or are lonely.
- Are going through a stressful time.
- Belong to groups that often get marginalized, such as racial minorities, the LGBTQ community and those who are differently abled.
- Have long-term medical conditions.

Sometimes, social media platforms help teens:

- Express themselves.
- Connect with other teens locally and across long distances.
- Learn how other teens cope with challenging life situations and mental health conditions.
- View or take part in moderate chat forums that encourage talking openly about topics such as mental health.
- Ask for help or seek healthcare for symptoms of mental health conditions.

These *healthy effects* of social media can help teens in general. They also may help teens who are prone to depression stay connected to others. And social media that's humorous or distracting may help a struggling teen cope with a challenging day. Moreno [11] leads the Social Media and Adolescent Health Research Team, whose approach to digital safety research bridges public health, consumer science, and education. It has a youth advisory board.

Attorney General Janet M. Reno and FBI Director Louis J. Freeh, the FBI's National Center for Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) invited 160 educators, administrators, mental health professionals, law enforcement officers, and prosecutors to a symposium on school shootings and threat assessment. The symposium took place in Leesburg, Virginia, in July 1999. In

attendance were teachers and administrators from all eighteen schools involved in the NCAVC study (including someone from each school who knew the shooter or would-be shooter personally), NCAVC staff members, and law enforcement officers who were involved in investigating each of the shootings. Also attending were experts in disciplines including adolescent violence, mental health, suicidology, school dynamics, and family dynamics.

They came up with a four-pronged model to predict and respond to school shooters. This assessment (NVCAC) is based on the "totality of the circumstances" known about the student in four major areas:

Prong One: Personality of the student

Prong Two: Family dynamics

Prong Three: School dynamics and the student's role in those dynamics

Prong Four: Social dynamics

Melamed [12-15] has cited several reasons we have incurred school shootings. These involve not paying attention to what their children are focused on. Children are increasingly using digital media to communicate their anxiety and need for attention.

There are also suggestions that the school buildings themselves should be looked at regarding safety [16,17].

<https://theconversation.com/5-ways-to-reduce-school-shootings-183965>. Definitely the need for social workers and others to be present in every school so that children with problems can be assessed and helped to handle their anxiety and inhibit aggression [18-20].

3. Conclusions

Future research should involve how family systems may influence children's accessing positive social models on the internet and in their television preferences. We can make competitive gaming and sports competitions lead to improved social skills learning and enhanced pleasure in relating with others. Parents must become involved in overseeing and recommending appropriate avenues for their children to gain resilience [21-23].

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