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*School crime and violence prevention —  
parents make a difference*

# School Safety

NCJRS

MAY 24 1995

ACQUISITIONS

**UPDATE**

## **An important message to parents: schools need you**

Nearly 3 million thefts and violent crimes occur on or near school campuses every year, according to the National Crime Survey. That is almost 16,000 incidents per school day or one every six seconds that school is in session.

Although the number of crimes committed on school campuses has remained about the same for the last few years, recent trends indicate that these crimes are becoming more serious in nature. The age at which children are committing these crimes is becoming younger, and the frequency of assaults is increasing. These crimes occur regardless of economic class or cultural/ethnic group.

Consider the following statistics:

- Every day, 10 Americans aged 19 and under are killed in gun accidents, suicides and homicides.
- One in seven students is affected by bullying.
- About one in 12 students has stayed home from school because of fear of being hurt at school. One in five students has feared being attacked at school; one in eight has feared being attacked going to and from school.
- One in 11 students reported being a crime victim at school. Property crimes affected 7 percent of students, and violent crimes victimized 2 percent.
- Fifteen percent of students reported gangs present at their schools. Of these, 35 percent feared attack at school; 24 percent feared attack going to or from school.

- In a 30-day period, one in five high school students carried a weapon, although not necessarily to school.

The fear of violence is powerful, motivating children to protect themselves with whatever is at their immediate disposal. Self-preservation is a high human priority — one that far too many students face on a daily basis. They witness serious injuries to others and attempt to prevent these injuries to themselves as best they can.

Students typically will not report crimes committed against them at school to teachers, administrators, police or parents. Yet as parents, we have to ask and we need to know what our children experience each day. We also have a responsibility to become aware of state laws and district policies on reporting violence.

Whatever the causes of school violence — media messages, low self-esteem, parental example, poor communication skills, peer pressure, prejudice, inconsistent discipline, disrespect for authority, societal influences — teachers cannot teach and students cannot learn in an environment filled with fear and intimidation.

The presence of community crime tends to breed more violence on school campuses. When fighting escalates, weapons are brought to school. It is unfortunate that many students perceive the need for protection to get through the course of an ordinary school day. Energy spent on survival is lost to academics.

Parents no longer face only concerns about content and quality of education. School used to be a place of safety, but today's reality provides no such assurance of security. The magnitude of school crime and violence cannot be ignored. This critical issue has come to the forefront of public concern, but a long-term solution will require parents to work with educators, law enforcement officials and the community in implementing prevention and intervention strategies to alleviate violence in our nation's schools.

Parents must get involved. The well-being and safety of children cannot be left to chance. Presented in this issue are a number of actions parents can take to prevent the victimization of their own children and to help make schools safer.

## Violence-free school: parents and schools working together

By sharpening parenting skills and developing positive relationships with their children, parents can prevent many problems. Here are a few basic tips for raising responsible children:

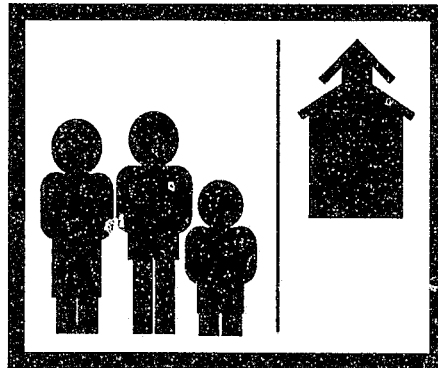
- Talk *with* and listen *to* your child.
- Children will not wait — be available to them. Spend special time with each child at home and at school.
- Help your child to improve self-image by praising effort as well as accomplishment. Emphasize the things your child does right.
- Be direct. Tell your children what you expect of them.
- Set limits. Reasonable boundaries make children feel secure.
- Be a good example. Your actions reflect the standards you expect.
- Occupy your children's free time with positive activities. Give them responsibilities at home.
- Monitor television viewing.
- Get children involved in after-school programs, city recreation or religious activities. Support those activities by showing up at special events in which they participate or are honored.
- Do not allow your children to stay out late or spend a lot of unsupervised time out in the streets.
- Know your children's friends. Find out who they are and what influence they have over your children. Determine how these friends spend their free time.
- Keep commitments you make to children.
- Admit mistakes — yours, not theirs.
- Challenge them with achievable goals.

Parents' presence at school demonstrates interest in their student, and volunteering is a good way to remain actively involved in your child's education. Volunteers make a significant contribution to overall school climate. The presence of parents in the classroom, the library and the hall-

ways subtly enhances school security. Personal attention from a volunteer tutor provides academic assistance and augments a student's self-esteem. And, having parents on campus validates education as a valuable process.

Parents and schools work best in partnership. No parent can do everything, but each contribution of time will enrich the school community. Attend school functions such as plays, concerts, sporting events, open house, conferences and PTA meetings. Within this range, parents will find something that especially interests them:

- Help supervise the campus during "passing periods" and patrol parking lots before and after school.
- Organize or join a safe school planning task force that will promote dialogue among multicultural groups.
- Work with the school to incorporate a violence prevention curriculum and/or a peer mediation program.
- Create a safe school corridor by volunteering to supervise walking routes to and from school.
- Provide a "safe house" in the community.
- Form a crew for special cleanup projects like renovating old classrooms, repairing playground equipment and removing graffiti.
- Share special talents and information regarding career opportunities: art lessons, languages, photography, dance, drama, woodworking, cooking, model building, gymnastics — the possibilities are endless.
- Organize fund-raisers for items the school cannot afford.
- Chaperone field trips and school events.
- Provide clerical assistance.
- Enhance special education classes by working as an extra aide.



Volunteering does not require any special degree, only a genuine interest in people and a concern for the future. Age does not matter. As a volunteer you choose the amount of time you are able to give, the age of students you prefer to work with, and the tasks you can do. Both the home and the school are interested in producing responsible future adults. With this common goal, a partnership between the two can achieve excellent results, even in times of reduced budgets.

Many employers offer professional development opportunities to their employees as a standard practice. Parenthood as a long-term occupation can also benefit from professional development. Learn how to be a more successful parent — attend parenting classes and join support groups. Many communities offer such classes for free or at very low cost.

## Keeping weapons out of school is everyone's business

More than ever, our public school system must confront weapons in schools. Any instrument used to attack another person can be considered a weapon, even a nail file when factors indicate that the individual in possession of such an article has the intention of using it to inflict physical or mental harm.

Children have always managed to take a variety of weapons to school, but the ones available today are much more powerful. School officials are concerned about all weapons, but knives, guns and explosive devices present the greatest threat to school safety. Of these, firearms pose the greatest risk to both students and school staff, multiplying the potential for serious injury and death.

Students carry weapons for a variety of reasons. Some do it to show off or display the weapon to a friend. Others carry a weapon out of fear — for their own protection. Many weapons also come to school because of the proliferation of gangs and drug activity.

Weapons are found in schools simply because weapons are available in the community. It is estimated that half of the households in this country possess a firearm.

Underlying the reasons students cite for bringing weapons to school seems to be society's attitude that violence is an effective way to deal with a problem. Television and movies regularly include violence as a problem-solving technique. Even the "good guys" such as Rambo, Rocky and Dirty Harry conquer evil through violent means.

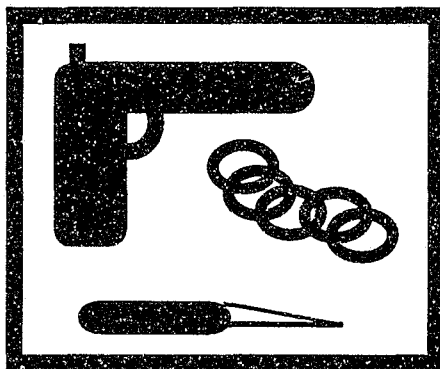
Probably the most controversial method for locating weapons is the metal detector. Although metal detectors are deterrents, they cannot offer a guarantee that weapons will remain outside the schoolhouse door.

One of the most effective means for detecting the presence of weapons on campus is receiving tips from students. One school superintendent stated, "We use portable metal

detectors and sweep schools, but we don't believe that it's the most effective way to secure the weapons." He thinks it is better to use information obtained from the students.

Parents can reassure their children that reporting the presence of weapons does not translate as disloyalty to peers. Reporting may actually prevent injury and save lives. Keeping schools weapon-free is everyone's business. Parents can actively help:

- Ensure that firearms and other dangerous weapons at home are inaccessible — lock them up!
- Talk with your children about the consequences of weapon use and violence.
- Participate in neighborhood patrols before, during and after school.
- Report suspicious individuals or unusual activity around the campus.
- Learn and teach personal safety techniques.
- Endorse implementation of a conflict resolution program.
- Encourage the formation of professionally supervised peer counseling and peer mediation programs.
- Advocate official crime tracking and reporting for all crimes committed on campus.
- Inform your political representatives about your concern.
- Support the posting of "weapon-free/crime-free school zone" signs.
- Promote the adoption of weapon and violence prevention curricula.
- Provide a means for students to make anonymous reports about weapons.



At school, clear policy regarding weapons violations is critical. Parental support of the school administration and the school board is necessary if such a policy is to have the desired deterrent effect.

The penalties for possession or use of weapons or dangerous instruments vary by locality. In some school districts, student possession or use results in immediate removal from school, a hearing and a recommendation for expulsion from the public school system. In others, a student caught with a weapon is automatically suspended for 60 days. In yet others, students found carrying guns are recommended for expulsion for the remainder of the school year as well as the following year.

The actions of some school districts may seem harsh to parents, but the presence of weapons at school places all people on campus at risk. As a former public school chancellor stated, "I think it's harsh when you have guns and weapons in school. That's my definition of harsh."

## Social, emotional issues affect your child's safety

At times, schoolchildren of all ages experience physically and psychologically harmful events at school. When these occur, parents frequently are not the "first to know," but deduce that something is wrong through verbal clues, physical evidence or behavioral changes in their children. Possible indications of troubled youth include: sudden withdrawal; sharp drop in grades; frequent illnesses, such as stomachaches, that clear up after being allowed to stay home; radical changes in behavior patterns; discontinuation of hobbies or usual activities; or generalized fearfulness in relation to school.

Children growing up amid community or familial violence are at risk of developmental harm. They may demonstrate difficulty in concentrating, memory impairment, anxious attachment to their mothers, aggressive play, tough actions to hide fears, uncaring behavior resulting from experiencing hurt and loss, and severe constriction in their activities, exploration and thinking.

### A word about gangs

Young people join gangs for reasons that make sense to them: a psychological need to belong; excitement; protection; a chance to earn money; companionship; prestige. The community — family, school, and religious and civic groups — helps children meet their basic needs. When children and teen-agers feel a lack of identity, acceptance and belonging, they may turn to a gang to provide what they feel society does not.

Gang membership crosses all economic, cultural and racial boundaries. There is a general supposition that gang activity is limited to low-income youth in low-income neighborhoods. In reality, middle- and upper-class suburbs as well as rural areas also face problems caused by gangs, whose members reside within their home communities.

It is often possible to detect gang membership through the

presence of several indicators. Your child may adopt some of these practices as either a gang member or an imitator:

- special hand signals;
- symbols or slogans on books or clothing, on walls as graffiti, or on the body as tattoos;
- wearing certain kinds or colors of clothing in very specific ways;
- a particular method of grooming;
- possessing relatively large, unexplained sums of money;
- a distinctive language; and
- behavioral changes.

Although children might not want to admit it, joining a gang raises the likelihood of involvement in illegal activities. A recent government survey showed that nationally, 6 percent of state prison inmates belonged to a gang before entering prison. These inmates joined at an average age of 14. They reported the following level of participation in group gang activities: fighting other groups, 92 percent; manufacturing, importing, or selling drugs, 69 percent; stealing motor vehicles or parts, 63 percent; and breaking into homes or buildings, 58 percent.

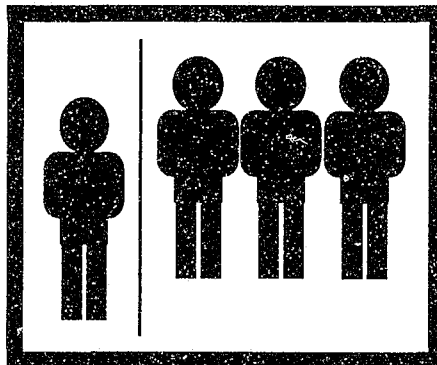
Parents can help reduce or prevent gang problems. Begin with an awareness of the gangs and drug activity in your own community. Keeping your own children out of gangs will require regular attention — as they mature, normal children gradually place increasing importance on peers. Noticing a shift in friends is impossible if parents do not have an ongoing relationship with their children.

- Do not buy or allow your children to dress in gang-style clothing. Doing

so displays an interest in gangs, and your children may become targets of gang aggression.

- Express to your children at an early age your disapproval of gang activities and of any family member joining a gang.
- Discourage your children from "hanging around" with gang members. If your children choose friends from gangs, they are more likely to become involved in one.
- Do not allow your children to write or practice writing gang names or symbols or any other type of gang graffiti.
- Discourage gangs from hanging around your neighborhood. Remove graffiti from around your home, preferably early in the morning, on a daily basis if necessary.
- Know where your children are at all times.

Children want to be loyal to their friends and may not un-



derstand why you do not want them associating with gang members. Even children who have no intention of joining a gang have difficulty realizing that the problem is one of image. If your child *looks* like a gang member or is *seen* with a gang member, rival gangs cannot differentiate between your child and the *real* gang member. Your child has a very good chance of being the innocent target of violent gang behavior.

Gang influence can create an intimidating school environment, and that environment has much to do with your children's success. When students are fearful, they cannot concentrate on schoolwork.

To report suspected gang or drug activity, call the Special Investigation Unit, 1-800/497-DARE.

### **Bullying: terrorism at school**

Schoolyard bullying cannot be shrugged off as an integral part of children's play. One in 10 students is victimized by a bully, enduring repeated exposure, over time, to deleterious negative behavior. Many adults carry permanent emotional scars from childhood encounters with bullies. Institutional toleration of such conduct does the bully no service either. Research has shown that a child who bullies others has a one in four chance of ending up with a criminal record at age 30, compared to a one in 20 chance for nonbullying peers.

In addition to more generalized withdrawal or a drop in grades, parents can also suspect bullying if children exhibit unexplained bruises or torn clothing, frequently "lose" personal possessions taken to school, or develop a history of "disappearing" lunch money or popular school supplies.

Parents can help students deal with the situation:

- Acknowledge the problem openly;
- Inform the school about the situation;
- Keep a written record of all incidents;
- Get a copy of the school's discipline and conduct codes;
- Insist that the school protect your child;
- Refrain from using bullying or pressure tactics on your child; and
- Teach your child to act assertively, not aggressively.

### **Sexual harassment: victim-blaming unacceptable**

Often labeled as horseplay, flirting or merely "boys being boys," sexual harassment is one of the most overlooked problems in schools today. Sexual harassment is the abuse of power, forcing attention upon someone who does not want it. It is the victim who defines the harassment, not the perpetrator. This abuse can take many forms, including:

- comments about a person's body;
- touching, grabbing, staring or leering;
- pulling or lifting clothing;

- whistling, catcalls, or offensive noises;
- displays of pornography or sex-related objects;
- obscene gestures or dirty jokes;
- sexual gossip, innuendoes, remarks or suggestions;
- pressure for dates or sexual activity;
- blocking a person's movements; and
- sexual assault, including rape

The majority of offenders are male, though females can also be guilty of sexual harassment. The harassment can be male to female, female to male, male to male, or female to female. Sexual harassment is often confused with flirting, but flirting is reciprocal in nature. Harassment is one-sided, and the recipient does not invite or enjoy the attention.

Schools that allow such actions to continue provide a calloused climate that interferes with a student's ability to benefit from education. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that schools may be held financially liable if sexual harassment is allowed to persist.

### **Teen suicide: prevention is possible**

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among teen-agers, and the suicide rate for adolescents aged 15 to 19 has tripled since 1950. There is general agreement among helping professionals that most suicidal people want to continue living. However, teen-agers frequently feel overwhelmed, unable to find alternative solutions to the problems troubling them.

Seventy percent of teen suicides occur in the victims' homes; guns are used in 65 percent of male teen suicides and 47 percent of female teen suicides. One very specific caution for parents is to restrict the accessibility of weapons at home.

Many suicidal people give warning of their intentions. An immediate response is indicated, without judgmental comments or moralizing. Do not promise that "everything will be OK." Such statements are empty rhetoric.

Possible warning signs include:

- abrupt changes in patterns of behavior, social response, sleeping and eating;
- depression that persists for an extended period of time;
- threats of suicide, which should be taken seriously;
- hints about their absence from family life;
- "final" arrangements — giving away personal possessions;
- prior attempts — 80 percent of all suicide victims have made at least one unsuccessful try; and
- preoccupation with death as the sole focus of art, personal reading and all writings.

Professional help is important, and your child's school may already have a list of agencies that provide counseling. Mental health experts can help both potential suicides and their families deal with the stresses prompting such action.

## Model programs support, enhance family structure

Although the structure of the "traditional American" family has changed, the majority of parents (and the term "parents" denotes primary caregivers, whether related or not) still have happy, healthy children as a fundamental goal of child rearing. Many community programs, such as those presented here, support parents — helping them to both prepare children for learning and maintain the family.

### Parents Assuring Student Success

On the basis of the premise that "parents are a child's first teacher, and the home is a child's first classroom," PASS presents training for parents that enables them to be learning facilitators. In group classes, parents learn how to improve their children's study habits. These techniques do not take long to learn, and the reward is the acquisition of skills that directly help parents raise student achievement.

Specific lessons address attitude enhancement; a productive learning environment; teaching children to manage time, listen and concentrate; homework; preparing for and taking tests; note taking; memory and thinking; and teaching reading. These study skills are presented in a modular format and can be taught in any order.

As parents study together in the PASS workshop, they learn from each other and create an informal network of support. Friendship is often one of the unexpected results. For parents who cannot attend the workshop sessions, the material can be purchased and studied on an individual basis. The workbooks are available from the National Educational Service, 1610 West Third Street, P.O. Box 8, Bloomington, IN 47402, 812/336-7700.

### Parent University

Continuing education takes a new direction in Broward County (Florida) Public Schools. There, Parent University

offers classes for parents of students covering general parenting and family dynamics, accessing the school system, and discipline and behavior. Four sites serve diverse communities within the school district, making travel to attend classes much easier. These classes are also offered in Spanish at the campus serving a large Hispanic population and in Creole at the site serving a large Haitian population.

In addition to helping parents improve their parenting skills, the courses also provide information about the community services available to families. For more information, call Broward County Public Schools, 305/760-7334.

### United Parent Services of America

With "Love, faith, hope" as a motto, United Parent Services of America strives to break the cycle of violence within the community through programs that redirect youths who are interested in gangs, graffiti and drugs. Counseling and education efforts focus upon teaching teen-agers how to be respected, active members of the community.

One very successful component is TAG — Teaching Artistic Goals. In this program, students learn to market their artistic abilities rather than illegally deface property with graffiti. Regular lessons include instruction in the equipment, methods and materials of fine and graphic arts. In addition, students receive career assistance in these areas. While enrolled in this program, students sign contracts regarding school attendance and grades, as well as an agreement not to participate in any tagging activity. For further information, contact Miguel A. Rios, Executive Director, United Parent Services of America, 33105 Santiago

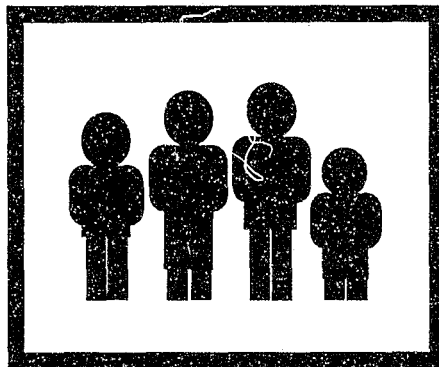
Road, #121, Acton, CA 93510.

### Save Our Sons and Daughters

SOSAD was started in January of 1987 by Clementine Barfield, whose two teen-aged sons had been shot, one fatally. It began as a support group for parents with children killed by gunfire.

From this group has grown an organization dedicated to crisis intervention and violence prevention. SOSAD provides grief counseling to people of all ages, including very young children. In the schools, members promote conflict resolution and teach classes on dealing with anger, frustration and trauma.

SOSAD has chapters nationwide. For information, write: SOSAD, 2441 W. Grand Blvd., Detroit, MI 48208, or call 313/361-5200.



## Helpful resources: where parents can go for assistance

- **Annotated Bibliography for Teaching Conflict Resolution in Schools** by Annie Cheatham is a comprehensive source for mediation and conflict resolution materials for students of all ages. National Association for Mediation in Education, 205 Hampshire House, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA 01003, 413/545-2462.
- **National Youth Gang Suppression and Intervention Program**, a cooperative research and development project between the University of Chicago and the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, features gang intervention models and technical assistance materials. School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago, 969 East 60th Street, Chicago, IL 60637, 312/702-5879.
- **Preventing Violence: Program Ideas and Examples** profiles 27 different community-based programs representing a cross section of the country. National Crime Prevention Council, 1700 K Street, NW, Second Floor, Washington, DC 20006-3817, 202/466-6272.
- **Project YES** is an anti-gang and drug curriculum for grades 2 through 7. Orange County Department of Education, 200 Kalmus Drive, P.O. Box 9050, Costa Mesa, CA 92628, 714/966-4473.
- **Publications for Parents** lists the U.S. Department of Education's booklets on learning activities for parents. Send your name and address to OERI, Department EIB, 555 New Jersey Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20208-5641. Ask for publication No. PIP 91-920.
- **STAR (Straight Talk About Risks)**, a pre-K through grade 12 curriculum, teaches students about decision making, conflict management and other skills necessary to help them react properly if they encounter a gun. Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, 1225 Eye Street, NW, Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20005, 202/289-7319.
- **Sexual Harassment and Teens: A Program for Positive Change**, by Susan Strauss with Pamela Espeland is a guide for addressing and solving sexual harassment problems in schools. Free Spirit Publishing, Inc., 400 First Ave., North, Suite 616, Minneapolis, MN 55401, 612/338-2068.
- **Student Crime Stoppers** is a program for reporting campus crime. Information is available from Crime Stoppers International, Inc., 3736 Eubank Boulevard., NE, Suite B-4, Albuquerque, NM 87111, 505/294-2300
- **Taking Stock: the Inventory of Family, Community and School Support for Student Achievement** was developed as an assessment tool to help examine parental, community and staff perceptions about current school practices. The National Committee for Citizens in Education, 900 Second Street, NE, Suite 8, Washington, DC 20002-3557, 202/408-0447.
- **Together We Can: A Guide for Crafting a Profamily System of Education and Human Services**, a book of collaborative strategies for better serving children and families, is produced jointly by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. U.S. Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents, Mail Stop: SSOP, Washington, DC 20402.
- **Violence Prevention**, a curriculum by Deborah Prothrow-Stith, examines the importance of both preventing violence and providing alternatives to such behavior. Education Development Center, 55 Chapel Street, Suite 24, Newton, MA 02160, 800/225-4276.

### National hot lines

- **The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms** takes reports of gun, gang and drug activity, 1-800/ATF-GUNS.
- **Gang Suppression Hot Line** — 1-800/78-CRIME.
- **National Runaway Switchboard** — 1-800/621-4000.
- **Teen Suicide Hot Line** — 1-800/522-TEEN.

### National organizations

- **Center for Research on Women**, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA 02181-8259, 617/283-2510, studies sexual harassment in school.
- **Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse** — 1-800/638-8736.
- **National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information** — 1-800/729-6686.
- **National Victim Center**, 309 West 7th St., Suite 705, Fort Worth, TX 76102, 817/877-3355, has general victimization information.



## School crime and violence: NSSC responds

The National School Safety Center was created by presidential directive in 1984. A partnership among the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the U.S. Department of Education and Pepperdine University helps facilitate the multidisciplinary approach. NSSC's mandate is to promote safe schools — free of crime and violence — and to help ensure quality education for children nationwide.

NSSC focuses national attention on cooperative solutions to problems that disrupt the educational process. Special emphasis is placed on efforts that rid schools of crime, violence and drugs, and on programs to improve student discipline, attendance, achievement and school climate. NSSC provides technical assistance, offers legal and legislative assistance, and produces publications and films. The Center also serves as a clearinghouse for current information on school safety issues. The following resources have been produced to complement these efforts:

- *School Safety News Service*, considered America's leading school crime prevention resource, features articles by prominent authors and communicates trends and exemplary

programs for delinquency prevention and school safety.

- *School Crime and Violence: Victims' Rights* is a comprehensive text on school safety law, providing advice to educators about risk and liability prevention and implementation of campus violence prevention programs.
  - *School Discipline Notebook* helps educators establish fair and effective discipline policies and procedures.
  - *School Safety Check Book*, NSSC's most comprehensive text on school crime and violence prevention, addresses school climate and discipline, school attendance, personal safety and school security.
  - *Child Safety Curriculum Standards* helps prevent child victimization by assisting youth-serving professionals in teaching children to protect themselves. Age-appropriate standards deal with a wide variety of safety issues and include sample strategies that can be integrated for both elementary and secondary schools.
  - *Set Straight on Bullies* examines the myths and realities about schoolyard bullying. Strategies to better prevent and respond to bullying are presented. A videotape by the same name, "Set Straight on Bullies," tells the dramatic story of a bullying victim and how the problem adversely affects his life as well as the lives of the bully, other students, parents and educators.
  - *Gangs in School: Breaking Up is Hard to Do* offers an introduction to youth gangs as well as practical advice on preventing or reducing gang encroachment in schools.
- NSSC strives to effect change by providing appropriate information to our nation's parents and youth-serving professionals so that they may be better prepared to deal with the problems children face in schools today. NSSC is dedicated to the support and protection of our children — our nation's most precious resource and our future.

Pepperdine University's  
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