

Lessons from Columbine: Effective
School-Based Violence Prevention
Strategies and Programs
Dartington Annual Lecture
London, July 2, 2009

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Columbine Review Commission*: Key Findings Related to Prevention

- Harris and Klebold left a “road map of red flags”
- Many people/agencies had relevant information, but it was not shared or acted upon
- Code of silence and agency policies inhibited information sharing
- Threats were not taken seriously
- Harris and Klebold were victims of bullying

*Erickson, 2001

Columbine Review Commission*: Key Findings Related to Prevention

- Harris and Klebold were marginalized in school culture
- Inconsistent enforcement of rules by school

*Erickson, 2001

Shooter Warning Signs

U.S. Secret Service Study*

- **Attackers make plans**
- **Attackers talk about their plans**
- There is no reliable profile
- **Attackers have easy access to guns**
- School staff are often the first responders
- **Attackers often encouraged by others**
- **Bullying often a factor**
- **Warning signs of problem behavior are common**

U.S. Secret Service, 2000. 2004.

General Strategies Employed After a School Shooting Incident

- Target hardening
- Creating a safe/positive school climate
- Developing effective intelligence system
- Developing an effective short- and long-term threat assessment capability
- Developing an all-hazards crisis response plan

Most Effective Prevention Strategies

- Creating and Sustaining a Safe School Climate
- Developing an Effective Intelligence Gathering/Analysis System

Safe School Climate Characteristics

- Strong academic orientation
- Respect from teachers and peers
- Positive feelings/attitudes toward school
- Perceived reward for effort
- Clear discipline policies fairly enforced
- Respect for authority
- Clean and orderly campus
- High teacher morale

Creating a Safe School Climate: Components and Tasks

- Assessment of school climate
- Importance of listening in schools
- Strong, caring stance against the code of silence
- Bullying prevention/intervention
- Implementing other EB programs as needed
- Planning, creating and sustaining a culture of safety and respect
- Trusting relationship with at least one adult
- Find mechanism for sustaining safe climate

Evidence-Based Violence Prevention Programs

- All Certified as Model or Promising on Blueprint List & Model, Effective or Promising on Federal Hierarchy Standard

School-Based Programs

- Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (M)
- FAST track (P)
- Good Behavior Game (P)
- The Incredible Years (M)
- I Can Problem Solve (P)
- Linking the Interest of Families and Teachers (P)

School-Based Programs (Continued)

- Life Skills Training (M)
- Bullying Prevention Program (M)
- Midwestern Prevention Program (M)
- Toward No Drug Abuse (M)
- Perry Pre-school Program (P)
- Seattle Social Development Project (P)

The Incredible Years

Description: Parent, teacher, and child training to promote child emotional and social competence

Target: Children ages 2-8

Cost: \$1,300 BASIC, \$775 ADVANCE, \$995 SCHOOL, \$975 Child Training, \$1,250 Teacher

Contact: Carolyn Webster-Stratton
University of Washington, School of Nursing
Department of Family and Child Nursing
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(206) 543-6010

The Incredible Years Evidence of Effect

Parent Program:

- Reduced conduct problems.
- Increases in positive affect and compliance to parental commands.

Teacher Program:

- Reductions in peer aggression in the classroom.
- Increases in positive affect and cooperation with teachers, positive interactions with peers school readiness and engagement with school activities.

Child Program:

- Reductions in conduct problems at home and school.
- Improved cognitive problem-solving strategies with peers.

Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)

Description: Social and emotional competence

Target: Grades K-5

Cost: \$82/student Yr 1 (training & FT consultant included)
Costs in Year 2 reduced by half

Contact: Mark Greenberg, Ph.D., Director
Prevention Research Center,
Penn State University
110 HDFS-Henderson Building South
University Park, PA 16802
814-863-0112

PATHS

Evidence of Effect

- Decreased conduct problems, including aggression.
- Improved self-control.
- Improved understanding and recognition of emotions.
- Improved conflict resolution strategies.
- Improved cognitive planning.

Life Skills Training

Description: Drug prevention

Target: All middle/junior high school (grades 6/7) students

Cost: \$625 per 30 students for 3 years (no training incl)

Contact: Gilbert Botvin, Ph.D., Director
Institute for Prevention Research
Cornell University Medical College
411 East 69th Street, KB-201
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212-746-1270

Life Skills Training

Evidence of Effect

- Reduces tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana use 50-75%.
- Effects maintained through grade 12.
 - Cuts polydrug use up to 66%.
 - Reduces pack-a-day smoking by 25%.
 - Decreases use of inhalants, narcotics, and hallucinogens.

Demonstrated Outcomes of EB Prevention Programs

- Improved Grades
- Higher Rates of Next Grade Promotion
- Increased GPA
- Higher Graduation Rates
- Better Reading, Math and Writing Skills
- Higher Standardized Test Scores
- Increased Credits Earned
- Higher Child Development Levels (young children)

Demonstrated Outcomes of EB Prevention Programs Con'td

- Lower Absenteeism
 - Lower High School Dropout
 - Higher Parent Involvement
 - Fewer Suspensions
 - Fewer Special Education Referrals
 - Fewer School Behavioral Incidents
 - Improved Social Competence
 - Higher Participation in After School Activities
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- CSAP Model's Academic Outcome Measures and Proven Outcomes, 2002

Effective Intelligence System

Anonymous Hot line

Threat Assessment Capability

Information Sharing Agreements

Safe 2 Tell Hotline

- In 81% of violent incidents at schools, someone knew it was about to happen
- Statewide, anonymous, information forwarded immediately to school officials and local law enforcement
- Follow up to determine what action was taken
- Between 9/04 and 4/09, over 5,000 calls received, over 1600 credible tips from 133 cities

Safe 2 Tell Hotline: Results

- 162 School Disciplinary Actions
- 33 Arrests
- 211 Investigations Initiated
- 202 Counseling Referrals
- 175 Prevention/Intervention Plans
- 28 Planned School Attacks Prevented

Information Sharing Agreement

- Critical Agencies include: Schools, Law Enforcement, Mental Health, Social Services, Healthcare Providers
- Legal restrictions (FERPA, HIPPA) are poorly understood- not as great an obstacle as typically assumed
- Agency practice a greater obstacle
- Model Inter-Agency Information Sharing Agreements are available

Statutory Authority – Colorado Interagency Agreement

- CRS 22-32-109.1(3)
 - Requires schools to adopt policy and a code of conduct concerning bullying prevention and education
 - Authorizes an exchange of information between schools and law enforcement agencies
 - Directs each district board to enter into **agreements** with law enforcement officials, the juvenile justice system, social/human services, mental health to help maintain a safe school environment.

Effective Threat Assessment

Principles of Threat Assessment

- All threats should be taken seriously
- Evaluate the person, setting and target
- Based on facts: motive, intent & ability
- Integrated system (puzzle) approach
- Posing vs making a threat
- Assessment process elements:
 - Authority to conduct an assessment
 - Capacity to conduct an inquiry/investigation
 - Integrated Systems-information sharing

Threat Assessment Tools

- Validated
 - SAVORY
 - Dallas
 - Psychopathy Check List
- Other Local Assessments
 - Denver Threat Assessment
 - Cherry Creek Schools Threat Assessment
 - Jefferson County Threat Assessment

Accuracy of Clinical Judgment and Selected Threat Assessment Instruments

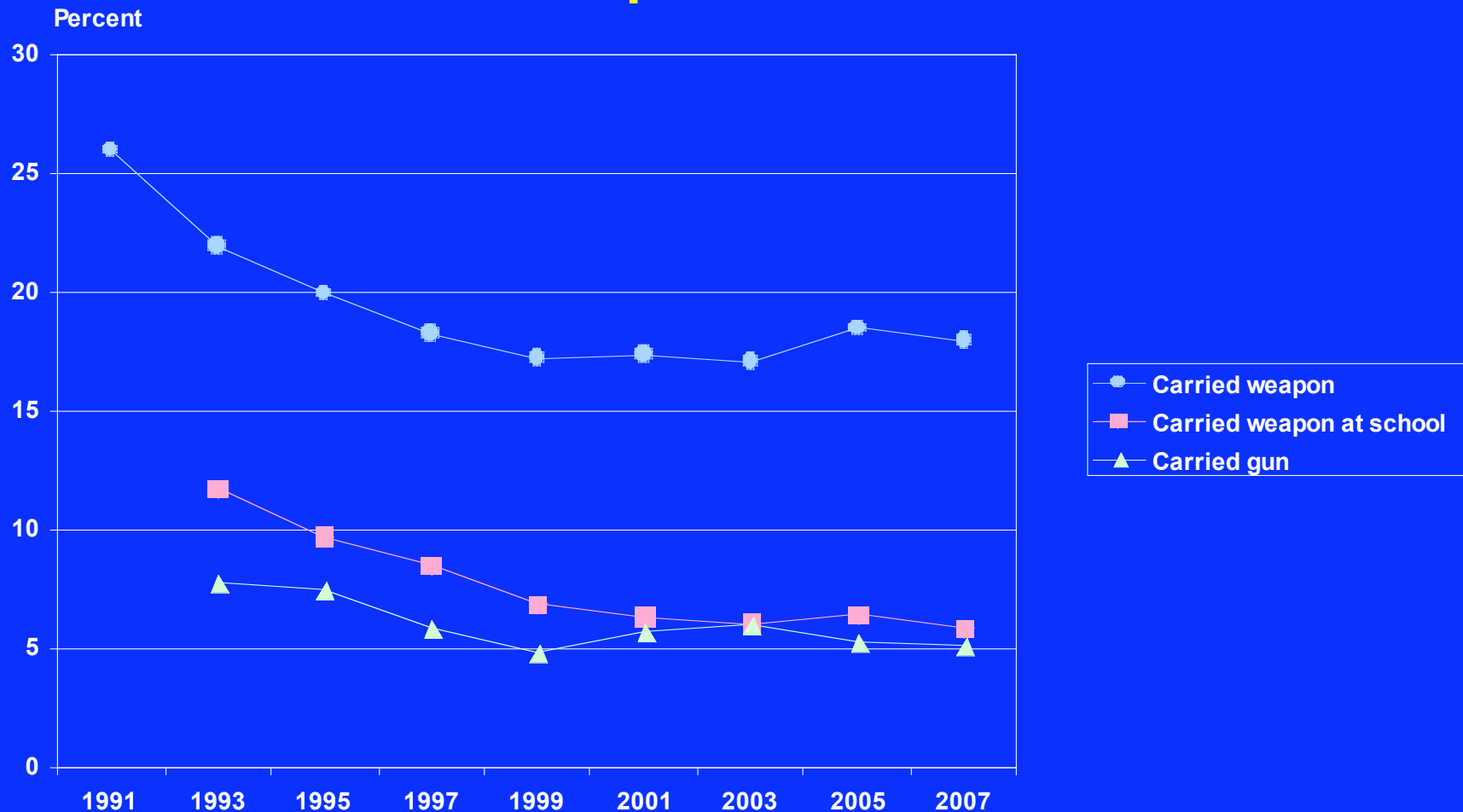
- Clinical Judgement .06*
 - Violence Risk Appraisal Guide .44
 - Psychopathy Checklist .27
 - Level of Service Inventory .26
 - Static 99 .32
- Robert J. McGrath, 1/2000 riskinst.doc. Person Correlation Coefficients.

*Are American Schools Safer in
2009 than 1999?*

Ten Years Later

Ten Billion Dollars Invested

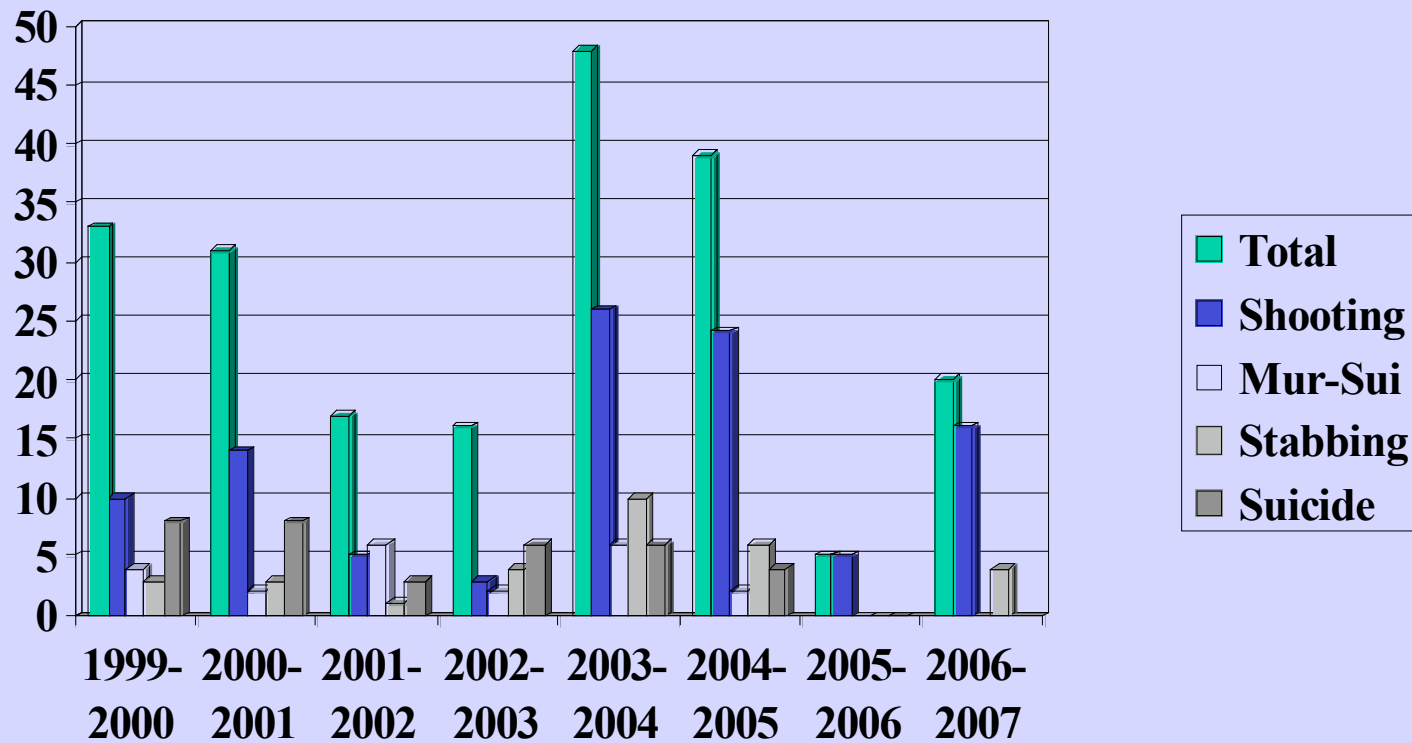
High School Students Who Carried Weapons*, 1991-2007



* On 1 or more of the 30 days preceding the survey. 95% confidence intervals for carried weapon = $\pm 1.3 - 2.3$; for carried weapon at school = $\pm 0.9 - 1.5$; and for carried gun = $\pm 0.8 - 1.3$.

School Deaths 1999 -2007

National School Safety Center, 2009



Other Violence Indicators

2007 Compared to 1999

Ages 12-18; Last 30 days

- Carried a weapon last 30 days - no change
- Carried a gun last 30 days – no change
- Injured in a physical fight last 30 days- no change
- In a physical fight at school- no change
- Threatened/injured w/weapon at school- no change
- Skipped school because of safety concern- no change
- 50% increase in cyber bullying, 2000-2005

Why Are We Not Implementing EB Violence Prevention Programs?

- Violence prevention is not a high priority
- It's hard to sell prevention- the focus 'typically is on improving responses to violence
- Programs not addressing strongest risk/protective factors or clusters
- Confusion about standard for EB certification
- Politics and parochial judgment often trump research
- Failure to implement with fidelity

Conclusions: Lessons from Columbine

- We know how to reduce the risk of violence in our schools
- Effective strategies and evidence-based prevention programs are not being implemented widely
- Lessons for *prevention* have had limited application
- Lessons for *responding* to a violent incident are widely applied/implemented

Resources

- U.S. Secret Service & Department of Education, *Final Report and the Findings of the Safe School Initiative*, 2004.
- _____, *Threat Assessment in Schools*, 2004.
- Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, *Safe Communities-Safe Schools Planning Guide*, 2000.