

PrepTalks Discussion Guides are companion documents to PrepTalk video presentations and question and answer (Q&A) sessions that help translate the expertise showcased in each presentation into actionable steps to improve preparedness. This discussion guide accompanies the PrepTalks given by Michele Gay and Kristina Anderson, who are advocates for improving school safety.

After watching the presentations and Q&A sessions, use this discussion guide and the additional resources to ensure your school safety planning is well informed and effective.

PrepTalk: Rethinking School Safety

Michele Gay is a mother of three, former teacher, and co-founder of Safe and Sound Schools (<http://www.safeandsoundschools.org>), a nonprofit started by Sandy Hook parents to support school crisis prevention, response, and recovery.

In her PrepTalk, Gay relays her personal experience as the parent of a child killed in the Sandy Hook tragedy in 2012. She highlights some of the simple solutions that students and staff needed during the crisis at Sandy Hook, and presents Safe and Sound Schools' Framework for Comprehensive School Safety Planning and Development: Emergency Management, Community Engagement, Physical Safety, Mental and Behavioral Health, Climate and Culture, and Health and Wellness.

Simple things can make all the difference in times of crisis: a locked door, a secondary means of communication, or prior knowledge and training to fall back on when every second counts.

Michele Gay

PrepTalk: Safety is Personal - Lessons Learned as a Survivor of the Virginia Tech Tragedy

Kristina Anderson founded The Koshka Foundation for Safe Schools (<http://koshkafoundation.org>), a non-profit dedicated to helping local community and school stakeholders work together to prevent, respond, and heal in the aftermath of school violence.

When people feel heard, and seen, and cared for, they are much less likely to resort to violence as a way to be significant.

Kristina Anderson

Anderson's PrepTalk begins with her experience during the Virginia Tech shooting in 2007. She translates her experience into a focus on the importance of threat assessments in schools to identify and mitigate potential threats. She explains that it's important to improve physical safety, but it's just as important to encourage people to monitor their environment and to build a supportive culture in a school.



Partners for the Discussion

School safety is an important topic for students, parents, school administrators, and local authorities to discuss together. Coordination between all stakeholders involved in school safety is critical to successful planning and outcomes.

We encourage you to discuss preparedness and response measures with a wide array of partners, including public safety, emergency management, and other community officials; school authorities; parents' associations; and other youth oriented organizations..

Discussion Prompts

Topic 1: School Safety Comprehensive Planning

Gay emphasizes how the factors associated with school safety have broadened in recent years. To answer the question “is our school safe?” Safe and Sound Schools recommends that communities focus on six principle elements.

Questions to discuss:

- What is our process to ensure schools are safe? Are school safety plans integrated with our jurisdictional emergency planning efforts? How can we strengthen the relationship between schools, law enforcement, and emergency management?
- How well do parents know our schools' emergency plans? Do they know the process and locations for reunification? How can we ensure they are knowledgeable? What is our process to include community members in emergency planning?
- Do our schools have health and wellness programs? Do our school safety plans incorporate mental and behavioral health?
- When was the last time each school conducted a safety audit?



Source: Michele Gay PrepTalk

Virginia School Safety Audit Program

The Code of Virginia requires that all schools in Virginia complete an annual safety audit. The audit is a “written assessment of the safety conditions in each public school to (i) identify and if necessary, develop solutions for physical safety concerns, including building security issues and (ii) identify and evaluate any patterns of student safety concerns occurring on school property or at school sponsored events. Solutions and responses shall include recommendations for structural adjustments, changes in school safety procedures, and revisions to the school board’s standards for student conduct.” (VA Code § 22.1-279.8)

Resources to support school safety plans include:

- Safe and Sound Schools “Straight-A Safety Toolkit”: Assists schools in assessing, acting to improve, and auditing their school safety culture. (<http://www.safeandsoundschools.org/programs-2/straight-a-safety-improvement>)
- Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans: Outlines principles of school emergency management planning and provides a process for developing and continually refining emergency plans. (https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1922-25045-3850/rem_s_k_12_guide.pdf)

Topic 2: Build Preparedness through Training

Both speakers highlight the importance of regular training and drills, to ensure that skills are second nature during an emergency. This includes awareness skills, reaction skills, and first aid skills. Anderson reminds us not to dismiss loud or escalating sounds and to practice scanning your environment to note potential exits, useful barriers to block the doors, and locations to hide. She also calls on the news media not to focus on perpetrators and encourages people not to watch excessive coverage of incidents.

Questions to consider:

- Have we considered adding and diversifying our active shooter training to include: unannounced drills, table-top exercises, community orientations and simulations?
- Are we testing our communications? Do we have redundant communications? How does your school notify law enforcement, parents, and the community in emergencies?
- How can we provide age-appropriate education and training for all developmental levels? Do we have training programs for school personnel and students in active shooter awareness and response, and in emergency first aid and CPR?

I remember thinking about the level of training, the level of preparedness, and wishing that we had given them so much more.

Michele Gay

A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States

60% of active shooter incidents from 2000–2013 ended before police arrived. Even when law enforcement was present or able to respond within minutes, civilians often had to make life and death decisions, and, therefore should be engaged in training and discussions on decisions they may face. (www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-study-2000-2013-1.pdf/view)

Resources to support building preparedness include:

- Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Active Shooter Preparedness Website: Provides products, tools, and resources to help you prepare for and respond to an active shooter incident. (<http://www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-preparedness>)

- FEMA, IS-907, Active Shooter: What You Can Do: Free interactive web-based training that provides skills to survive and help during an active shooter. (<https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-907>)
- FEMA - You Are the Help Until Help Arrives: A training program to provide everyone with simple skills like bleeding control, to help in life-threatening emergencies. (<https://community.fema.gov/until-help-arrives>)
- Teen Community Emergency Response Team (CERT): A training program in basic response skills for teenagers. (<http://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/28048>)

Topic 3: Creating a Culture of Safety in Schools

Anderson explains that school safety is not just physical security, such as camera systems and door locks, but also the culture of the school environment. Anderson cites the research from the Safe School Initiative that shows perpetrators of these attacks “do not snap. They plan in advance.” This means that there is usually some indication before the event occurs: they either tell someone verbally or on the internet, or they physically practice their plan. The challenge is to establish a process to collect relevant information, to encourage a culture of safety, and to have personnel responsible for analyzing the information (connecting the dots).

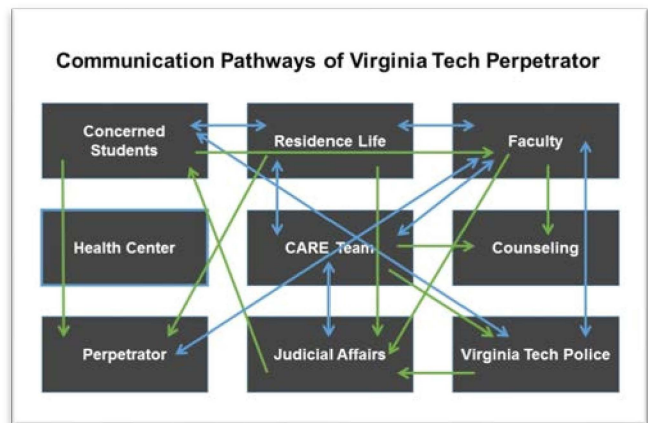
Questions to consider for school administrators, teachers, parents, or students:

- Did our last safety audit consider different kinds of threats like student behavior, fire in or near school buildings, and natural hazards?
- How do we document and manage reported concerns of suspicious student behavior? Do individuals know their options for sharing a concern? How can we make it easier and more acceptable for students, staff, and members of the community to report potential threats? How can we better support a climate and culture that embraces safety? Do we have or should we consider a school resource officer? Do students know their role?

Questions to consider for emergency managers, law enforcement, and other community officials:

- Do we have a threat assessment plan and team? Are all stakeholders – teachers, staff, students, parents, community members – represented? Do stakeholders know our threat assessment process and resources? How can we do a better job communicating about our threat assessment process and encouraging individuals to get involved?
- Do students, teachers, and parents know how to report a concern in their community? What are the best ways to remind them and encourage them to report potential threats?

The time to speak up and say something is when you've had the first gut feeling ... of behavior that is suspicious, creepy, or odd.
Kristina Anderson



Source: Kristina Anderson PrepTalk

- How can we encourage ongoing integration of local law enforcement with schools? How can law enforcement be more familiar with school layouts and assist with developing access protocols for the school? Do local schools know and regularly work with their Chief of Police and or Sherriff?

10 Findings of the Safe School Initiative

1. Incidents of targeted violence at school are rarely sudden, impulsive acts.
2. Prior to most incidents, other people knew about the attacker's idea and/or plan to attack.
3. Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to advancing the attack.
4. There is no accurate or useful "profile" of students who engage in targeted school violence.
5. Most attackers engaged in some behavior, prior to the incident that caused concern or indicated a need for help.
6. Most attackers were known to have difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures. Moreover, many had considered or attempted suicide.
7. Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to the attack.
8. Most attackers had access to and had used weapons prior to the attack.
9. In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.
10. Despite prompt law enforcement responses, most shooting incidents were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention.

(www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/preventingattacksreport.pdf)

Resources to support creating a culture of safety include:

- National Association of School Psychologists, Threat Assessment Resources: Tools for school administrators and crisis teams to help schools conduct threat assessments. (www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/threat-assessment-at-school/threat-assessment-for-school-administrators-and-crisis-teams)
- The National Behavioral Intervention Team Association: Provides guidance on establishing "behavioral intervention teams," which include members from multiple disciplines who are focused on tracking "red flags" over time and deciding the best approaches to support or intervene. (<https://nabita.org/behavioral-intervention-teams>)
- Safe and Sound Schools, Threat Assessment Resources: Provides a useful list of resources for threat assessments. (<https://www.safeandsoundschools.org/additional-resources-threat-assessment/>)
- The National Association of School Resource Officers: Provides the highest quality of training to school-based law enforcement officers to promote safer schools and safer children. (<https://nasro.org/>)

Recommended Next Steps

Improving school safety requires that all stakeholders work together. It is an ongoing process that requires planning, physical security assessments and remediation, training and communications protocols, and a change in culture. Use the resources in this guide and the experiences of the PrepTalk speakers to strengthen your community by improving school safety and security. Every community can make improvements, but it is a team effort that must include school administrators, teachers, students, parents working with community emergency management, law enforcement, and elected leaders.

Establish a process to ensure school safety is a priority in your community: threat assessments and audits should be done periodically; new students and teachers/administrators should be fully briefed on protocols; parents and community partners should be included in planning; age-appropriate training should be offered at all levels; and drills and exercises conducted regularly.

Additional Resources

- The Department of Education’s Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center (<https://rems.ed.gov>) has a wide variety of tools for assisting communities and schools in improving their school safety.
 - Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans At a Glance: (<https://rems.ed.gov/K12GuideForDevelHQSchool.aspx>)
 - Technical Assistance: (<https://rems.ed.gov/RequestTA.aspx>)
 - Emergency Preparedness Resources: (<https://rems.ed.gov/Resources.aspx>)
 - EOP Interactive Tools: (<https://rems.ed.gov/EOPinteractivetools.aspx>)
 - Online Courses and Webinars: (https://rems.ed.gov/TA_VirtualTrainings.aspx)
 - Live Training: (https://rems.ed.gov/TA_TrainingsByRequest.aspx)
 - Tool Box: (<https://rems.ed.gov/ToolBox.aspx>)
- The Department of Homeland Security provides several resources for school safety planning including guidance on exercise development and active shooter preparedness.
 - Active Shooter Preparedness: (www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-preparedness)
 - Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program: (www.fema.gov/hseep)
 - K-12 School Security Guide and School Security Survey (2nd Edition): (<http://www.dhs.gov/publication/k-12-school-security-guide>)
- The Federal Bureau of Investigation provides resources, information, and reports to help prevent active shooter incidents.
 - Active Shooter Resources: (www.fbi.gov/about/partnerships/office-of-partner-engagement/active-shooter-resources)
 - Violence Prevention Against Schools, Enhancement through Law Enforcement Partnerships: (www.fbi.gov/file-repository/violence-prevention-in-schools-march-2017.pdf/view)

- Study of Pre-Attack Behaviors of Active Shooters in the United States, Between 2000 and 2013: (www.fbi.gov/file-repository/pre-attack-behaviors-of-active-shooters-in-us-2000-2013.pdf/view)
- Making Prevention a Reality: Identifying, Assessing, and Managing the Threat of Targeted Attacks: (www.fbi.gov/file-repository/making-prevention-a-reality.pdf/view)
- Ready.gov provides a list of Active Shooter resources (www.ready.gov/active-shooter) including the two-page guide: Be Prepared for an Active Shooter (www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1523561958719-f1eff6bc841d56b7873e018f73a4e024/ActiveShooter_508.pdf).
- The Federal Law Enforcement Training Center has hosted two summits (2013 and 2014) on preventing multiple casualty violence. The resulting reports (www.fletc.gov/summits-preventing-multiple-casualty-violence) focused on creating toolkits for assisting communities with violence prevention efforts.
- FEMA and the International Association of Chiefs of Police produced A Resource Guide to Improve Your Community's Awareness and Reporting of Suspicious Activity For Law Enforcement and Community Partners (www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1818-25045-9223/suspiciousactivityresourceguide_508_.pdf)
- National School Boards Association:
 - School Safety, Security, and Emergency Preparedness: (www.nsba.org/services/school-board-leadership-services/school-safety-and-security)
 - Anti-Bullying Statutes by State: (www.nsba.org/anti-bullying-statutes-state)
 - Threat Assessment in Schools, A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates, United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education, 2004: (www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/threatassessmentguide.pdf)
- Threat Assessment in Virginia Public Schools: Model Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines. Second Edition (2016): (www.dcjs.virginia.gov/sites/dcjs.virginia.gov/files/publications/law-enforcement/threat-assessment-model-policies-procedures-and-guidelinespdf.pdf)